**WYE COLLEGE INQUIRY**

**APPEAL A: APP/E2205/W/20/3259450 at Former Wye College**

**APPEAL B: APP/E2205/W/20/3259462 at Occupation Road**

**APPEAL C: APP/E2205/W/20/3259465 at Former ADAS site**

**INTERESTED PARTIES SUBMISSION BY PROFESSOR CHRIS BAINES, 2 FEBRUARY 2021**

My name is Chris Baines, and I studied horticulture at Wye College in the late 1960s. I grew up in Sheffield, live in Wolverhampton, and I have worked all over the world. I believe passionately that the village of Wye is very special, and it deserves the best of care and conservation. That is at the essence of what I want to say.

**Communal values**

Wye College has an influence way beyond the boundaries of the village. In the past month I have been in touch with more than 1,000 college alumni, and so far, almost 200 of them have responded personally with messages of support. I encourage the inspector to listen to the edition of *On Your Farm*, which was broadcast on Sunday 31 January on BBC Radio 4. (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000rv53>) It gives a clear sense of the scale of Wye’s communal values. As Kit Wedd emphasised in her evidence, this is a critically important aspect of Planning Policy Guidance, and particularly in the case of Wye and its ancient college.

**Academic legacy**

The buildings and the landscape we are dealing with here are very special indeed, but so is the worldwide community of interest, and in the case of Wye College the scale and significance of that community is really remarkable. Among the alumni, there is an ex-director of the Royal Horticultural Society and a current Government Minister in the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, DEFRA. The great garden writer Christopher Lloyd was a student and a teacher at Wye, and the John Nix Farm Pocket Book, known as the “*Farmer’s Bible”*, has been published annually for more than 50 years. There are Wye graduates in more than 70 different countries, with many of them running major centres of agricultural teaching and food production all across Africa, Asia and North America.

Research was always a hallmark of Wye College. As examples, it was here that hormone weedkillers were developed; where a hop, *Brewers Gold*, was bred in the 1920s, and *Brewers Gold* is still the basis for brewing worldwide. A particular favourite of mine is the small, scented cyclamen that are in every flower shop and garden centre at this time of year. The perfume was achieved through a breeding programme in the glasshouse where I used to suffer my tutorials. Wye’s contributions to the world are legion.

**Very recent history**

In recent years Wye has been very badly served – particularly by Imperial College, by Ashford Borough Council and by Historic England - and there are a great many of us urging you to redress that balance, reject these appeals, and encourage the owners to work with us now to achieve the very best of possible outcomes.

**Personal credentials: built environment**

I would now like to address several aspects of the appeal. I am a landscape architect and I work as an environmental adviser to industry and government. I have served as a trustee of the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the Heritage Lottery Fund. I have been President of the Association for Environment Conscious Building (<https://www.aecb.net/>) for almost 30 years and I am an adviser to the National Trust. I currently sit on two Ministerial Round Tables, helping central Government to shape the future of planning.

**Appeal A, Kemp’s College**

The original heart of Wye College is a compact group of listed buildings of the very highest order. It is on the site of a scheduled ancient monument, in a conservation area and well within the boundary of a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In theory it could hardly enjoy more protection. It was established in 1447 by an Archbishop of Canterbury, Cardinal John Kemp, who was born about a mile from Wye, at Olantigh. That was precisely the time that King Henry VI was establishing Eton College in Windsor, and King’s College Cambridge. Now, for the first time in its very long history, Wye College is threatened with loss of public access and loss of physical integrity. That should be unthinkable.

**Appeal A, Edwardian campus**

The Edwardian courtyard campus is also very important, and its current state of inaccessibility and neglect is tragic. With great skill, I believe that it could provide wonderful homes for people, but there are far too many aspects of this current scheme that do not do it justice, and the talk of community access is misleading for what seems almost certain to be a gated community. As one example, you will recall Kit Wedd singing the praises of the central dining room, with its magnificent timber beams. On Telereal’s web site, where they offer the development for sale, they use that dining room as their opening image, displayed in all its glory - but their development proposals actually show the space partitioned across the middle and converted into two semi-detached dwellings, destroying the splendour of the space for ever. A skilled and sensitive designer could do very much better than that.

**The college and village inter-relationship**

A particularly important aspect of this planning consideration is the very long history of an intimate relationship between the college and the local village. That would have been true four hundred years ago, when local boys were being taught there, and it was certainly true in my day. Of course, Wye College employed a great many village residents, but it was more than that. In my three years as an undergraduate I ran the college folk club and I organised folk concerts in the Wheel Room, a part of Kemp’s College. These were always attended by staff, students ***and*** people from the rest of village. I also spent one year on the Wye Village Fete committee, alongside the village elders. There was always a free flow between town and gown.

**Appeals B and C**

If I can now move on briefly to comment on **appeals B and C**. Both these so-called brown field sites lie in the heart of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a landscape designation that affords the highest level of protection, on precisely the same level as our National Parks. The two sites also sit close to the entrance to Wye for travellers from Canterbury.

**Personal credentials: landscape**

Professionally I have a good deal to do with such special landscapes. I am the patron of the Countryside Management Association, (<https://countrysidemanagement.org.uk/>) a national Vice President of the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts, (<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/>) and I chair a Stakeholder Advisory Group for the National Grid, with a £500 million budget to spend protecting and enhancing the visual quality of AONBs and National Parks.

**Intrusion into the designated landscape**

I believe that both scheme B and Scheme C are inappropriate intrusions into the protected rural landscape. Site B would clearly extend the boundary of the village, and Site C would be a wholly new housing development, well beyond the walkability of Wye. The clear direction of travel for the country’s most highly valued landscapes, re-emphasised by the current Secretary of State within recent weeks, is for *more* protection, not less. Site C in particular, offers an opportunity to restore the brownfield land to green, and to repair one small corner of the Kent Downs AONB.

**Appropriateness of this housing design**

## If the eventual fate of sites B and site C is for one or both of them to be built on, then again it is undoubtedly possible to achieve far more appropriate results. Neither of the current schemes is worthy of a place in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, close to such a historic and characterful settlement as the village of Wye. I have worked with house builders and developers all my adult life. I established and then judged the *Green Leaf Housing Awards* for the New Homes Marketing Board for 15 years, seeking out and celebrating the best that commercial housebuilders, large and small, had to offer. In fact, the Stonegate retirement development off Wye’s Bridge Street was an early award winner and is well worth visiting for inspiration.

I am a strong advocate of new housing so long as it is the right housing in the right place, and skilfully designed. Wye and the Kent Downs AONB deserve so much better than this roll out of suburbia. Wye is a dream location with a great sense of place and personality. In my view all three of these applications are unnecessarily damaging, and I hope the appeals will be refused.

**The WyeCRAG scheme for Kemp’s College**

Finally, I would like to return to the alternative proposal presented by WyeCRAG for Kemp’s College. To a speculative city developer such as Telereal Trillium, the idea of a sensitively restored group of historic buildings having a sustainable future as a community asset may seem fanciful, but I am confident that, in the right hands, funding would be available through the lottery, through charitable philanthropy and through the Wye College alumni too. Telereal is part of the Pears development group, and they themselves have a charitable foundation with an annual turnover of more than 20 million pounds. Their Trust takes pride in focussing on ***education*** and ***community empowerment***. This seems particularly ironic.

**Positive prospects through partnership**

Kemp’s College sits beside the Pilgrim’s Way – surely one of the oldest long-distance footpaths in Christendom. It is an hour by train from London and a 20 minute drive from the Channel Tunnel. It has a powerful aura of rich human history and the pastoral English Countryside. It is a day’s walk from Canterbury Cathedral and close to some of the finest gardens in England. There is every reason to believe it can become a destination of international appeal – far, far too important to be ruined by second rate redevelopment.

I believe the next chapter in Wye’s 570-year history as a centre of learning could lie in its development as a source of information and inspiration for visitors from around the world. That would depend on the passion and knowledge that the community is demonstrating now. Surely that passion deserves to be fostered through the planning process and harnessed by the site owners for mutual benefit, now and on into the future.

[**chris.baines@blueyonder.co.uk**](mailto:chris.baines@blueyonder.co.uk)