SALLY LEAVER WYECRAG INTERESTED PARTY STATEMENT 2 Feb. 2021

I am Dr. Sally Leaver, I am one of the founder members of WyeCRAG and since its incorporation as a Community Interest Company, one of the directors.

I lived in Wye in the 1960s, when I worked at the College Farm, returning to live in the village again in the 1980s. I now live nearby on the North Downs. I have an MBA in public sector management and a Social Science doctorate. I worked as a registered socialwork manager in inner city London, then as a management consultant.

Before I talk about the benefits to the community of the alternative WyeCRAG proposal, I want to quickly address the former public access to the College.

ACCESS

It has been said that little public access to the College was normally possible over the past 60 years. Based on my nearly 60 years knowledge and experience of Wye and Wye College I cannot agree.

The College was never closed to the public. There was open access through the main front entrance, and at the back through the gate leading off the public footpath. The community walked in through both.

A great many of the College staff lived in Wye and students lodged with them in their homes. There was a lot of coming and going to and from the community. The relationship between the College and the Wye Community was symbiotic. Visitors in the buildings were always accepted as part of the package of a learning institution, never thought of as suspicious.

When Imperial took over they introduced a Hospitality arm printing a glossy brochure advertising bookings for dinners, weddings and meetings with catering. This was becoming popular, and public presence in the College was increasing when they closed it.

The benefits to the Community of the WyeCRAG plan:

WyeCRAG’s alternative plan for regeneration of the Grade I and II\* listed buildings as a year round open access cultural and community centre, will not only benefit the Wye Community, but the College alumni, the locality, county, country and overseas visitors

It preserves Wye’s heritage assets in a respectful, and creative manner, giving due diligence to its architectural significance, and historic 570 years, mindful of the legacy we need to hand on to future generations.

Our Business Plan took two years to research. This covered:

* Digesting published reports and guidelines on The Community Business Market and Heritage Regeneration
* Making detailed analysis of existing schemes and business plans, and their fund raising strategies.
* Based on the Neighbourhood Plan proposal for a Community Centre on this site, undertaking a needs assessment to determine the gaps that could be filled.
* And Consulting the Visit Kent’s Annual Business Barometer statistics to inform our demand and supply analysis.

This plan is not a ‘pie in the sky wish list’. It was drawn up with financiers and accountants. Our consultee feedback considers it to be plausible; it meets the National Lottery Heritage Funding outcomes, and, importantly, maintains the continuum, of the College Founder’s intentions, that it should benefit the Wye Community.

Wye is a village with a growing population and limited available community space. The Wye Centre will provide an additional, year round, open public base and forum, to be developed and managed by the Community for the Community, from which it will benefit in the following social, educational, and economic ways:

*Wye Centre will provide social cohesion, relief of social isolation, health promotion, support and occupation.*

Wye residents will be able to meet, relax, eat, read, receive advice, join activities and entertainment, attend markets, hire rooms for private events,

Groups and societies and the parish council likewise will be able to store archives and book spaces for events, talks, hold public meetings, and run film nights, benefitting from the use of the tiered lecture theatre.

*Wye is a creative and aspiring community, the problem will NOT be what to put on offer educationally, but WHAT TO LEAVE OUT.*

Wye residents will have an enlarged public library, particularly benefitting children, a living history of Wye museum with reference archives, join a range of classes and courses, attend lectures, take part in Masterclasses, and go on organised tours to learn more about the local environment and visit to places of interest.

The Wye historical and heritage societies will be able to design information for interactive technology in the museum, set up exhibitions, and coordinate tours and lectures and, importantly, store their archives for consultation.

*Economically, due to the combination of its extraordinary listed buildings and artifacts, and its colourful historic past the Wye Centre and its activities will have niche market value*

The Centre will create both direct and indirect employment and volunteering opportunities. The increase in visitors will lead to development of new businesses in Wye, and boost local businesses.

Its flexibility for multi site bookings makes it ideally suited for events, concerts, dinners, weddings, art shows, and the outdoor antique and craft markets etc. The large brick wine cellar for wine tasting will also be a unique attraction, popular with visitors and beneficial to local providers

The close access to public transport, motorway and channel terminal is an additional asset.

Of particular significance to visitors will be the as yet ‘unrecognised’ national important Jacobean Staircase. Once authentically restored to its original colours with statues replaced, this will be a major attraction, as is the case for historic houses with staircases of comparative importance such as Knole and Blickling.

I would like to digress at the point to stress importance of these College heritage assets to the Wye Community, particularly the Statues which gained notoriety when Imperial sold them; then were ordered to buy them back by ABC. Dr. Lee Prosser, a Curator of the Royal Palaces, also a Jacobean Staircase specialist, wrote a report on the Staircase which was once brightly coloured. As this needed research he suggested the names of 2 of the country’s leading paint experts to analyse and identify the colours and patterning. The village united to fund these researchers and their reports. 21 village societies and business raised this money including such various groups as the WI, Flying Horse Pub, Church Choir, Tennis Club, Garage, Organic Farm and Bell Ringers.

The Wye Community values these Statues. It is therefore of great concern that the experts’ paint reports are being ignored by ABC and Historic England whose intention is to choose the decoration themselves

*Finally:*

The Wye population of Wye is put at 2,500, serving a wider population of nearly 9,000. WyeCRAG’s plan provides benefit for this number as well as to the wider public, and provides optimum value for the site by being open year round. It will provide stewardship for the historic Grade I/II\* listed buildings of Wye College as a community asset. It is a viable alternative to the Appellants planning application for this site which benefits just 4 households, with no public access, only 4 hr per month escorted visits to specified heritage areas, and one public open day/annum.

It is hard Sir, for us to reconcile the dedication and devotion that has gone into the years of Wye College with firstly the exploitation by Imperial for the benefit of South Kensington, who at least kept on a skeleton maintenance staff, and a low level of heating in the listed buildings; and now developers with no heritage investment already advertising the site for onward sale.

Thank you Sir