

3259450 Appeal A – Former Wye College

NOTES FOR THE OPENING SUBMISSION FOR WYECRAG

28.01.21

I am Dr James McAdam. I am here to represent the Wye College Regeneration Group (WyeCRAG).

I am not a barrister, so please excuse me if I inadvertently stray from the usual etiquette of such proceedings.

I am a practicing architect and academic, and I do have experience of review panels, moderations, and juries, concerning architecture and the built environment.

WyeCRAG was formed in 2018 by a group of village residents, Wye College alumni and conservation specialists. The group has fourteen permanent members and over 5000 supporters, many of whom are local residents and college alumni.

The group was set-up in response to the resolution to grant planning permission for conversion of the Former Wye College into a private residential development, by the Planning Committee of Ashford Borough Council in June 2018.

WyeCRAG's purpose is to conserve and enhance the medieval and Jacobean Grade I listed College buildings, located at the heart of the village – retaining a significant national heritage asset for the benefit of the local community and wider public.

Wye College has been at the centre of village life for over 570 years, and the essence of its relationship with the village would be lost if it became private housing – closing access to residents and changing the unique ambience of Wye the university village forever.

WyeCRAG's case focuses on the dismissal of Appeal A – the Former Wye College Buildings.

It is based on genuine concerns for heritage and the importance of the Grade I listed buildings to the village and local community.

While WyeCrag understands that there may be limited alternatives for the future of the Grade II listed buildings, they do not at all accept that it is necessary or appropriate to convert the Grade I listed buildings into private housing.

WyeCrag will hope to show during this appeal:

- Firstly, that the significance of the historic buildings was not set-out by the appellant from the outset, in accordance with the NPPF and ENV. 13
- Second, that the Wye Neighbourhood Development Plan (adopted 2016) was not properly considered when planning the housing scheme
- Third, that the planning process was dealt with in a cursory manner, bypassing the involvement of the local community
- Fourth, that the proposed conversion of the Grade I listed buildings to multiple dwelling units is neither appropriate nor practical
- Fifth, that the Appellant's proposal to simply convert the Grade I listed buildings to housing does not comply with the requirements of para 196 of the NPPF. It causes harm to the historic buildings, but does not comprise an optimum viable use of them.

In order to demonstrate that the appeal scheme is not an optimum viable use, part of WyeCrag's evidence is in the form of one possible alternative scheme, proposing that the Grade I listed buildings could be used as a Cultural & Community Centre, thus providing a more policy compliant, multi-functional scheme, in accordance with the Wye Neighbourhood Development Plan.

To be clear – WyeCrag does not seek to promote the planning merits of the alternative scheme, but seeks to set out an example of a different, more policy compliant scheme, which involves less harm to the listed buildings and therefore does comprise an optimum viable use in accordance with para 196 of the NPPF.

The WyeCrag scheme is there to demonstrate the fact that the Telereal Trillium scheme does not comply with para 196. That is the relevance of the WyeCrag scheme.

For this purpose I will be calling 3 witnesses to give evidence:

First witness - Mr Charles Bain-Smith RIBA SCA, Senior Building Conservation Manager, National Trust.

- He will give evidence on matters concerning heritage and the significance of the historic buildings.

Second witness - Mr Jonathan Timms MA (Oxon), Financial Adviser and Company secretary to the Cadwgan Building Preservation Trust and the Cardigan Castle Building Preservation Trust.

- He will give evidence on matters concerning the viability of the WyeCrag scheme or something like it.

Third witness - Mr Tony Shoults MA (Cantab), Diploma Town Planning, Chair of Wye Building Preservation Trust CIO. Chair of Wye Parish Council 2011 – 2016.

- He will give evidence on matters concerning the role of the College in the village and lack of community involvement during the planning process.

WyeCrag logically and realistically focuses on the fate of the Grade I buildings at the heart of the village.

As an expert in architecture, I would like to convey my general concerns with the whole Appeal A project for the conversion of the Former College Buildings to a residential development.

The Grade II buildings were designed by the renowned architect, Thomas Collcutt – awarded RIBA Gold Medal 1902 (no less). The College was designed specifically as an educational facility - with classrooms, lecture rooms, offices and accommodation planned around a series of quadrangles, with horizontal circulation. It is an exemplary building of the time.

From a simple review of the plans proposed, it is obvious that these buildings do not lend themselves for conversion in this way – with lateral division and vertical connections required for multiple dwelling units.

However, to summarise WyeCrag's case -

WyeCrag's fundamental concern is for the Grade I listed buildings, which are located at the heart of the village and have been an essential part of community life for over 570 years.

If the Grade I listed buildings are converted to private housing they will be closed to the community and the ambience of Wye the university village will be lost forever.

The Appellant's proposal to sub-divide these medieval and Jacobean buildings into private dwellings is very alarming. Such sub-division and associated upgrade will be extremely problematic and detrimental to the original building fabric.

As an example of optimum viable use, WyeCrag have prepared an alternative proposal, providing a less harmful, more policy compliant, multi-functional scheme, in accordance with the Wye Neighbourhood Development Plan.

In general, WyeCrag members and supporters are dismayed by the lack of community involvement in the planning process and the reluctance of the Appellant to engage in discussions concerning the future use of the Grade I listed buildings.

For the reasons mentioned in this short submission we would urge that Appeal A be dismissed.

Thank you.

Dr James McAdam

28.01.21