I am Noel Ovenden, local resident and Ashford Borough Council member for the Wye ward since 2014. I have lived locally to Wye all my life. My mother taught in the village in the 1960s. I attended the local scout group in the 70s and 80s, enjoying the benefits of the college facilities before finally moving my family here in the early 90s, when Wye college was very much the heart of the community.

I became involved with the future of Wye College in 2013, first, as a member of the steering group for Imperial Colleges masterplan and then, as ward member, part of the WYE3 masterplan steering group.

After the change of ownership, at the very first meeting of the three parties, the Borough Council, the Parish Council and the new owners of the WYE3 campus, I asked the planning policy officer what form the “masterplan” should take. His answer was that it should be a comprehensive detailed document and he would expect that an outline permission for the site could come off the back of it.

Going forward, I witnessed firsthand the lack of willingness of the appellant to fully engage with the parish council in a truly collaborative manner. It concerns me greatly that at no point did the appellant provide evidence that alternative uses of schemes for this Nationally important site were explored or considered. The planning officer, lacking support or resources, seemed resigned to accept this situation. I would go as far as to say that during the entire consultation, the final proposals barely changed from the original concept, in my view failing to consider or respect the views of local residents.

After ABC cabinet in September 2018 resolved to defer the adoption of the masterplan, the overview and scrutiny committee felt that an examination of the processes followed to develop and consult on the masterplan for WYE3 would be beneficial. It subsequently provided 12 recommendations for cabinet, identifying the failings of the WYE3 masterplanning process. These recommendations include phases such as “specific budgetary allocations; administrative support for case officers; clearly defined scope; clearly defined terms of reference; independent chair; independent external facilitator”

With special regard to Appeal A, the idea that this chapter in Wyes long and rich history should be closed forever is abhorrent to me.

In particular, the Latin school, grade1 listed and a scheduled monument would be destined to become a garden shed, its close proximity to the street entrance tempting use as a bicycle or bin store. On this, myself and the Ashford borough council planning committee that considered the application in 2018, concur. Due to its social and historical significance they resolved that the Latin school should remain in community use.

These buildings have survived almost unchanged from 15th century – a rare survival and certainly worthy of the community response to protect and enhance the contribution they make to the special place that is Wye.

I would also like to add my weight to comments made by others that the Neighbourhood Plan was not given correct weight in the determination of planning applications in Wye. Both members and planning officers alike consistently failed to understand the legal significance of the NHP treating it as planning guidance rather than policy.

These lessons have now been learnt, with officers respecting the special landscape nature of Wye. One only has to stand on the downs and look down to realise that residential development creeping out of the village will indeed be harmful to this area of outstanding natural beauty.

I will leave the rest to others.

Thank you Sir.