

Wye, 10 November 2020

PINS reference APP/E2205/W/20/3259450

STATEMENT OF CASE FOR THE WYE COLLEGE REGENERATION GROUP
Rule 6 registered party

In relation to the Appeal by Telereal Trillium Ltd against non-determination of planning application 17/00567/AS Former Wye College buildings, High Street, Wye TN25 4AH

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This statement of case is submitted by the Wye College Regeneration Group (WyeCRAG) as a Rule 6 party, registered to make representations on behalf of a significant number of village residents and Wye College alumni.
 - 1.2. WyeCRAG was formed in November 2018 by a group of village residents, Wye College alumni and conservation specialists. The group has fourteen permanent committee members and over 4000 supporters. It has a mandate from a significant number of local residents and college alumni, to act on their behalf and is registered as a Community Interest Company.
 - 1.3. WyeCRAG was set up in response to the resolution to grant permission for the conversion of the Former Wye College into a private residential development, by the Planning Committee at Ashford Borough Council (ABC) in June 2018. We consider the planning process to be flawed as it did not address the parameters of the Wye Neighbourhood Development Plan 2015 – 30 (adopted 2016) and ignored the heritage concerns of the local community.
 - 1.4. WyeCRAG's purpose is to conserve and enhance the historic Grade I listed buildings of Wye College, retaining a significant national heritage asset for the benefit of the community and wider public.
-

- 1.5. Wye College has been at the centre of village life for over 570 years, and the essence of its relationship to 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.
- 1.6. WyeCRAG’s statement of case outlines its objections to planning application 17/00567/AS Former Wye College buildings, and focuses on the proposed conversion of the historic Grade I listed buildings at the heart of the village, which it considers to be an essential heritage asset around which the village of Wye has developed over the centuries.
- 1.7. WyeCRAG has prepared alternative proposals for the use of the historic Grade I listed buildings as a Cultural & Community Centre, allowing unrestricted access to, and the use of all ground level areas, with minimal impact on the existing building fabric.

2. WyeCRAG’s general position

- 2.1. WyeCRAG supports the position of the Wye Parish Council on the WYE3 Masterplan and agrees with its objections and arguments, relating to Appeals against non-determination of the three planning applications 17/00567/AS Former Wye College, 19/01330/AS Former ADAS Offices, 19/01327/AS Land north of Occupation Road.
- 2.2. WyeCRAG upholds the content of the Wye Neighbourhood Development Plan 2015 – 30 (adopted 2016), for which some of its members were co-authors. The group is convinced that the Neighbourhood Development Plan sets out a feasible and robust plan for the future development of the village of Wye.
- 2.1. WyeCRAG does not believe that the Former Wye College buildings (17/00567/AS) are suitable for conversion to a residential development. The Former Wye College buildings were specifically designed as an educational facility with a series of classrooms, lecture rooms, offices and accommodation planned around the quadrangles with horizontal circulation. Hence, the buildings do not lend themselves for conversion to residential use and vertical division into smaller independent units.
- 2.2. As far as we know, following the acquisition of the Former Wye College buildings by Telereal Trillium in 2015, no attempt was made to consider an educational or other suitable use for the Grade I and Grade II listed buildings of the main campus.

3. Background and context

- 3.1. The college of St Gregory and St Martin was founded in 1447 by Cardinal John Kempe, as a Latin school and training college for secular priests.
-

- 3.2. The medieval buildings were planned around an intimate cloistered quadrangle, with chapel, chapter house refectory, lodgings, common room, and master's residence looking onto a walled garden. There was an outbuilding with bakehouse and stables, and a small building in the corner which was the Latin School for priests. These buildings and spaces all remain today and are mostly in original condition.
- 3.3. After the Reformation, the buildings continued to be used, with a new Grammar School in the Latin School and a master's house. In 1610 alterations and improvements were made including an exemplary Jacobean staircase with carved statues, when the main body of the College was converted into a Jacobean mansion. These features remain and are in original condition. In 1720 the school expanded and took over the mansion and a new cloister of brick was built.
- 3.4. In 1894 the school moved out and the buildings were taken over by the South Eastern Agriculture College, which then became Wye College, University of London.
- 3.5. At the beginning of the twentieth century the main campus was developed as a substantial educational facility, with a complex of new buildings planned around a series of quadrangles, reminiscent to an Oxford college. These Grade II listed buildings were designed to fit with the original architecture of the earlier college.
- 3.6. At its peak in 1995, Wye College had over 900 students from around 50 countries and collaborated with over 70 institutions in global and national research.
- 3.7. In 2000, Wye College merged with Imperial College and in 2009 teaching and research ceased at Wye. In 2015, the main college campus was sold to Telereal Trillium (TT).

4. TT's proposed private housing development

- 4.1. In the plans submitted by TT, the Former Wye College buildings are to be converted into 40 no. private residential dwellings and the site will be closed to the community and public.
 - 4.2. TT's application offers a consolatory space of 90sqm for use as a heritage centre, to be relocated from the 15th century Latin School into a 20th century space on the High Street. The application concedes access for visitors by arrangement only, to be limited to: twice per month by appointment for up to 4 hours; use of Chapel for 2 services per week; an annual heritage open day.
 - 4.3. The historic Grade I buildings occupy no more than 20% of the floor area of the Former Wye College main campus.
 - 4.4. 4 no. of the dwellings are to be positioned in the Medieval and Jacobean buildings at the heart of the village - to comprise a 5-bedroom villa, a luxury 2-bedroom apartment, a 2-bedroom flat and 1-bedroom flat.
-

- 4.5. Sub-division of the historic Grade I listed buildings is wholly inappropriate for such a rare and significant building. Any sub-division will be extremely problematic, involving sound and fire proofing between volumes. Moreover, the intensification of services and drainage required for each separate unit will be hugely detrimental to the historic building fabric.
- 4.6. For such an important site as this, such proposals should form part of the principle of the case and not left to conditions which are most likely not possible to fulfil.
- 4.6. In relation to this we would make a procedural objection in that, the significance of the historic Grade I listed buildings should have been set out by the applicant in accordance with the NPPF and ENV.13.

5. WyeCRAG's alternative proposals

- 5.1. WyeCRAG's proposals are to conserve and enhance the historic Grade I buildings as a cultural & community centre, to include a Museum of Wye, the village archive, public library, exhibition spaces, community education facilities, events venue, offices for local societies and a 10-room hotel and restaurant.
- 5.2. In these proposals the conjoined parts of the medieval and Jacobean buildings will remain in single occupation, maintaining cultural, educational and community use. The plans allow unrestricted access to, and the use of all ground level areas, and will involve minimal alterations to the original building fabric.
- 5.3. These viable proposals are supported by an architectural concept and a robust business plan, detailing core funding, restoration costs, income revenue flows, and estimated running costs. The plans have been developed by professional advisers.
- 5.4. The WyeCRAG proposals would reduce TT's development proposal by only 4 no. units and perhaps enhance the viability of the scheme, by removing the most complicated areas of conversion and restoration.
- 5.5. Most importantly, the WyeCRAG proposals are in synergy with the Wye Neighbourhood Development Plan 2015 – 30 (adopted 2016) and have the unwavering support of the village community and college alumni.

6. The planning process and communications with TT

- 6.1. Prior to the planning committee resolution of June 2018, the local community, in the form of the Parish Council and Village Design Group made numerous and persistent attempts to engage in a collaborative process with TT and ABC. This endeavour was unsuccessful and the community's heritage concerns and the significance of the historic Grade I listed buildings was ignored.
-

- 6.2 In June 2018, a planning committee at ABC resolved to grant planning permission for the conversion of the historic buildings into a private residential development, without considering the objections of the local community.
- 6.3 Legal and planning specialists were appointed to review the documentation for TTs' application and it became clear that the planning process had been dealt with in a cursory manner, bypassing the involvement of the local community.
- 6.4 In relation to this we would make a procedural objection in that, the correct decision making procedures, as set out in para 196 of the NPPF and sec. 66 and 72 of the Act have not been complied with.
- 6.4 WyeCRAG has attempted to communicate with TT on two occasions – in September 2019 and February 2020. This communication has included open information describing WyeCRAG's activities and alternative proposals for a cultural & community centre and has requested a meeting to discuss concerns for the future of the historic Grade I buildings. These requests have been met with indifference.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 WyeCRAG objects to the conversion of the Former Wye College buildings to a private residential development.
- 7.2 WyeCRAG's fundamental concern is for the historic Grade I 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 buildings are converted to private housing they will be closed to the community and the ambience of Wye, the university village will be lost.
- 7.3 WyeCRAG is equally concerned by the proposals to sub-divide the medieval and Jacobean buildings for use as 4 no. private dwellings. Such sub-division and associated upgrade will be extremely problematic and hugely detrimental to the original building fabric.
- 7.4 WyeCRAG has prepared realistic and viable proposals for the historic buildings to be conserved and enhanced as a cultural & community centre.
- 7.5 WyeCRAG is dismayed by the lack of community involvement in the planning process and the reluctance of TT to engage in discussions concerning the future use of the historic Grade I buildings.

This statement of case was prepared by WyeCRAG members and its professional advisers and is made on behalf of a significant number of village residents and Wye College Alumni, and all who value our heritage.