**Wye Planning Hearing 2021 – Planning Inspectorate References: APP/E2205/W/20/3259450, APP/E2205/W/20/3259462, APP/E2205/W/20/3259465**

**Personal statement from Elizabeth Coulson**

I am an “interested party” because Wye is a wonderful place to live. I appreciate what a privilege it is to live here and want future generations to be able to enjoy it. My family moved to the university village of Wye in1996, attracted by its heritage and amenities and the beautiful Grade II\* listed house that became our family home for 20 years. Our move was precipitated by a change in my career from assessor at the Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency (MHRA) to Pfizer, latterly as global head of Quality and Regulatory Policy. My late husband, Ian, was a passionate historian who quickly immersed himself in village activities and was enthusiastically involved in developing the Village Design Statement, Parish Plan and was independent chair of the Neighbourhood Plan group. In addition to Ian’s involvement in the village and a busy job as Kent schools’ history inspector and advisor, he was president of the Kent Archaeological Society, an author of school textbooks and other academic publications and worked closely with Canterbury Archaeological Trust. A beautiful bench in his memory stands in front of the old college, thanks to our friends Lucy and Francis Huntington and the Heritage Centre.

When I retired in 2010, I was keen to get involved in the community. I had no idea what I was taking on when I agreed to chair the Village Hall committee, which is effectively responsible for running a charity providing affordable venues as a service for the residents of Wye and the surrounding area, a population in excess of 8,500 registered at Wye surgery. The village hall is a vital community asset and the hub for many activities and clubs – Wye Under Fives, Mother and Toddler group, After School Club during the day, an evening venue for a diverse selection of clubs (Gardeners, Wye Arts, Whist, Scouts etc) and a sought-after location for exercise classes (Pilates, yoga, Zumba etc).

I worked with the committee (volunteers representing the various user groups) to review the hall procedures, pricing structure, utilities etc and to maximise the hall usage and income. At that time, the halls were rather run down so we started to work on improving the facilities available to our users. The Wye Centre project, under the leadership of David Reece, has subsequently transformed the standard of the facilities and added two meeting rooms to the existing two halls. Notwithstanding the ongoing Covid pandemic, the village halls are under pressure and operating at maximum capacity. As current secretary to Wye Arts and cinema club, I know how difficult it is to find suitable venues for special events that require a larger space or on different dates from those we normally use.

When I first moved to Wye, the College was very much integrated with the community and we had access to the facilities of the College for events, meetings, leisure activities and classes. I have happy memories of attending parties in the old college buildings and Withersdane Hall and using the pool and tennis courts with my children. That access was gradually lost during the years following the college closure, with the exception of the Latin School which has continued to be used for the Heritage Centre and for meetings, choir, WEA classes etc. In summer, the Latin School garden is a joy, a tranquil plan to sit on a bench and reflect. We are now also losing the Methodist Church along with its hall and meeting rooms. The Methodist hall has also been continuously fully booked for community groups such as Options (drop-in for coffee and soup), various exercise classes and meetings. While the new Wye School has some excellent facilities that are available for hire when not in use by the school, their hire fees are high and beyond the reach of many community groups for anything but occasional use.

With the village halls fully booked, many of us already have to travel outside the village to classes in other local community halls, a situation that will be exacerbated by the loss of the Methodist Hall. This is both an inconvenience to residents and a missed opportunity for employment of teachers in Wye. Not everyone in the village can afford to run a car or is able to drive, so there is a need for affordable activities within the centre of the village to cater for all. The concept of the walkable village and the ability to access local amenities on foot is increasingly important as parking and traffic have become progressively problematic; the village is grid-locked at school drop-off and pick-up times so you can forget trying to drive anywhere!

Wye has always been proud of the range of facilities, clubs and activities on offer, a major attraction for prospective residents – and bringing in people from outside the village to enjoy the ambience, countryside, pubs and restaurants. Not only have we lost access to a significant amount of community space over recent years (college and now the Methodist church), but we are about to face a significant increase in population and consequent demand. The shortfall in community space for local activities needs to be urgently addressed or quality of life for residents of Wye and the surrounding area will be adversely affected in future.

The residents of Wye understand that change is inevitable, but expansion would be more readily acceptable if accompanied by sensitive design and balanced with an increase in amenities proportionate to the population. If Telereal Trillium (TT) is allowed to proceed with their intention to cram in the maximum number of bland and characterless houses in a piecemeal manner without regard to the Neighbourhood Plan, the unique character of Wye will be lost forever. **People choose to live in Wye, because Wye is special.** It would be a tragedy if all that makes Wye special were to be lost to future generations.

EL Coulson

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