

**Watercress Field, Strand Meadow**  
**Short initial submission by Burwash: Save our Fields**

Burwash: Save our Fields objects to the application for the following reasons:

**Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)**

- 1 The whole site is in the High Weald AONB The Inspector in July 2019 found that a planning proposal for the same number of homes on this site was:
  - a) An ‘overly large development [which was] harmful and locally [a] prominent suburban intrusion into the landscape of the AONB.
  - b) ‘ the scheme would significantly harm the character and appearance of the area and the landscape of the AONB.
- 2 The exceptionally historic and beautiful village of Burwash needs its setting in the AONB. The village should not be disfigured by suburban houses estates in an ancient field.
- 3 The AONB issue is side stepped by the developer. Protecting the AONB is vital.

**The scheme is not viable**

- 4 The developer has known for a long time the site has problems, like the slope and the need for piling. He obtained outline planning permission with a false promise of 40% affordable homes. In 2018, he signed a section 106 contract promising those affordable homes. The developer then claimed he could not afford to build the affordable homes and asked the contract to be cancelled. Rother District Council refused to do that. That decision was right and the Council should stand firm. The Inspector made particular note that the scheme was unviable and considered the developer’s approach was hypothetical.
- 5 The developer makes no mention of this problem.

**Form and scale**

- 6 The original application was for 17 homes. The developer has increased this to 30. The Inspector on the last appeal considered that there was a marked difference between a scheme of 17 homes and the proposed 30 homes and as a result [original consent] does not justify the ‘form and the appearance’ of the [developer’s] proposal. He also said the scale of the buildings would harm the landscape.

**The ecology**

- 7 The developer has refused all requests for our ecologist to visit the site. In their last application, the County Ecologist found eight significant failings in the developer’s ecologist’s report and three areas of concern. The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee planning officer in her submission objected to the scheme because: ‘The development has potential ecological impacts on the site and adjacent woodland which are not addressed in the application material contrary to their policies.’ The developer used the same ecologist in 2020. That ecologist seeks to keep various parts of his report as secret so that they cannot be shown to our ecologist or checked by the group. Inevitably there would be failures in the ecologist’s approach to this site.

**The footpath to nowhere**

- 8 In their October 2011 application, the owners and the applicants in outline planning permission, promised ‘to incorporate a footpath link extending west towards the existing

footpath at Ham Lane'. In the 2018 section 106, the developer also agreed to provide the 'specified' footpath. In these latest plans the footpath just goes to a thick hedge at the edge of a sports ground. Those who look after the sports ground refused to permit a footpath link across their land for safety, security and other reasons.

9 The footpath link is important and was one of the reasons why the site was given outline planning permission. It would have made the development less car based. In any event with the section 106 agreement in place .

10 The developer makes no mention of this problem.

#### **The housing quota**

11 The developer relies on the need to build houses. This factor does not override planning rules. It just gives him a minor advantage which is overwhelmed by the objections.

#### **Traffic**

12 In Shrub Lane there is anger at the plans to make the traffic flow and the parking at Strand Meadow even more chaotic. Generally, there is an understanding that Shrub Lane cannot safely take any more traffic and another large development is misconceived.

#### **The consultation**

13 In the developer's Community Involvement statement it says, 'the design team have sought extensive involvement from the community regarding this scheme.' This is the opposite of the truth. There was no community involvement in the latest plans. In the previous scheme, the developer and his agent declined to attend the community consultation event and only the architect was left to show those present some inaccurate artist impressions, an inaccurate leaflet and a site plan. He showed no housing plans or any other material. The consultation exercise has been deceptive, reluctant and ill-informed. Interestingly virtually everyone who filled in a form was hostile to the proposal.

#### **The nature of the application**

14 The application is not for detailed planning permission. It is a reserved matters application in which the developer seeks to discharge the conditions that the Council imposed when they granted outline planning permission. The conditions were appropriate and should remain in place. **Here refusal is the appropriate decision.**

#### **The objectors**

15 The last similar scheme had over 460 objectors. No one supported the scheme. The scale of opposition to the last similar application is a very relevant factor linked with the developer's refusal to properly engage with the local community and inability to deal with their specific objections.

#### **Design**

16 In the developer's Planning statement at para 5.5, he says the issue is whether the new scheme has met the Inspector's concerns. The Inspector determined the appeal following Rother District Council's refusal of the last application. The developer ignores the main issues while over many pages just congratulates the drafters of the scheme. The Inspector in fact rejected the scheme on character, appearance, AONB, form, scale as well as design. Although the design has improved it is not yet acceptable. The large number of steps to the houses mean they are unusable for wheelchair users and those with buggies. There are other issues about the design.