

Ma'am,

My name is Giles King, I have been a local resident in Cuckfield for more than 20 years and a resident in West Sussex for over 30 years. I am proud to be chairman of a local charity, called The Cuckfield Society which formed in 1963. The Cuckfield Society is one part of the R6 party which includes Cuckfield Parish Council, Ansty and Staplefield Parish Council and the Stop Cuckstye Action Group.

Our charity represents a significant portion of the Cuckfield population estimated at 3,911 as of 2024. I feel it is important to remind participants in this hearing the purpose of the Society and why it has played a role in working closely with the Parish Councils over the last four years to challenge the proposed development on land between Cuckfield and Ansty.

We have played a major role in drumming up local support through a number of activities over the last four years. We have held public meetings in the village with over 150 people present and as you might have seen this morning we had circa 30 to 40 people demonstrating peacefully outside the MSDC offices. The objectors to this proposed development are a significant portion of both Ansty and Cuckfield households.

However, before I do that I want to share a brief history of Cuckfield.

Cuckfield is a historic West Sussex village situated on the High Weald. Originally a medieval market town granted a Royal Charter in 1255, it flourished as a key London to Brighton coaching stop before the railway shifted development to neighbouring Haywards Heath in the 1840's - the main reason for diverting the railway was to avoid destroying Cuckfield's heritage of mainly 16th century timber framed buildings in the High Street and avoid the destruction of a landscape, which previous speakers today have referred to as one of the most important medieval landscapes still in existence in Northern Europe.

So what are the five core aims of The Cuckfield Society:

1. Protect and enhance the local character - by ensuring Cuckfield retains its distinctive character and setting between the High Weald AONB, the South Downs National Park and neighbouring settlements like Ansty. Also preserving the essential atmosphere of Cuckfield and its surrounding countryside whilst aiming to improve the appearance of the village and our amenities.

It is worth adding, as Simon Stokes mentioned this morning. We are not against building new affordable homes in the right places, ie next to appropriate amenity and transport.

2. Work collaboratively with other organisations - by this I mean supporting and cooperating with local and national bodies whose work aligns with these aims.

3. Promote awareness and appreciation of Cuckfield's beauty, history and character.

4. Encourage public support

5. Engage the community through activities - using meetings, exhibitions, lectures, publications and campaigns to advance these goals.

The Society's constitution establishes it not just as a social group, but as a guardian of Cuckfield's character and environment. Because of this, any major development, like Cuckstye, falls squarely within its remit, particularly where there are questions about landscape impact, heritage preservation and sustainability issues.

To conclude, the appellant this morning agreed (using his words) - "the starting point is the spatial reality in Mid-sussex. This is a deeply constrained part of the Country. 60% of the District is subject to national level landscape designations." This includes Ashdown Forest and other AONB (nearly 50%) and the South Downs National Park (over 10%).

It is precisely because of these constraints that large proposed developments (even in the setting of AONB) like the proposed Appellants scheme of 1,450 homes, need to be thoroughly scrutinised. This is why our R6 expert witnesses will be focusing on

the sustainability of the location, the landscape and planning policy and explaining why this development is in the wrong place and would destroy land and views that have remained sacrosanct since the medieval times.

Thank you.