

## High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

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[www.highweald.org](http://www.highweald.org)

*Working together to care for one of England's finest landscapes*

5<sup>th</sup> August 2020

Dear Councillor,

### **Major Development in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

We are taking the unusual step of writing to all the members of Wealden District Council's Planning Committee (North and South) to express our dismay at the decision of Planning Committee North to grant planning permission for 119 new houses in the AONB north of Crowborough (WD/2017/2197). We were particularly concerned by some of the comments made during the debate which included 'the site is not very beautiful, and you can't see it anyway' and 'anything to take the pressure off the south of the district'.

The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is a national designation, one of only 36 in England, which is recognised for its very special landscape qualities. As District Councillors you are the custodians of the part of the AONB within Wealden district, whether it is in your own ward or not, and that is a very important responsibility.

The protection enjoyed by this landscape is not just in planning policy but in legislation. Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act imposes a duty on all public bodies to "have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty" in making decisions that affect the designated area.

The designation applies to the whole of the AONB, and the protection afforded to it by legislation and planning policy is not lessened by individual site characteristics, detracting factors or views into the site being restricted by vegetation or topography. Indeed, part of the AONB's special character is that it is a hidden landscape with rolling hills, secret valleys and copious woodland and mature hedges. It is a landscape that has remained largely intact since the 14<sup>th</sup> century and the heritage and cultural value of its medieval farmsteads and fields are an integral part of its natural beauty.

We understand the intense pressure that Wealden District Council is under to increase its housing supply, especially since the unfortunate collapse of its Local Plan at examination last year. However, this does not override its legal duties in respect of the AONB and national planning policies are clear that the presumption in favour of development does not apply to major development within an AONB.

The Eridge Road proposal will not be the last such application, and we would implore you to treat any future proposals for major development in the AONB very carefully, having regard to your role as guardians of this nationally designated landscape, so that its natural beauty will be conserved for future generations to enjoy.

Yours sincerely,

Handwritten signatures of Sally Marsh and Jason Lavender in black ink.

Sally Marsh and Jason Lavender  
Co-Directors  
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c.c. Members of the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee  
Town Clerk, Crowborough Town Council