

Sent: 02 October 2025 14:32

To: planninginfo <planninginfo@midsussex.gov.uk>

Subject: DM/25/2223 Representation

Dear Mid-Sussex District Council,

The Church of Scientology's proposed development of its Saint Hill compound is a prime example of this organisation's attitude that it is above the law and the needs of their parishioners supersedes that of the local community and environment.

I call it a compound because that is exactly what it is. From personal experience, I can attest to the fact the workers are not permitted to leave the property without permission, have limited access to the outside world and are, for all intents and purposes, modern slaves being exploited under the guise of religion. These are the conditions workers lived under during the construction of the faux-castle in the 1960s, and the same would apply for any construction work that would take place on the property in respect to application DM/25/2223.

The crux of the matter lies with their annual gathering of the International Association of Scientologists (IAS). This is the official membership body of the so-called Church, although it is not registered as an entity that trades in the United Kingdom for the purposes of tax avoidance. The property itself is designated as a Place of Worship and as such, does not generate any revenue for the Council in the way of Business Rates despite the Charity Commission rejecting a bid for tax exemption in 1999. The Charity Commission's view remains that the Church of Scientology does not serve a public benefit, and the annual charity gala which sees £50,000 cheques given out for local causes, is a prime example of Scientology's attempt to distract and obfuscate the real purpose of this proposed development: to generate money for an overseas entity which serves no public benefit in the UK whatsoever.

The IAS event is Scientology's largest annual fundraising event and ticket sales to the Saturday 'Patrons Ball' alone generate in excess of \$1.2 million for the IAS, money extracted from its members and from the local economy.

The proposed development is for infrastructure to support the continuation of this event being held at Saint Hill and the Council's decision on this matter will effectively

result in the legitimisation of an event which any reasonable person would assess as being better to hold elsewhere.

As part of Mid-Sussex District Council's review of Scientology's application for a Public Spaces Protection Order last year, it noted severe traffic problems, pedestrians walking in the road and insufficient safety procedures in place to protect event attendees and members of the public on a dark, country lane. The PSPO application failed, and the Council made it clear these issues were a result of the Scientology event - not protestors.

Although Scientology claim that by building a new entrance, these traffic issues would be mitigated but this is categorically false. In both 2023 and 2024, both entrances were already being used for the duration of the event, and the miles-long tailback and local traffic disruption was caused by poor traffic management and the requirement for every vehicle to be stopped and searched prior to being allowed on the property. Scientology's plans include, for example, a large metal barrier at the new entrance, and there is no explanation as to exactly how renovating this entrance would improve traffic flow.

The road itself is simply unsuitable for the increase in traffic generated by the event, is insufficiently lit and there is no paved footpath on either side of the road for pedestrians to use. There is also no pedestrian crossing, meaning even if these plans were approved, the issue of event attendees crossing the road would remain, which is a major safety issue. The Church makes it clear that this proposed car park in Juhring field would be used for events at the Rugby Club - which is on the other side of the road, and although it may alleviate congestion for these smaller events, it would still result in an increased number of pedestrians crossing the road in an unsafe manner.

Safety is clearly not Scientology's number one priority, as evidenced by consistent failure to meet basic safety requirements around this event. For example, a 130ft hedge row, concealed fencing and wooden sleepers had been placed on the public highway opposite their main entrance, which they admitted to the Council was in order to obstruct protestors, without permission. WSCC Highways ordered they be removed, and only after months of legal threats and back and forth did they comply. All the while, this reduced the space available for passersby and dog walkers to use - meaning they were forced to walk in the road due to Scientology's obstructions.

Similarly, in 2023 and 2024 the Church placed planters, metal barriers and other obstructions along the western side of Saint Hill Road, blocking the public right of way and forcing pedestrians to walk in the road.

Scientology's own additions to the property have been noted in the Heritage Statement they provided and described as "unsympathetic" - this is a continuation in a long history of unnecessary and tasteless additions to the property which over time have permanently damaged the prominence, charm and visual surroundings of Saint Hill House (Manor). The visual environment of houses of this period is as much a part of their amenity value as the houses themselves and Scientology cared more for money than heritage or taste. The faux-style castle, for example, was built in the 1960s without the required planning permission - something which is boasted about on Scientology's own TV channel (scientology.tv) in the documentary they produced about Saint Hill. I can see no justification for any further development of this property and fear doing so would only harm the character and charm of this protected, Grade-II listed building.

It's obvious Scientology have been planning to construct a huge, 45,000 square foot marquee and hold the event on their property for months, regardless of planning - and have no due regard for the local authority. Photos supplied during the LDC process are an admission of guilt that this event is held in the same, mammoth marquee, almost annually for the best part of two decades, and they have never applied for permission.

Why should the planning committee trust the intentions of an applicant who has just defied the law altogether? How can they be sure that Scientology will stick to the plans they have submitted, and allow works to be inspected as required by law. The committee has good reason to suspect they won't. That ought to be grounds for at the very least a greater level of scrutiny.

The event and use of the field as a car park has already done damage to the environment and due to a lack of enforcement in previous years, the impact this construction has already had on the local ecology has not been, and cannot be assessed.

All of this centres around mitigating the impact of Scientology's own annual IAS event, which is the largest fundraising event in their calendar. Although environmental and ecological studies have been carried out in relation to the

construction of concrete base plates, there has been no assessment of the impact of the marquee itself, its construction, or its use.

As a result of Scientology wanting to host a large scale event at an unsuitable site, local residents will now have to endure weeks of noisy and disruptive construction work - and damage to the environment will occur in an AONB. Looking at the bigger picture, this construction is entirely avoidable and completely unnecessary as the solution would be to host their event at a more suitable permanent venue, which has been designed with the event's scale in mind, with the appropriate infrastructure in place to support the increase in road and foot traffic.

Situated in an AONB, this property is simply not suitable for such a large development - car park, toilet blocks and a sub station would all damage the environment and legitimise Scientology's plans for their annual event, despite more suitable alternative venues nearby not being considered.

The event draws thousands of parishioners from across Europe to the site, and there are significant road safety concerns - especially caused by drivers with little to no experience of driving on UK roads. MSDC's PSPO report noted that there were several near misses noted in 2023, and I fail to see how the development of a car park would solve these issues. Rather, it would encourage more people to attend and may even amplify these problems.

Scientology's application is littered with false statements half truths and outright lies. For example, in the Noise Impact Assessment, it states "Note that the events proposed are to run only during daytime hours and as such the car parking noise will only be assessed against these noise levels." This is simply not true. The property's Premises Licence allows events to continue well into the hours of darkness and the nature of the annual IAS event requires it to take place in the evenings. For example, The Patrons Ball is a black tie dinner event and the Charity Concert takes place in the evening.

I was also surprised to see a supporting statement for East Grinstead Meads FC. The club is located over 2 miles away and so the additional car parking spaces would have little to no impact on their operations, considering the lack of paved and protected footpaths connecting the site to the Football Club.

The Leisure Centre next door, which has supported the expansion of the car park, itself applied for the expansion of its own car park by an additional 37 spaces earlier

this year (DM/25/0934). The application was subsequently withdrawn, but demonstrates how any demand for additional parking is limited to just a small number of spaces - and hardly justifies the creation of a 600+ space car park at Saint Hill.

This is not just an application for a new car park, this is a wide-ranging, full scale redevelopment of a rural landscape into a venue for one of Scientology's largest gatherings in their annual events calendar. It would result in permanent change to a protected area, designated as an AONB, for the purpose of a single, three day event that takes place once a year - which would be much better suited being hosted in a purpose-built venue elsewhere.

This development is totally unnecessary and could be avoided if Scientology were simply to consider using a nearby events venue instead.

I therefore strongly urge the Council to reject Scientology's application.