

Objection to DM/24/2770/Stumble Ridge

I am the daughter of John and Doreen Scates of Hill Pasture Oldlands Avenue Balcombe RH17 6LP. This is my childhood home. I spend a lot of time at the property, visiting for at least one week a month as my parents are elderly, now both in their 90s.

I wish to object to the application for several reasons, set out below.

The history of the area is relevant. As can be seen from the plans the properties on the south side of Oldlands Avenue form a line, each with a garden running down to an existing field. Each of the properties own a strip of land running down through the field, through the woodland ending at the brook. The strips of land were bought in 1967 by collective agreement of each of the owners to be preserved for the benefit of all and to safeguard the natural landscape. The field is jointly maintained by the owners as a wildflower meadow. It is an old and historic meadow – an archaic meadow. The woodland is an ancient woodland as has been surveyed in the past. The woodland has been maintained to preserve biodiversity and there are resident dormice. When the field and woodland areas were purchased there was a mutual agreement intending to protect the area from development and covenants entered into ensure that the area would not be built on. This was to preserve the area, which is in effect a nature reserve providing diverse habitats (meadow, ancient woodland and brook). The proposed development is completely at odds with this, as it creates another large house on the garden and field of the property at Stumble Ridge – out of line and out of character with all the other properties along Oldlands Avenue.

The proposed development is also at odds with local planning policies of not allowing development outside of the confines of the village, it is outside of the Balcombe built up area boundary and the proposed property and garden infringes on the area designated as Natural Landscape in what is an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is also in a conservation area. The proposal will essentially subdivide the existing plot into two properties. There is no need under the existing Balcombe neighbourhood plan for this property.

I reproduce below a copy of the first page of the ANOB management plan website:

“Managing our medieval landscape – 2024 to 2029

The [High Weald AONB Management Plan](#) is the single most important document for the AONB.

The Management Plan is a statutory document which defines the natural beauty of the AONB and sets out a twenty-year strategy supported by five-year action and investment priorities for conserving this nationally important landscape.

*The Plan provides a means by which all public bodies can judge, and be judged on, their duty **to seek to further conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the AONB**. It also provides a guide for residents, businesses and visitors on the actions they can take to help safeguard this special area”.*

There has been what might charitably be described as “mission creep” in relation to the development of the garden and field areas of the property at Stumble Ridge, but in reality, is more likely a deliberate and cynical strategy of overextension and development.

The garden of Stumble Ridge has been extended into the meadow area, which it should not have been, as this breaches the 1967 agreement and is outside of the Balcombe built up area, the existence of which is then used in justification of the proposals.

The planning history bears examination. There is a clear history of minimising the description of the work to be carried out – firstly in relation to the current very sizable property at Stumble Ridge, which replaced a modest property, having been described as a 4 bedroomed home – despite the extensive additional accommodation at both ground floor and attic levels.

The initial application in relation to the garden/field area was in 2013 for an “garden office/gym”; decking was added without permission, which had to be sought retrospectively.

In 2017 application was made to extend the building to be used as “annexe accommodation”, though that was later withdrawn, but the “outbuilding” was used in any event used as a holiday home without permission - permission again having to be sought retrospectively. It should be noted at that time that conditions were then imposed to block permanent residence on the site and the allowing the proposal would effectively overturn this. The existence of the existing holiday home is relied on in support of the proposals –it is wrong that the existence of this structure should then be used as justification for yet further development. The use of the holiday let already causes noise when in use affecting the quiet enjoyment of the gardens of the other properties along Oldlands Avenue and Stumblemead.

It is also noteworthy that concern was raised at that time with regard to ownership the track accessing the meadow (which is currently only used for a tractor to enter to cut the meadow on annual basis) and this application effectively seeks to convert this to a road/drive. This is jointly owned by the owners of the property and the owners of Lamb Cottage, with permissive rights of access for the other properties backing onto the field. This would totally change the nature of the environment. To effectively allow conversion of this to a road/drive for the benefit of a second property on the site would be wholly inappropriate leading to noise and disturbance affecting the quiet enjoyment of the neighbouring gardens on an ongoing basis (never mind the noise and disruption during the building process). It is also foreseeable that allowing such use would then be exploited to develop other elements of the site next to the existing allotments, again this would be wholly inappropriate for the reasons outlined. Allowing the scheme would set an unwanted and unwarranted precedent. The proposal does not properly address the treatment of the track – but it is clear that the property is proposed to have multiple vehicles. It is likely to cause damage to existing trees and hedges by digging and or compaction of roots – in what is heavy clay soil.

In 2024, whilst permission was given for the removal of a mature blue Atlas cedar. This has not replaced, as it was specified it should have been, which would have affected the proposed plans.

The proposed building is described as a 3 bedroomed house – but again this appears a cynical attempt to in fact build a 5 bedroomed property. There is an “cinema room” at first floor level with large windows and “integral garage” – both of which in fact mean this should be considered as a 5 bedroomed dwelling, as if permission was granted it could, and no doubt would, be so converted.

Whilst the proposal for a second dwelling is opposed in principle it should also be noted that the design of the building is also objectionable, both in size and design. The half sunken nature would not remove it from view (the present edifice is currently visible) and would significantly affect the nature of the area – it is out of keeping and unattractive.

Increased use of the dwelling would put increase pressure on the surrounding meadow and woodland in addition to generating more noise and light pollution.

It is clear that developers are targeting the area – my parents get almost weekly letters suggesting development of the land – if this building and division of the existing site is allowed – the pressure and risk to the rest of the meadow and woodland will increase further and the natural landscape be further reduced – at the very time there is a climate and nature crisis when individuals and communities should be doing their best to preserve the natural environment for the future. The proposals do not in any way further the objectives of the ANOB management plan 2024 to 2029 and is completely at odds with that plan.

This proposed development is precisely the type of development identified by the plan as harmful, and does not promote any of the objectives identified in that management plan and it is the duty of the planning authority to:

“Seek to minimise erosion of AONB character through suburbanisation in rural areas, including landscape-intrusive replacement dwellings, extensions to residential curtilages, annexes, and smaller interventions such as new accesses and solid fences, which have a cumulative effect”.

In summary the proposal offends against or is not compatible with or would cause problems with

- The parish council's, local council's and wider planning policies (both of itself in terms of the erection of a permanent dwelling on the site and by virtue of the size, appearance, layout and density of the proposed development)
- Overlooking or loss of privacy (to neighbouring gardens and due to the access route)
- Means of access, parking, servicing, traffic generation, highway safety
- Impact on landscape and ecological habitats in AONB
- Crime prevention and community safety
- Effect on listed buildings, conservation areas and archaeology
- Noise and disturbance

I would urge the planning authority to reject the application, indeed, cannot see how the proposed development could be permitted.