

Steve Ashdown

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 27 June 2025 13:29
To: planninginfo; Steve Ashdown; [REDACTED]
Subject: Amended Objection to planning applications DM/23/2866 and DM/23/2867 from the Stop Cuckstye Action Group and the Cuckfield Society

Dear Mr Ashdown, this response to the two interdependent planning applications **DM/23/2866** and **DM/23/2867** is submitted on behalf of the **Stop Cuck-stye Action Group(SCAG) and the Cuckfield Society**.

Both organisations have taken the opportunity before to **object** to these applications and our further comments here should be seen as restating our continuing objection rather than as a replacement for anything that has been written previously.

The latest submissions to the evidence base by the applicants (Fairfax Land Acquisitions and Savills) adds very little that is new or noteworthy and does nothing to refute the objections made earlier by ourselves and the many others that have also objected to this development.

Sustainability - This site was, is, and will remain unsustainable insofar as this term is understood by the National Planning Policy Framework. The proposed development is not an organic extension to either Ansty or Cuckfield and adds nothing to either place. It is instead an unrelated suburban housing estate of unimaginative design artificially planted in ancient countryside of high landscape and agricultural value which would be irreparably harmed should this permission be granted.

The landscape at this site has been described in the High Weald Management Plan as "One of the best surviving medieval landscapes in North Western Europe" and - according to MSDC - comparable to the landscape of the High Weald National Landscape (to which it is adjoined). The heritage assets scattered amongst the natural landscape depend for their context on their rural setting. Their mere survival in a landscape so changed by development would leave them much diminished.

Notwithstanding its detachment from the two existing settlements, it manages at the same time to effectively coalesce them by occupying much of the land between. In terms of place making, it represents the worst of all possible worlds. Ansty is defined in the settlement hierarchy as category 4 which is a small village with limited scope for further development. It is patently absurd to claim that this development is somehow complimentary to the existing village.

The facilities that the applicant lists as benefits such as Schools (primary and SEN), a GP Practice, a bus service, retail provision, employment opportunities, and sports facilities are a fantasy. They are not in their gift to provide. Instead, third parties such as the Education Authority, the Integrated Care Board, the bus company and various sporting bodies would be responsible for providing these. Nowhere however does the applicant provide any evidence other than a few vague letters of comfort that these third parties are engaged with them at all. There is no business plan, no timetable for delivery, and no detail that gives these vague aspirations any credibility at all. With regard to retail, the truth is that even when built out there would be an insufficient critical mass of population to support anything other than a small convenience store.

We note further that Southern Water in their capacity as a statutory consultee have commented that "The wastewater discharged from the proposed development will be drained to Southern Water's Newbury v Cuckfield and Ansty Wastewater Treatment Works. The works currently does not have the capacity to accommodate flows from the proposed development. Where development has been identified and allocated for future development by the Local Planning Authority, Southern Water will attempt to ensure capacity is

available. The occupation of the development is required to be deferred until adequate capacity is available to serve the development".

The applicant has suggested in their active travel plans that it would be possible for potential residents to access shops, schools, GP surgeries, and leisure facilities in nearby communities. In stating this they say they are informed by the work of the Town and Country Planning Association who have pioneered in this country the concept of the 20 minute community. However, it is obvious that it is impossible to walk from and to the centre (much less the far side) of the proposed development to any facility in anything like this timeframe.

Travel by cycle to Cuckfield or to Haywards Heath is also fraught with danger due to the nature of the A272 and the B2036 which jointly form an effective barrier to active travel by residents from the site. It is worth noting in this context that the siting of the pelican crossing just south of the existing junction of the B2036 and the A272 (Cuckfield bypass) would have a very limited visual splay especially from the right and would therefore place pedestrians and cyclists at great risk from oncoming traffic.



Diagram above taken from "Aborcultural Impact Assessment and method statement". This shows in green a retained line of trees and hedgerow which would severely restrict visibility splays at the point of the proposed pelican crossing.

As previously mentioned, travel by bus from the proposed development is dependent on a highly irregular service which doesn't even run daily. Moreover, the operators of this service have made it clear they will not be diverting it onto the estate. An alternative plan whereby the developer themselves would subsidise a service is unsubstantiated by any detailed costings or any long term commitment to the site.

Another benefit claimed by the applicant, is the generous provision of affordable housing as documented in their Housing Statement provided by Tetlow King. The 30% figure they quote however is the minimum percentage as laid out in policy DP31. The NPPF furthermore emphasises that for developments of this scale the percentage should be higher. There is certainly dire local need for more housing of this nature and therefore the applicant's claim of major benefit is therefore nothing of the sort.

It should be noted too that Fairfax are not themselves a volume house builder but are instead a land acquisitions company who - should outline permission be granted - would in all probability sell the site on in which case any promises made with regard to new facilities would be worthless.

Traffic. - It is the inherent unsustainability of the site whereby people are forced to rely upon private motorised transport modes that causes the severe impact on the local road network. The A272, B2036 and other local routes in the locality and beyond are already at or near capacity. WSCC's own modelling using the county's approved Saturn software provided by Systra demonstrates this and our own independent consultants (Velocity) have reached the same conclusions. As far as we can see Fairfax's

modelling (done by ACE) seems to be based on a form of suppression of traffic flows based on the fact that road congestion would in itself limit trip rates. A more realistic and less cynical analytical approach would consider the actual demand from drivers wishing to drive onto local roads from the new estate rather than assume they are unable to do so.

Fairfax have in addition tried to claim that the move to home working brought about by the response to the Covid pandemic is a permanent feature that will suppress commuting on local roads. This is an outdated view. Although home working as an occasional option for workers in agreement with their employers is likely to remain, there has been a huge shift recently back to having a presence at the office. Additionally, home working is not an option for everyone. The experience of the pandemic is that "essential workers" which is to say those lower paid workers likely to be living in the 30% of housing units defined by Fairfax as "affordable" or "social" housing will not be home working at all.

We do note that National Highways have rescinded their objection to this development. However their brief is the protection of the national road network (A23/M23) and that their objection was limited to proposals concerning a single junction. More relevant to this development is the attitude of West Sussex County Highways whose remit must consider the heavily impacted more local routes, incorporating a proper account for trip rates.

The "Parkland Reserve" and Bio-diversity net gain. - Central to the Fairfax plans is the "Parkland Reserve". This unconnected parcel of land is offered as some sort of "recompense" for the ecological damage done elsewhere on the development site. From the start its purpose has been confused and inconsistent. Originally it was a recreational facility for the existing inhabitants of Ansty and Cuckfield as well as the residents of the new estate. Then as it became obvious that this would not provide the necessary biodiversity net gain it was re-designated as a "Parkland Reserve" inspired by Sir Charles Burrell's wilding regime on the Knepp Estate. Sir Charles himself has rubbished the proposal and pointed out that (given its limited scale) it is utterly impractical. Additionally, of course a wilding regime must of its very nature restrict access which is hardly compatible with its use as a recreational resource.

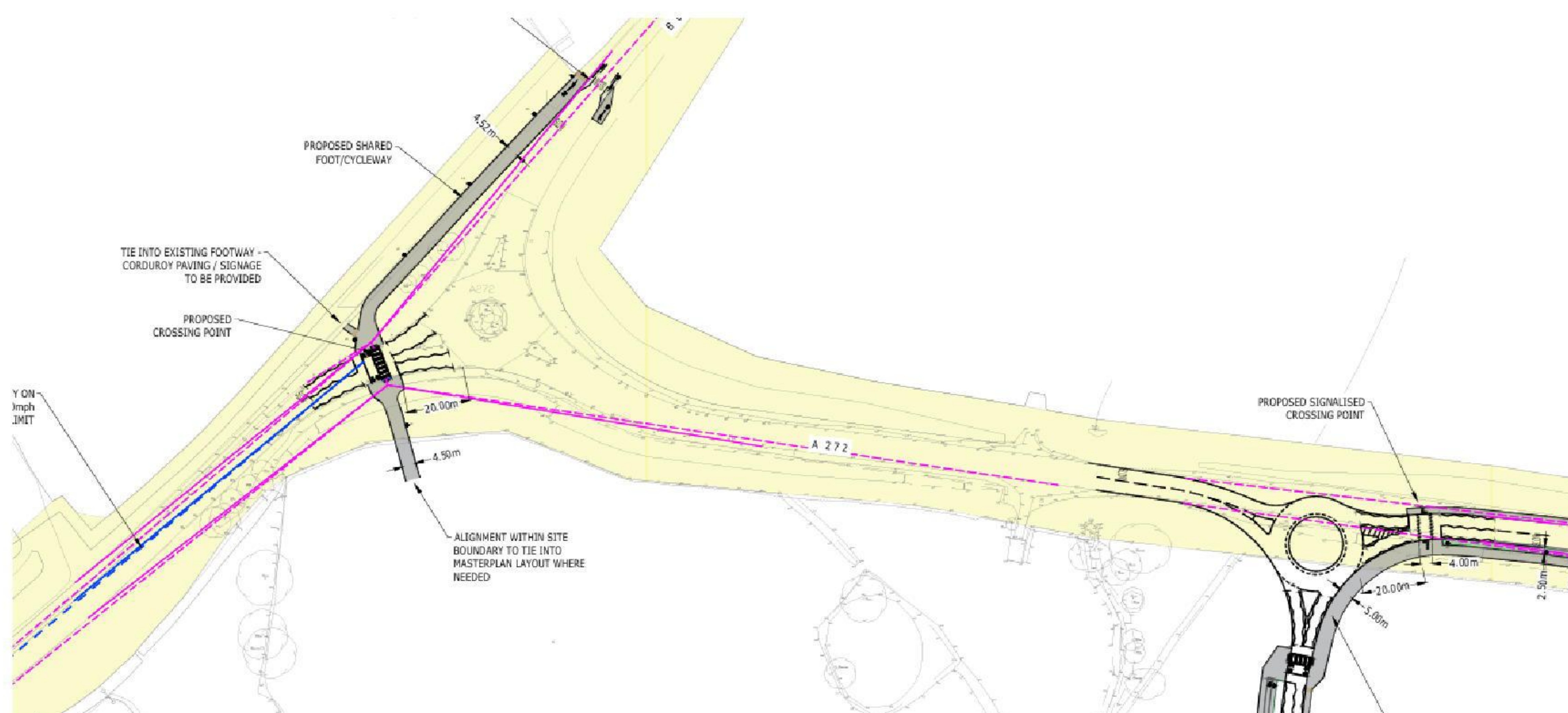
Neither have Fairfax explained how the stewardship of the "reserve" is to work. Its governance, funding, and accountability to the local community remains clouded in mystery, especially considering that in the event of permission being granted, responsibility would have passed to others once Fairfax have disposed of the site.

Ecological damage – The Ansty Farm development will inevitably cause extensive ecological damage across the proposed Site and, to date, the detailed response to the applicant's proposals from MSDC's Ecological consultant remain unpublished.

Detailed consideration should be applied to the scale and location and impact of the removal of habitats including the destruction of significant trees, 2.19ha of woodland and 1.74km of native hedgerows endangering both protected and unprotected species. Even where habitats are proposed to be retained, further scrutiny is required on the interrelationships with other aspects of the proposed development. For example, at the northern boundary of the site various documents submitted by applicant suggest that the existing trees and hedgerows along the Cuckfield Bypass would be retained but this is incompatible with road safety. As previously mentioned the main crossing point from the development across the A272 is not sufficiently visible to oncoming traffic. This could only be mitigated by the wholesale clearance of the roadside verge. This swathe of land is where The Ecology Coop in its "Dormouse mitigation statement" found the presence of Dormice and Dormice nests.



The diagram above is taken from the "Dormice Mitigation Statement" submitted on behalf of the applicant by the Ecology Co-Op. It seems to be contradicted by the one below from Ardent in their "Framework Travel Plan Final" which shows proposed visibility splays that require the clearance of the trees and hedgerows in the vicinity. It should be noted further that the sloping nature of the ground would require rather greater clearance than that shown.



Across the development site the linear hedgerow network that is such a feature of the local landscape will be punctuated by the north/south roadways that would cross their path and isolate existing habitats. This seems highly incompatible with other documentation submitted by the applicant that claims these hedgerows would be retained and indeed improved.

Both the development site and the "Parkland Reserve" contain existing pockets of ancient woodland which would be adversely impacted by the urbanisation of the development site and a cycle path through the parkland reserve.

Planning and development - As the NPPF makes clear, housing development should be "plan led". Although we understand that the emerging District Plan is stalled and currently subject to legal process, its policies and that of its predecessor still carries some residual weight. It cannot be right that an argument regarding what amounts to a technicality concerning the duty to cooperate opens up the whole of Mid Sussex to developer led speculative ventures that have no regard to local infrastructure or the wishes of local people.

We note that in a significant legal development concerning Horsham District that Bellway Homes were refused at appeal a proposal to build 250 homes in Thakeham Village (ref APP/Z3825/W/24/3350094). This is significant as the Thakeham proposal bears a striking similarity to the Ansty Farm site. The Inspector's principal findings were that:

- "the proposal would not sustainably located to minimise the reliance of such a high number of future residents on private vehicles and would not robustly secure appropriate realistic or attractive alternative travel choices to mitigate against the resultant serious harm"

- "I have found that the proposed scheme would conflict with the spatial strategy of the HDPF and TNP in relation to its nature, substantial scale and poor relationship to facilities and services"
- "the framework (NPPF) requires in paragraph 110 that significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes, taking into account the differences between urban and rural locations"
- "Under Framework paragraph 11d) ii), consideration must be given to whether any adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the Framework as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination. Having given due regard to these matters, in particular the need to direct development to sustainable locations, I consider that the adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the totality of the benefits outlined above"

This decision by the planning Inspectorate is not an isolated case. In the case of Crouchlands Farm, Plaistow (APP/L3815/W/24/3344538/61/63) the Planning Inspector Guy Davies concluded that:

- The location of the development ran counter to the spatial strategy of the Chichester development plan and accessibility to facilities and services including sustainable modes of transport.
- Landscape character and appearance, including heritage aspects of the landscape
- Design and Layout
- Highway safety
- Ancient Woodland

Conclusion. - The Inspectorates decision with regard to both the Thakeham site and that at Crouchlands Farm are also applicable to Ansty Farm. The benefit of providing much needed housing is not in doubt but it is clear from paragraph 110 of the National Planning Policy Framework that "Significant development should be focussed on locations which are or can be made sustainable through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes". Demonstrably this is not the case with regards to this site.

The golden thread that runs through the NPPF is that there is a "presumption in favour of **sustainable** development". This is the critical concept in making a decision on these proposals. We and others (as we have hopefully summed up in this submission) have demonstrated that whilst the harms of the Ansty Farm development are very real the benefits are illusionary.

The Application should be refused.

██████████ for The Cuckfield Society

██████████ for the Stop Cuck-Style Action Group.