

Press Release

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Dismay and anger as Wealden publishes Mead House plan

Planning application reveals 'the worst possible option' for Crowborough

Crowborough community leaders have reacted with anger and dismay following publication of a planning application to build 68 residential units on the combined Mead House car park and Beaconwood sites, accessed from Pine Grove. The plan, as drafted, is the worst possible outcome for the neighbouring Crowborough Community Centre and the Enterprise Hub due to open in the summer of next year.

If approved, it will result in the loss of nearly 100 public car parking spaces in the immediate vicinity of the community centre and will see flats built within a few metres of the building. The application is therefore as bad as it could be for the community centre and enterprise hub.

In early objections to the scheme, concern was expressed that Wealden District Council would be making a decision on an application involving its own land and from which it will benefit financially.

Crowborough Town Council, which is opposed to the loss of public car parking in Crowborough, is due to discuss the application at its Planning Meeting on 10th October. It can make representations to Wealden District Council but has no powers of veto over the application and does not make the final decision.

“Sadly, the application which we were warned to expect on the Mead House site is the worst possible option for the Crowborough Community Association, the enterprise centre which the town council has such visionary plans for, and indeed, for Crowborough as a whole,” said Chantal Wilson, CCA chairman. “As landowner, Wealden could have ensured that any proposal to develop in that area was supportive of the community but instead it has put no restrictions on the land at all. The result is a proposal for dense housing and the loss of every public parking space on that side of Pine Grove. The community centre will be left with just 16 parking spaces immediately in front of its building.

“The Community Centre has gone from strength to strength since it opened five years ago and has become a great asset in the community. This has been largely due to a vast amount of voluntary time given to create and run it and wonderful support from the community. This application undermines at a stroke all the effort the community has made to look after itself. It is not what we expect from Wealden which is meant to look after the interests of the communities within its boundaries.”

In July, after seeing outline drawings for the development, Crowborough Community Association, Crowborough & District Chamber of Commerce and Cllr Peter Ellefsen, Crowborough’s Mayor and the Town’s Council representative on the Community Centre’s board of directors, wrote to Abbey Developments demanding changes to the plan.

The letter pointed out that building homes so close to a place of entertainment, which hosts events for up to 500 people, would be inappropriate and that the loss of all public car parking in the area is against the policies of Crowborough Town Council and Wealden District Council’s own new Local Plan Draft Submission. This states: “Additional public car parking provision, household waste management and library facilities may be required to support growth in the Crowborough area in the future.”

In February 2015, a government planning inspector, Mike Fox, stated: “Regarding site CRA (Pine Grove), I am not persuaded that there is an overriding case for such a large proportion of the site to be developed for housing on this important town centre site. I consider that at least part of the site should be reserved for both office floor space and/or community facilities as well as for parking.” He recommended a maximum housing allocation of 50 units.

Abbey and its advisors, it seems, have totally ignored the objections, ideas and recommendations of the community within which it is seeking to build these homes as well as a previous adjudication on the land by a senior government planning inspector.

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Crowborough Community Association

The Crowborough Community Association has been active in Crowborough since 1975, when it opened the original CCA Hall in Park Road, built in 1925 as a Guide hut. It was ‘home’ to many of the town’s local organisations until momentum for a new community centre swelled following a public consultation by Wealden District Council on future retail development in the town. With funding from Crowborough Town Council and the National Lottery and on land donated by Wealden District Council, the new Crowborough Community Centre, costing £3.2 million, opened in 2012. It is now very much at the heart of the community with an average of 260 bookings each month for a large number of clubs, associations and individuals. The Centre is now financially self-supporting having exceeded bookings and income targets.