

# Press Release



17<sup>th</sup> January 2018

## **Waitrose joins the battle to save Crowborough car park**

### **Letter reminds Wealden of binding agreement on Mead House**

Waitrose has thrown its weight behind the campaign to stop 68 homes being built on a Crowborough town centre car park and adjacent land, by reminding Wealden District Council of its contractual obligations to the supermarket chain.

Wealden is hoping to sell Mead House car park and the boarded-up Beaconwood council offices site to Abbey Developments who have applied for planning permission for houses and flats at the expense of nearly 100 public car parking spaces. It would see homes built just 5 metres from Crowborough Community Centre, a licensed place of entertainment for up to 500 people, and leave it with just 16 car parking spaces.

Crowborough Community Association believes that the planning application is fundamentally flawed on legal and technical issues. Now Waitrose has pointed out that Abbey cannot cover the land with homes because of an agreement between Waitrose and Wealden “by which the current layout of long and short stay parking must be maintained.”

In a formal letter of objection to Wealden District Council, Mark Dawkins, Asset Manager, Waitrose/John Lewis Partnership, says: “The existing long term car park on the application site was developed at the time of the major extension of the Waitrose supermarket and remodelling of the Croft Road car park. The long term parking provision was required by both the Planning and Highway Authority in order to satisfy a requirement for long term parking in the centre of Crowborough. It was provided as a temporary car park until such time as Wealden District Council were able to provide an alternative solution for which a substantial sum was deposited with the Council to fund that provision.

“Since that development, there is no evidence that the need for long term parking has reduced to warrant removal without replacement as agreed by the Council with the owners and developers of the Waitrose supermarket.

“The Transport Statement with the application refers to the existing car park on the site as an overflow for the nearby Community Centre. This is factually wrong. It was provided as a long-term car park until such time as alternative provision was made. The existing car park and future replacement was entirely funded by the Waitrose development.”

Mr Dawkins added that the development would remove parking from the commercial centre of Crowborough “essential for the vitality and viability of the businesses operating there.”

The Waitrose objection comes on top of the discovery that Wealden District Council appears to have grossly exaggerated the number of staff associated with the Beaconwood buildings that are being used to claim the necessary Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) credits needed for planning permission to be granted under rules for protecting the Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area.

“Wealden advised Abbey that AADT credits could be based on an assumption of 190 staff employed at Beaconwood pre-1989, which cannot be correct,” said David Larkin, a community centre trustee and director. “Even using their own figures on Beaconwood’s floor space, the maximum employee figure could only be 67. In reality, during the last five years that the building was in use, the highest number of people employed there was only 27.

“If this is not simply breathtaking incompetence, then I wouldn’t like to speculate on how or why the erroneous figure of 190 was given to Abbey who must now be wondering whether drawing up plans and submitting them to Wealden has been a waste of time and effort.”

***For more information:***

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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.***