

JAN AHERN

	LAND CENTRED COORDINATES 489803 131978 MIDHURST ROAD HASLEMERE
Reference:	WA/2022/01887

Redcourt Planning Appeal
Public Session
Jan Ahern
Resident of Vine Cottage, Bell Vale Lane, Haslemere GU27 3DJ

Speaker Notes

Good morning,

My name is Jan Ahern and I have been a resident of Bell Vale Lane for 18 years.

Today I would like to talk to you about the landscape character of Bell Vale Lane.

For some context, Bell Vale Lane sits at the southern border of the proposed development. A stream runs down the length of the lane and this is broadly the Surrey/ Sussex border, meaning that the lane sits within and is the gateway to the South Downs National Park. The land that borders Bell Vale Lane on the Surrey side has been designated AONB land or a National Landscape as it is now called.

The proposed development sites within this land a Gate Lodge, a car park and potentially depending on the to be confirmed siting a Scout Hut and a Forest School. In addition the developer proposes the creation of ponds, wetland and new gravelled footpaths.

Bell Vale Lane is a beautiful, tranquil, characterful rural lane. It is a very windy, very narrow single track lane bordered by a stream, trees and hedgerows with a number of blind bends. Passing places are few and it's residents are adroit reversers! Of the 30 or so houses on Bell Vale Lane, 4 are listed with Historic England. It is bordered by National Trust land that was gifted by local residents in the 1990's, who fundraised to buy it for the nation to provide a gateway to Black Down, the highest point in West Sussex and inspiration to the poet Tennyson. At the end of the lane is an area of wetland habitat currently being enhanced further by the introduction of a pair of beavers by the National Trust.

The soundscape of Bell Vale Lane is the gentle trickling of the stream, the wind in the trees and bird song. The lane has high scenic amenity, as I stated earlier, it is a beautiful, characterful and tranquil place. It has an abundance of public footpaths, including the Sussex Border Path, bridle ways and Green Lanes. These existing amenities on Bell Vale Lane are well used by the residents of Bell Vale Lane, the wider Haslemere community, people from wider afield visiting the beautiful area for day trips or holidays. We get dog walkers, long distance walkers, families, large rambling groups, Duke of Edinburgh participants. We get mountain bikers, horse riders. So contrary to how this planning application reads, the connection to the National Park is already there, the infrastructure already exists on Bell Vale Lane and is well used. Therefore the community benefit of 'providing' this gateway as per the proposal is zero. The wheel in this case has already been invented and has run in nicely.

Bell Vale Lane is rich in flora and fauna. Spotted orchids and other wild flowers can be seen growing along the edge of the lane. Dormice inhabit the area and in our garden alone, on a daily basis, amongst others, we see we see Marsh Tits, Bull Finches, Dunnocks, Song Thrushes and Lesser Spotted Wood Peckers, all on the government's red list of birds of conservation concern. The occasional Kingfisher can also be glimpsed flying on the lane. The nature on Bell vale Lane does not need man made enhancements - the developers proposed 'improvements' of gravelled paths, artificially created wetlands etc may enhance a city park, but not a pre-existing naturally wild area that is already rich in such habitats. It is not needed and one could argue that it would destroy more habitats than it creates, leading to an actual decrease in biodiversity on the lane.

In short nature has already built what it needs on Bell Vale Lane. The developer's proposed improvements are no such thing from a diversity perspective. Opportunities for learning by observing different habitats and exploring and getting out in nature already exist and are enjoyed by the community. A specific Forest School classroom or scout hut is not needed to experience nature on Bell Vale Lane, a pair of wellies and enthusiasm is all that is needed.

The creation of a car park on a single track road, that cannot accommodate an increase in traffic numbers and destroying AONB land in the process also does not benefit the community in anyway.

The developers proposed manmade creation of ponds on land that borders Bell Vale Lane by bringing water down from ditches on the top of the land that overflow into the stream on Bell Vale Lane is ill thought through. The stream, that already breaks its banks, flooding Bell Vale Lane numerous times a year. This will make an already problematic situation worse.

Landscape are made up of everything you see, hear and experience. The landscape of Bell Vale Lane is special, it is a place that makes you feel better. It's visual enjoyment improves mental health, it's network of paths and bridle ways encourages active lifestyles already, nature is not only recovering but is thriving in Bell Vale Lane. The flora of Bell Vale Lane contribute to managing climate change.

In conclusion, the developer's proposals for Bell Vale Lane will destroy rather than enhance, regardless of the claims and have zero community benefit.

Many thanks for taking the time to listen to me today.

