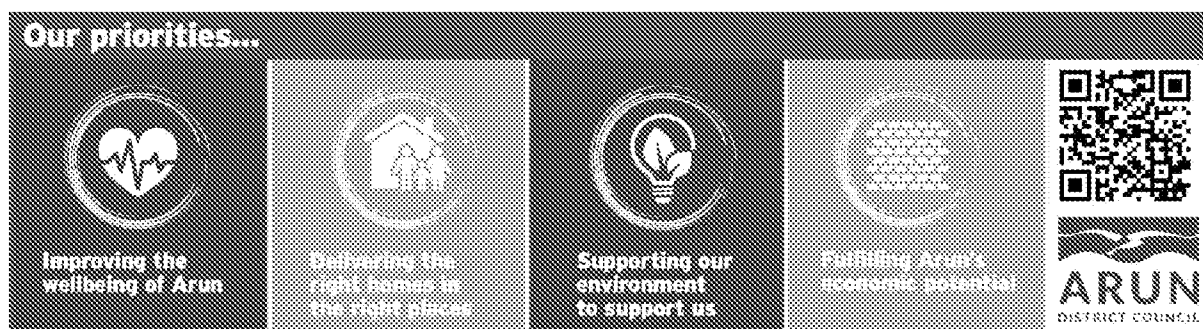


Arun District Council, Civic Centre, Maltravers Rd
Littlehampton, West Sussex, BN17 5LF
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From: Clare Sparshott [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, March 30, 2024 11:59 PM
To: Planning <Planning@arun.gov.uk>
Subject: OBJECTION TO Planning Application AL/11/24/OUT

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organisation. You should take extra care when clicking links or opening attachments - if you are unsure the content is safe contact the IT Helpdesk before clicking or opening.

Mrs C Mortlock

Holly Cottage

27A Belle Meade Close

Woodgate

PO20 3YD

Planning department
Arun District Council
Civic Centre
Maltravers Road
Littlehampton
West Sussex
BN17 5LF

30th March 2024

OBJECTION TO PLANNING APPLICATION REFERENCE AL/11/24/OUT

Dear Sirs,

I write to formally object to the above-mentioned planning application for the housing development of 400 houses on land East of Westergate.

The current pressures from failing infrastructure in Westergate and the surrounding villages is already having a detrimental impact on local communities and businesses in our area.

The main road that runs through Westergate street is already congested, with traffic at a standstill for long periods of time due to the level crossing at Woodgate. With the expansion of Southern rail services coming into effect in June 2024, this situation is about to get a lot worse.

The design, layout and size of Pine Close makes it unsuitable as an arterial route from the new housing estate onto Westergate Street. The installation of traffic lights will further incumber movement of traffic in both directions causing gridlock in the local vicinity, particularly the villages of Eastergate, Fontwell and Barnham.

Local sewer networks are under duress, with the collapse of sewage pipes in and around Barnham causing financial loss to local companies. The network system in Westergate is similar in age so it would not be unexpected if Westergate requires the same level of repair in the immediate future.

Lidsey sewage treatment works is failing to cope with the current levels of foul water and sewage from existing housing estates in Westergate and the surrounding villages. This is abundantly clear in the meadows next to the chalk stream; thousands of litres of foul water and excrement are pouring continuously into the stream contaminating the crystal-clear water that comes from the chalk aquifer. The hay meadow surrounding the chalk stream is now littered with sanitary towels, putrid water and all manner of detritus that has been flushed down the sewer network. Who on earth puts these items down the toilet? A combination of fetid water and faeces are also polluting the rife watercourse as it is connected to the chalk stream. This is having a devastating impact on the health of the wildlife that inhabit both watercourses. A major expansion of the Lidsey treatment works is long overdue.

If the planning application is granted by the planning committee, Grampian conditions should apply in this instance, that Southern Water treatment plant undergoes a major upgrade before the development is started. The sooner the better, given the high volumes of wastewater contaminating the stream, rife and land that runs along the stream.

Flooding in the Arun district has been at record levels, Shripney, Westergate, Nyton and now Fontwell Avenue are being engulfed by huge volumes of water. Further afield, Bersted Brooks and land at Flansham, (A259) has been seriously impacted by floodwater throughout the winter. Felpham golf course has been under water for over 5 months, as has the land at Flansham which is clearly visible from the A259. A new housing development along the chalk stream will further exacerbate the problem of flooding not only for our village, but also other local communities. The flood plains that run along the chalk stream provide essential protection for the villages of Eastergate and Westergate and for communities further downstream like Lidsey and Shripney. Water that filters down from the South down hills is carried by our chalk stream through to the rife eventually arriving at the sea at Felpham. The chalk stream flood plains are vital for managing the over spill of water that filters down from the hills via the chalk aquifer. The flood plains are also increasingly being inundated by foul water and sewerage from the drainage network, water is being forced up under pressure out of the many manholes that line the stream. Lidsey treatment plant and the drainage system are not coping with current levels of sewerage.

This winter has seen persistent closures of the A29 due to the flooding at Shripney, this has been for prolonged periods during the winter of 2023/2024. As a result, Hook Lane in Westergate has become a rat run for vehicles trying to get to Bognor and Felpham, the entrance to this lane has also experienced significant flooding making it difficult for residents to enter and exit the lane. Hook Lane is extremely narrow in places and is not suitable for the volume of traffic being forced to use it with the closure of the A29. The roads around Westergate are fast becoming inaccessible, with more routes suffering flooding events. An action plan needs to be implemented as soon as possible to mitigate the devastating effects that are now being felt by over development in the village and Southern Water failure to expand the treatment plant at Lidsey.

Discussions regarding the A29 realignment are still under review, with no final decision being reached on its route. It would be prudent to wait for a determination given the extensive floodings at Lidsey, Shripney and Felpham. This road may need further assessment, given the over development of the village areas and the impact that climate change is having on the frequency and intensity of rainfall in the Arun District.

Residents are already frustrated with the unavailability of appointments and waiting times at our local GP surgery, the increase in population associated with the new development will only further burden a system that is presently under pressure.

The land East of Westergate is unique, stunningly beautiful, and vital for the survival of many generalists, vulnerable and endangered species that live here. The natural features that exist on this site along with the diverse range of habitats available, contribute to perfect conditions for wildlife and plants. This area boasts a chalk stream fed by the chalk aquifer for aquatic life, hay meadows for grasshoppers and crickets, hedgerows that provide protection for hedgehogs and small mammals, trees that provide food, shelter, and nesting sites for birdlife.

The combination and proximity of such diverse habitats has created the perfect environment for bats. Consequently, bats frequent my garden in the summer months foraging for food. They arrive at dusk just as the light is fading, darting along the treelines of my garden. The existence of the railway tunnel that runs parallel to my garden provides opportunity for these bats to roost as does the woodpecker holes and crevices that are clearly visible on the Beech and Oak trees growing on this land.

The hay meadows and chalk stream are currently used extensively for recreational activities, walking, running, and exercising of dogs via the many public footpaths. Young families bring small babies and children to the fields and stream as the area is pleasant. Women that live in our community walk and run here as do I as the open spaces provide a safe environment to exercise.

Nature is essential for people's wellbeing and mental health. Communities need green spaces as nature generates many positive emotions, a feeling of calmness, joy, and creativity. Green spaces are also fantastic for reducing stress levels and anxiety. I walk here every day, it makes me happy, I enjoy listening to the

songbirds and watching the wildlife. I meet a lot of other residents when out walking, not just from my village, but from Fontwell, Eastergate and Barnham. There is a wonderful community vibe here, I talk to a lot of residents especially the older generation and dog walkers when I am out.

The land East of Westergate should be protected given its significant global importance and its special features, such as the chalk stream and Woodgate railway tunnel roosting site. I urge the planning committee at Arun District Council to consider application for SSSI for this unique part of Westergate as this area is the best representation of our natural heritage in England, the rare chalk stream, and to protect the endangered species that live here, namely, Water vole, Adders, and Bats.

I urge the planning committee to refuse this planning application as the applicant fails to satisfy the requirements outlined in the Aldingbourne Neighbourhood Plan, adopted by Arun District Council in 2016, revised in 2020, and adopted by Arun District Council on 14 July 2021. Specifically, policies, EH2, EH4, EH5, EH6, EH12 and GA2 as set out below.

Neighbourhood Plan Policy EH2 Green Infrastructure and Ecosystem Services

The proposed development poses a cataclysmic threat to the function and integrity of the wildlife corridor on the land East of Westergate, identified on Maps A1 and A2 as shown on the Aldingbourne Neighbourhood plan. The proximity of the development to the chalk stream and flood plains poses a significant threat to the fragile ecosystems and the species that inhabit them. The grassland, wetlands, and aquatic ecosystems within the wildlife corridor contributes to the movement of species, provides sources of food, water, shelter, protection, and an opportunity for wildlife to breed. These vital habitats serve as a haven for threatened and endangered species, such as Water voles, bats, Adders, Lesser Spotted / Green Woodpeckers and Swifts.

Policy EH2 stipulates that new developments within or adjacent to biodiversity corridors must not cause significant harm to their integrity or function. It requires developers to demonstrate how their proposals will impact these corridors and provide adequate mitigation measures to prevent harm to the designated areas. The policy emphasises the importance of enhancing the overall function and integrity of the biodiversity corridor to achieve a 'net gain' in biodiversity.

The proposed development fails to comply with the objectives set out in the Aldingbourne Neighbourhood Plan, adopted by Arun District Council on 14 July 2021. The scale of the removal of the vast number of trees on this land by the developer, clearly shows disregard for the importance of some of the endangered species of bats and birds that use the trees for roosting, nesting, and sourcing food. Bats use the Woodpecker hollows to roost, swifts and swallows feed on the insects attracted to the trees, moth caterpillars feed on the Oak Tree leaves. Bats in turn eat the adult moths. The Beech and Oak trees that grow on the site are of huge ecological importance due to the presence of bat roosts that are visible on the tree trunks.

Again, the widespread destruction of the hedgerows and undergrowth is a clear indicator that the developer disregards the importance the hedgerows and dense vegetation contributes to the wildlife. The hedges are essential habits for key species like pollinators, they also provide protection to small mammals and hedgehogs. With the rapid decline of a generalist species like the hedgehog, is this not the canary in the coalmine moment? The dense vegetation and brambles that are prevalent throughout the site allows hedgehogs, small rodents, and mammals to move safely around the boundaries of our village. Brambles are fantastic for supporting biodiversity and wildlife. Hedgerows are a vital habitat for pollinators such as Honeybees and Bumble bees. These habitats are a vital component of the bio-diversity corridor. The habitats, flora and fauna are intrinsically linked, as each ecosystem is laid waste by the developer, a domino effect will set off a catastrophic chain of events resulting in the collapse of the Entire Ecosystem in the Biodiversity corridor.

The replacement of soils and grasses by the developer with impervious surfaces over such a vast area will have a devastating impact on the grasshopper and cricket populations, this will reduce the availability of food to other animal and bird groups. The change of use of the hay meadows cannot be understated, the loss of grasses, wildflowers, and native plants, will affect the micro-organisms, insects, beetles, butterflies,

caterpillars, and moths. The removal of tall grasses will expose small mammals to predators such as foxes and owls.

The introduction of domestic cat by new homeowners from the new development will be devastating for amphibians, small mammals, and birds that live here. Cats are top predators; they have a significant impact on animal group populations. Removal of the brambles, trees and native vegetation on the biodiversity corridor will exacerbate the mortality rate as protection will be non-existent for these species due to loss of undergrowth.

I rarely see cats on this site due to the number of residents that walk their dogs here, this helps to deter cats from hunting the wildlife that lives in the habitat corridor.

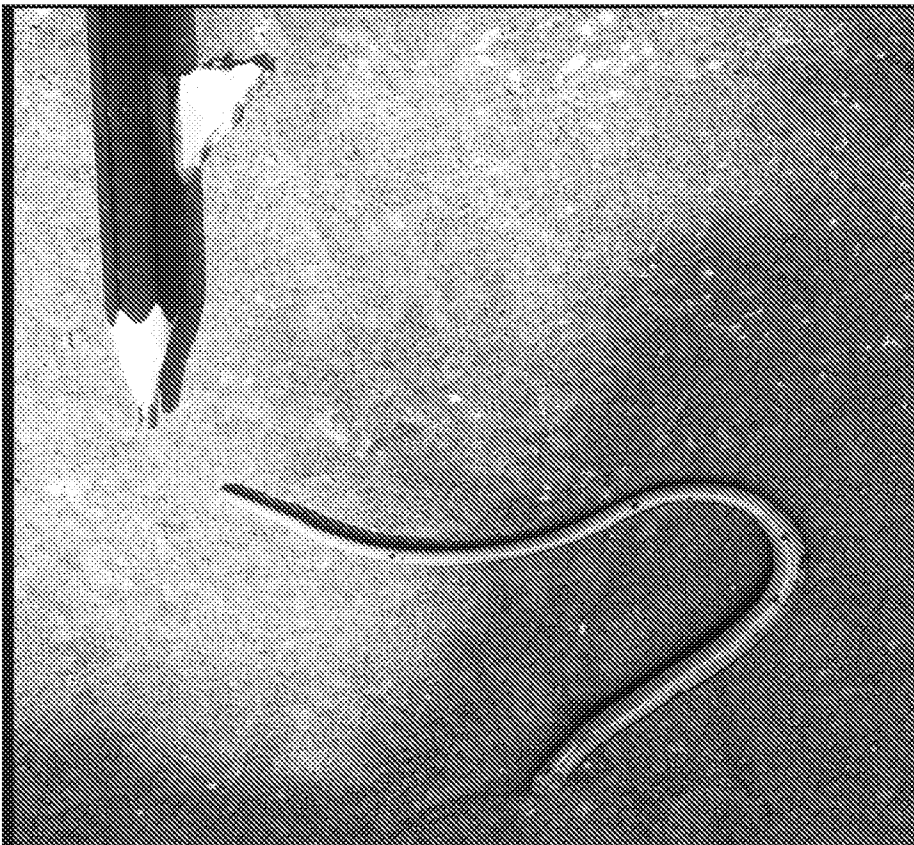
Wild species cannot exist in isolation from their habitat. The scale and loss of so many distinct habitats and the creatures that are reliant on them, are an example of the developers disregard for the Ecosystem and the species that live in the wildlife corridor.

Activities associated with the construction of homes and the installation of a bridge over the chalk stream will impact all habitats, with areas becoming heavily polluted from plant and machinery and works vans. Pollution from vehicles building and using the bridge will have a detrimental impact on the water quality of the chalk stream and the aquatic wildlife that inhabits it. Pollution from vehicles will affect the quality of water in the chalk stream which will impact the rife and migratory fish that swim between fresh and saltwater areas. The Water Voles will be particularly vulnerable due to loss of habitat, food resources and human activity. With the stream habitat laid waste, the survival of the Water Voles is highly unlikely. The construction of homes and the associated thoroughfares will cause significant harm to the aquatic Ecosystem and interconnected watercourses. The chalk stream transports vital minerals and nutrients via the rife out to the sea at Felpham, near Bognor. This natural process will be impeded by pollution from the development, negatively impacting the aquatic and marine life in the rife and sea.

Construction plant activity will prohibit animal groups from moving freely around the biodiversity corridor meaning species will become isolated. This will prevent animals from finding a suitable mate, meaning less creatures can pass on their own genetic code. The isolation of groups could result in individuals mating within their own family group which could have far reaching consequences for the viability of the local species.

The Ecology report provided by the developer states that no Adders are present on the site, this is untrue. (Page 48, Adder 0). Last summer, I used a ditch to pass from one field into another to discover a young juvenile Adder emerging from the undergrowth. The presence of young is a clear indicator of a thriving population. Reptiles are present in the biodiversity corridor.

Page 47 of Ecology report: author states 'low' population of Slow Worms, this is untrue, the biodiversity corridor and housing estates in Westergate are a hot bed for Slow Worms. My husband and I regularly see them, see photograph of two adults mating in my garden and the results of their liaison, a baby Slow Worm. My husband has several videos on his mobile, of the adults mating in our garden and their subsequent offspring.



Furthermore, page 56 of the Ecology report that has been provided by the developer contains multiple inaccuracies, with the author stating Swift (*Apus apus*) as BoCC Amber conservation status. Again, incorrect, Swift were added to the Red list in 2021 as per Birds of Conservation Concern List. The author stated that Swift were 'commuting over the site', this is inaccurate, a viable population of Swift live and build nests in the Ex-Authority housing that exists in Westergate Street and St Richards Road. The biodiversity corridor is vital for

their survival, this is where they come to find resources such as water and food. They are not flying over the site, it is their home, they hunt their food here.

House Martin (*Delichon urbicum*), page 56 of the Ecology report provided by the developer, the author states House Martin (*Delichon urbicum*) as BoCC Amber, again, incorrect, House Martins were given Red status in 2021 as per Birds of Conservation Concern List. A viable population is thriving here, they collect mud from the stream to build their nests on the Ex-Authority housing in St Richard Road and Westergate Street.

Some of the surveys per the Ecology report were undertaken in 2023, (page 55 and page 56), a full two years after Swift and House Martin were added to the Red list. I question the credentials of the author that compiled the Ecology survey; an expert should know these facts.

The author of the Ecology report fails to identify the existence of the Railway tunnel on the line from Barnham to Chichester as a potential roosting site for bats, this significant fact has been omitted from the Ecology report. Given that bats inhabit the Singleton and Cocking railway tunnels, there is a strong possibility that the tunnel is used as a roost now or could be in the future.

Given the vast number of omissions and inaccuracies reported in the Ecology report provided by the developer expert, I question its validity. The age of the surveys commissioned in the Ecology report are outdated, surveys have also been completed at unsuitable times of the year given that most of the species and animal groups were in hibernation.

Policy SD10 of the South Downs local plan highlights the importance of protecting the habitats within the biodiversity corridor, as it is essential for the feeding, roosting and movement of bats. These objectives are adopted by The Aldingbourne Neighbour Plan, policy EH2.3.

A significant part of the land on the biodiversity corridor, (proposed development site), falls within the Singleton and Cocking 12km buffer zone known as Singleton and Cocking Tunnels Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The developer will cause significant harm to the integrity and function of the biodiversity corridor by indiscriminately felling so many trees and hedgerows. With so many habitats laid waste, the bats food will be non-existent, contamination and pollution from construction site traffic will have a devastating impact upon the chalk stream, contaminating the drinking water drunk by the bats. Woodpecker hollows and crevices used by the bats for roosting are laid waste, all inhabited roosts or available empty roosts are destroyed by the felling of most of the mature trees on site. The movement of bats is inhibited by the change in the natural landscape due to the widespread clearing of these ancient trees and hedgerows, bats navigate fly-ways along hedges to prey on food, very rarely do they fly across open land. Construction activities will disturb roosting bats, forcing them to abandon their roosts in the biodiversity corridor at Westergate. See photographs below of bat roosts taken by my phone on 27th and 28th March 2024, all three have a roost that is clearly visible.







The loss of the wildlife corridor at Westergate, will inhibit species ability to travel from the South Downs, through our habitat corridor onto areas further inland such as Worms Wood at Felpham or Bersted Brooks Nature Reserve located at Rowans Way in North Bersted. It is crucial we maintain these links, to ensure the long-term viability of vulnerable and endangered species. Given the extreme flooding in places such as Bersted Brooks, it is highly likely land animals have been using our wildlife corridor to find drier grounds inland back up to the South Downs.

Biodiversity has been declining at an alarming rate in recent years, with England being the worst country in Europe for loss of habitat and species. We need to conserve the habitats upon which threatened and endangered species depend.

The proposed development poses a cataclysmic threat to the functionality of the biodiversity corridor with catastrophic and permanent consequences for the wildlife that live here, therefore I urge the planning committee at Arun District council to reject the planning application.

Neighbourhood Plan Policy EH4 – Protection of water courses

I object to planning application AL/11/24/OUT as this development will cause significant harm to the chalk stream and rife, with a detrimental effect on the watercourses and the aquatic plants and animals that inhabit both Ecosystems.

Policy EH4 of the Aldingbourne Neighbourhood Plan, as adopted by Arun District Council on 14 July 2021, emphasises the importance of supporting and promoting river catchment management, wildlife conservation, and flood risk reduction. It recognises the significance of the Worthing, Chichester, and East Hampshire chalk aquifers, which give rise to the chalk streams flowing through the parish, forming part of the Arun and Western Streams River catchment area.

The chalk stream that flows through our parish on the proposed development site is hugely important, this rare asset, is vital for the survival of the flora and fauna that inhabits the wildlife corridor. The stream is fed by the Chichester chalk aquifer, the crystal-clear water is a perfect habitat for aquatic life. The chalk stream forms part of the Arun and Western Streams River catchment area which originates in the South Downs National Park. It then flows via the Rife River system into the sea at Felpham, near Bognor Regis.

Chalk streams are often referred to as the England's equivalent of the Rain Forests or Great Barrier Reef so our streams importance is noteworthy. 85% of chalk streams are found in the South and East of England so we have a duty as their custodian to protect them. Central government is currently driving the restoration and preservation of these habitats. Water Minister, Rebecca Pow said: "Chalk streams are both incredibly rare and hugely important part of our environment. Today's amendment adds to actions already taken by government to protect them, including ensuring funding is invested in projects to help restore them – as set out in our Plan for Water. They are iconic habitats, home to specific wildlife, and the UK is home to approximately 95% of the world's chalk streams – so it is beholden upon us to look after them and we are demonstrating that we have committed to doing just that." Source: <https://deframedia.blog.gov.uk/2023/09/21/changes-announced-to-better-protect-englands-chalk-streams/>

The chalk stream on the land East of Westergate is desperately in need of restoration as supported by Rebecca Pow, Water Minister for Central Government as stated above. Currently, excrement and thousands of litres of foul putrid water are spilling into the chalk stream, polluting both it and the Rife that it runs into. The meadow surrounding the chalk stream is littered with sanitary towels, excrement, and all manner of detritus flushed down homeowners' lavatories. This excrement is being forced up under pressure through the many manholes that line the stream.

The impact to the wildlife from the pollution entering the stream is immense, animals are drinking contaminated and rancid water, which is making them sick. Migratory wild fish that travel between fresh water and saltwater environments, moving from and to the sea, via the Rife and chalk stream system are being adversely affected. Currently there are lots of Juvenile fish darting about our chalk stream, the contaminated water not only impacts our local environment, but it is also causing detrimental harm to the fish and aquatic life in the rife and sea systems.

Southern Water treatment plant at Lidsey is not coping with the current level of sewage being produced by the existing housing estates in the village and surrounding areas. A major upgrade of the sewage treatment works is required, this needs to be completed by Southern Water as a matter of urgency. The current level of pollution and contamination of both the chalk stream and Rife is upsetting.

The Sussex Wildlife trust has identified the chalk stream as a site in need of restoration, which would provide greater biodiversity for Westergate and The Aldingbourne area. An action plan needs to be implemented to resolve the issue of persistent pollution by Southern Water with untreated waste that is currently contaminating the chalk stream and rife network.

The ongoing sewerage overflows next to the chalk stream resulting from capacity issues at Southern Water treatment plant is having devastating consequences for the wildlife living in the biodiversity corridor.

Considering the concerns highlighted above, I urge the planning committee to reject application AL/11/24/OUT.

With the stream already burdened from such high levels of contamination, further pollution associated with construction site activities would be an environmental disaster for the wildlife and plants that inhabit this site.

The addition of four hundred houses on this site, will further overrun the sewage network, increasing the levels of contamination and sewage prevalent in the meadow, chalk stream and rife system. Pollution from construction site activities will further contaminate the quality of water in the Chalk stream and Rife. This contravenes policy EH4 stipulated in the Aldingbourne Plan as the development significantly harms both waterways and the aquatic life that inhabits both water courses.

The scale of the alterations by the developer to the site has far reaching consequences to the land ability to absorb water, levelling of the land, infilling of the ditches, widespread clearing of trees that drink vast amounts of water, replacement of soils to impervious surfaces will all contribute to an increase of flooding on this site. The scale and number of problems that affect the site already means the water table is over capacity, the continuous overflow from the sewage network further exacerbates the flooding problems, the installation of drainage ponds will do little to alleviate the flooding in this area given the scale of current challenges.

The chalk stream is of huge global significance, the example in Westergate is a rare phenomenon, with some very rare animals inhabiting the Ecosystem. The impact of construction site pollution, loss of habitat by the creation of a bridge over the chalk stream and diminishing food resources will contribute to the demise of many aquatic species, most notably, the rare Water Voles that live along the banks of the stream. I urge the planning committee to reject this application considering the concerns raised above.

EH5 – Surface water management

The proposed development site already suffers from significant flooding, as does other locations in the vicinity, specifically Lidsey and Shripney that are now experiencing regular flooding events.

Vast swathes of the biodiversity corridor have been under water this winter due to prolonged periods of rain, with significant amounts of rainfall draining down from the South Down hills into the chalk stream. The inundation of water into the meadows from higher ground into the chalk stream has been vital this winter.

The proposed development site naturally slopes down from higher land into low lying plains. The site slopes on both sides of the chalk stream which helps create a downward force channelling the water into the stream. Without this natural feature, the risk of flooding increases dramatically. The addition of four hundred houses will significantly alter the landscape on this site, the developer will even out the surface of the land to construct new dwellings and roads which will alter the land levels significantly. I am deeply concerned that these changes will lead to flooding in the villages of Eastergate, Westergate and Woodgate.

Policy EH5 stipulates new development, within areas at risk from flooding, will not be permitted unless it is supported by a site-specific Flood Risk Assessment which provides clear evidence to demonstrate that the proposal: a). Would not give rise to additional risk of flooding, either to the development site or to other land, arising from the carrying out or use of the development; b). Would make appropriate provision for accommodating the surface water and foul water arising from the development.

The scale of the alterations by the developer to the site are profound, with water unable to drain away it will start to accumulate on the site, spreading out to local communities as the water levels rise. The combination of levelling the land, infilling ditches, removal of trees and hedgerows and the replacement of soils with impervious surfaces will have wide-ranging consequences, not only for the new homeowners on site, but also the neighbouring housing estates in Westergate and the wider region.

The removal of the hedges and ditches that are prevalent throughout the site is reckless, these natural features are currently storing enormous amounts of water. Trees and plants drink significant amounts of water, they help control water levels.

The natural landscape combined with the hedgerows and ditches that are prevalent throughout the biodiversity corridor are currently highly effective at managing the floodwaters. Water drains down from higher fields into the ditches that then permeates into the low-lying meadows, eventually entering the stream, then on to the sea via the Rife network. The hedgerows and the ditches that line the biodiversity corridor have been a vital asset for managing floodwater over the winter.

The volume of water that is currently sitting in the water table on this site is immense, the increase and intensity of the downpours along with the over development in the village is impacting the areas' ability to absorb any more water. Drainage ponds are insufficient given the scale and number of problems that affects the site.

The installation of a bridge will reduce or impede the flow of the chalk stream affecting other areas. The ongoing sewerage overflows next to the chalk stream resulting from capacity issues at Southern Water's treatment plant is further blighting the situation. Southern Water needs to complete a major upgrade to Lidsey's treatment plant to resolve capacity issues, this will ensure the wastewater is clean when discharged out to sea.

Furthermore, EH5.1 states: Residents have indicated strongly that they do not want to see further development until work is completed on the Aldingbourne Rife Integrated Flood Risk Management Plan & Works (ARIFRM) Strategy as surface water run off contributes to flooding in Aldingbourne and to neighbouring parishes.

The change in use of the land from farming to housing will have significant consequences for local communities. Without the protection of the natural drainage system in place, flooding is inevitable, rising levels of water will swell, devastating not only for the new development but the neighbouring urban area. The removal of the flood plains by the chalk stream will also adversely affect communities further inland, such as Lidsey and Shripney that are already suffering significant flooding events that have resulted with the A29 closure.

EH5.4 Where applicable, surface water management measures will be required for development proposals to ensure that the risk of flooding both on-site and downstream is not increased. No development should be commenced until full details of the proposed surface water drainage scheme have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

We need to retain the floodplains to ensure they continue to protect existing homes and businesses within the Aldingbourne district. The loss of the natural drainage system will have far reaching consequences, not only for Westergate and Eastergate, but also our neighbours at Shripney and Felpham.

Therefore, unless the developer can provide concrete evidence supported by a comprehensive flood risk assessment covering Eastergate and Westergate and the wider district incorporating Lidsey and Shripney, the committee should not approve the planning application of the development.

Considering the concerns highlighted above, I urge the planning committee to reject the application.

EH6 – Protection of Trees and hedgerows

The environmental impact of removing so many trees and hedgerows is immense, as well as being stunningly beautiful, the flora that grows on and around the biodiversity corridor is vital for the health and survival of the animals, birds, bats, reptiles, insects, and fungi that live on the Land East of Westergate.

These trees matter, they give us Oxygen, store carbon, stabilise the soil and provide food and shelter to our local wildlife. These trees help protect our village against flooding and water pollution. Trees such as Willow can consume up to 100 gallons of water a day, this helps capture water, the trees, hedgerows, and vegetation helps decrease groundwater levels naturally.

In the spring and summer, the trees growing on the biodiversity corridor provide roosting and nesting sites for our native songbirds, they help with global conservation as they provide food and shelter for migratory birds that arrive in Westergate, such as the swifts and swallows that return here each year.

Leaf litter that falls here in the autumn feeds bacteria, fungi, insects, plants, and animals.

The biodiversity corridor boasts many mature Oak trees, each Oak on this land can sustain over 280 species of insect. Moth caterpillars inhabit our oak trees to feed on the leaves, moths are a vital source of food for bats. The Oak trees on this land are of immeasurable ecological significance as they play a vital role in the survival of the bats that live here.

Green Woodpeckers have created a myriad of holes and crevices when drilling the trunks and branches of Oak trees on this site. Bechstein bats favourite place to roost is a Woodpecker hole. The significance and value of the Oaks trees that grow here cannot be understated, they play an important and vital role in bats' survival.

The hedgerows and undergrowth that grow and flourish in the biodiversity corridor also provides food, shelter and protection for small mammals and hedgehogs. The dense vegetation provides protection from domestic cats and foxes. These superhighways are great for nomadic hedgehogs, they help them to travel safely between areas on the biodiversity corridor.

A significant part of the hedgerow consists of bramble bushes, these provide protection for songbirds, small mammals, and hedgehogs. Brambles are fantastic for supporting biodiversity and wildlife. The flowers that form on bramble bushes are a valuable food source for butterflies and bees. In the height of summer our bushes are smothered in honeybee, bumble bees, butterflies, beetles, and other insects. It is a hive of activity, with an army of pollinators gathering pollen from the rows upon rows of blackberry bushes. In the autumn, many families visit the biodiversity corridor to pick blackberries. Hedgerows are a vital habitat for all types of animal groups.

Policy EH6 explicitly states that developments resulting in the loss of trees and hedgerows of ecological significance will be resisted unless the need for development in that location clearly outweighs the loss. Furthermore, development proposals must be designed to incorporate biodiversity within and around developments, aiming for net gain.

The removal of trees and hedgerows will have devastating consequences for the ecological balance of the environment with significant detrimental effect on wildlife. The oak trees that grow here are a vital component to the long-term viability of the bats, so are of huge ecological significance.

I have seen nothing on the plans that shows a 'net gain' for wildlife, in fact the opposite is true. The clearing of so many of the mature trees and hedgerows will have far reaching consequences for the wildlife that lives here. The change in use of the hay meadows will lead to the collapse of cricket and grasshopper populations, the pollution of the chalk stream will have a detrimental impact on the aquatic life that lives here. The impact of the development and the subsequent changes to the wildlife habitats contravenes policy EH6 aim for net gain. I urge the planning committee to reject this application as it contravenes EH6 objectives for 'net gain' for wildlife.

Eh6.2 of the Neighbourhood Plan highlights the importance of protecting habitats within biodiversity corridors, especially considering the proximity of the Plan area to the Singleton and Cocking Tunnels Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

I urge the planning committee to reject this application as it contravenes the aims as outlined in policy Eh6.2 of the Aldingbourne Neighbourhood Plan, adopted by Arun District Council on 14 July 2021. The contribution of the diverse range of habitats on the land East of Westergate to the Singleton and Cocking Tunnels Special Area of Conservation (SAC) cannot be underestimated. The loss of habitats in the biodiversity corridor caused by

the new housing development will have a detrimental impact on bats from the conservation area of Cocking and Singleton. They will no longer have access to the moth caterpillars that feed on the oak trees' leaves due to the removal of most of the trees on the development site. With the loss of floodplains and pollution of the chalk stream there will be less food available with the collapse of insect habitats. Visiting bats will not be attracted to the biodiversity corridor to mate due to the exodus of resident bats because of the collapse of habitat and loss of resources.

Policy GA2 Footpath and cycle network

The myriad of footpaths that cross the biodiversity corridor are used extensively by the local communities of Woodgate, Westergate, Eastergate and Fontwell. Residents from these villages use the footpaths for walking, jogging, and exercising their dogs. Young families bring their children here to play at the chalk stream. I use the footpaths extensively; in the summer I walk along footpath 297 to go from Woodgate to Eastergate to go and sit in the pub garden. I also walk to Barnham with friends to catch the train.

Footpath 297 is located at the entrance of Pine Close and is used extensively by school children from Ormiston secondary school, and Aldingbourne and Eastergate primary schools. The modification to this footpath is of huge concern given the number of children that use this route daily. The change in use of the road from a quiet cul-de-sac to a main thoroughfare is significant and will have major consequences for children navigating this area. The dramatic increase in activity at this new junction, along with the volume of cars exiting the housing development is also cause for concern.

The original entrance to footpath 297 has been moved by the developer of Pine Close. Council taxpayers in Westergate and Woodgate should have been consulted about relocation of the entrance as this change affects several local communities.

Policy GA2 of the Neighbourhood plan explicitly supports proposals that improve and extend the existing footpath and cycle path network, emphasising the importance of better access to local amenities, green spaces, housing, and the open countryside. Furthermore, the policy emphasises the resistance against loss of existing footpaths and cycle paths.

The development of 400 houses and their associated thoroughfares completely lays waste to the network of footpaths that criss-crosses the biodiversity corridor. The proposal to re-route path networks will restrict access between local communities. The loss of so many footpaths contravene the objectives set out in policy GA2, rather than improve and expand the network, the developer has laid waste to multiple footpaths over an extensive area. Therefore, I urge the planning committee to reject the planning application.

Clare Mortlock