

Imperial Wye 3 masterplan – how do we influence the outcome to get what we want?



I know that many people are disappointed and angry that the views they expressed to Imperial at the 'consultation' meetings and 'sounding boards' have been overlooked or ignored - given the sheer scale of development now proposed.

But lets face it this should be no surprise.

Wake up and smell the coffee everyone! This situation has been on the cards since 2006 when Imperial began to close the college down!

Evidently Imperial acquired Wye College back in 2000, purely as a long-term financial *not* educational investment.

Analysis of the Imperial proposals Pro's & Con's

There are some positive aspects to the proposals but the amount of development would increase the size of Wye by a third within 17 years or less and is I think we all agree, just too much.

With such a scale of development the centre of community activity will shift and potentially damage the fundamental nature of the village and its integration within the AONB.

The Free School fits well into the Edwardian and laboratory site. Use of the Kempe Centre for 3 years has been agreed between DfE and Imperial, but the PC is concerned about what happens after that. Where will the school go then? We also believe there should be space for playing fields next to the school.

The idea of community use for the Grade I buildings is a high and exciting ideal but only if funding mechanisms for its refurbishment and maintenance leaves no ill-effect on the village. Excessive enabling development for this is surely unacceptable.

Imperials masterplan does provide a concentric, well defined village boundary but it allows this boundary to move too far from the historic centre.

It is good that Imperial would develop within the existing infrastructure, no major new road upgrades are proposed. But at this scale of development the difficulties this will place on traffic movement and parking have not been worked through and any rational for the proposals have not been properly justified.

Nevertheless the Wye 3 site is an asset that WILL be realised

Imperial mean to realise their asset as any other landowner with a site identified for development in the local plan would want to do.

They are committed to this and will push their considerable resources behind it.

In 2006 the Wye Park proposal with thousands of houses stretching out to Brook was an outrageous travesty. However the current proposal for 300 houses, *whilst being too much* is significantly closer to being objectively reasonable. It equates to development of 17.6 homes per year on average from now until 2030.

ABC's Local Plan Core Strategy has an allocation of 865 houses for the Boroughs rural villages by 2021 and this *excludes* whatever allocation is given to Wye 3! The Core Strategy is being revised next year with the final outcome of Wye 3 incorporated into it.

With no other constraint the development of Wye 3 will come down to ABC's assessment of the Imperial masterplan and *their* update of *their* Local Plan.

So really if *we* do not decide the future of Wye - someone else will!

How do we the community most effectively influence the outcome?

Any counter-proposals to Imperial have to be reasonable, credible and viable to be taken seriously by all concerned.

We think there are approximately 17 hectares or 42 acres of developable Wye 3 land, at 30 units/hectare this could actually accommodate over 500 homes. So 300 homes is *actually* not as bad as it could have been!

Nevertheless it appears that Imperial are providing community facilities and village improvements at a *cost* of unreasonable numbers of extra housing. We need to agree the best way to have this re-set to an acceptable level.

But if we made a very low counterproposal figure of say 45 or 50 homes up to 2030 it will be unachievable. It will not accord with the ABC local plan, will be ignored by Imperial and dismissed by government planning inspectors.

But this sort of figure just for Wye 3 to 2021 (as suggested by the majority response to the NP questionnaire) might be possible, if we allow for further housing up to 2030.

This is all likely to come down to negotiation and if you want to buy something worth £100 and be sure of getting it for a good deal you should probably offer £75 not £15!

What about the Neighbourhood Plan (NP) and what is this?

Once in place the NP will set planning policy in Wye and the Parish until 2030.

Any future development will have to follow its Vision, Principles, Plans and Policies.

Since September last year the NP Questionnaire & Workshops have given us the Vision and Principles and are now beginning to crystalise plans and policies.

For Wye 3 the NP currently has 2 draft options. The first proposes somewhere between 58 homes and 74 homes by 2030 so up to 4.3 homes per year average. The second option somewhere between 113 homes and 145 homes by 2030 that would be up to 8.5 homes per year average up to 2030. The NP combines these proposals with new business and community facilities.

We think that in contrast to Imperial Masterplan, the NP seeks to define a sustainable level of growth up to 2030 and a development framework that will retain the village identity beyond that date.

With your agreement the final plans and their associated policies will constitute our NP.

Then to quote a recent central government document...

'Once a Neighbourhood Plan is put in place, local decisions should be made in line with it.'
(DCLG Myth Busting document about the NPPF, 2011)

The Wye 3 area covers over 1/3 of the entire village, its impact is huge. So we have more to gain from a NP than other places, and more to lose if we do not complete the job properly.

If we all agree to a viable and sustainable NP it will become statutory planning policy. That means what we say will have to happen!

But we really need to establish a consensus in the Parish.

If we stand together united we will be strong, if we're divided we are weak

Lets not give Imperial the chance to divide us and rule this situation.

The Governments policy of Localism and Neighbourhood Plans give communities the best chance they have *ever* had to influence the future development of their locality. Lets use this opportunity to best effect not throw it away!

So I urge you to please support the NP objectives and it will become local planning policy that Imperial and other developers will have to follow.

Thanks for coming this evening and thanks for listening.

Councillor Andy MacFee ARB RIBA

For Wye Parish Council & Neighbourhood Plan Working Group
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