

Statement by Campaign to Protect Rural England, Worcestershire Branch

The black text is what was submitted in advance of the inquiry hearing. The red text is additions added before the statement was read on 28 February 2023.

I am Dr Peter King, chairman of CPRE Worcestershire and also of Hagley Parish Council. My doctorate is in economic history, specifically that of the iron industry. Many years ago, I made a detailed study of the history of Wolverley manor, which includes Cookley, involving what I would now call a tenement reconstruction.

I would say that I support the position taken by the County Council on Green Belt. This statement has two appendices, which I do not propose to read, as I do not think they add much to the case I am making (unless you want me to, Sir). I will leave them merely to become part of an Inquiry Document.

The appeal site is good quality agricultural land, which has been continuously cultivated since at least medieval times. It was part of the open fields of the township of Wolverley, a settlement that (perhaps surprisingly) is a Deserted Medieval Village (see appendix 1). The former mansion of Lea Castle was built in the 18th century by Edward Knight, the ironmaster who operated Cookley Forge (now Titan Steel Wheels) and other ironworks in the area and acquired parts of its park in 1748. His grandson bought the remainder of the associated park in 1806.¹ A later member of the Knight family sold Lea Castle and its park in 1823 to John Brown (from Manchester), from whom it was inherited by the Westhead or Brown-Westhead family,² whose heir sold the estate in 1933,³ because her estate was inadequate to support the mansion.

Green Belt

At application stage CPRE raised a number of issues, I do not withdraw these, but I have little specialist expertise on many of these and thus I rely on evidence provided by others who are better qualified. I thus want to focus on Green Belt and landscape.

One of the purposes of Green Belt is to keep neighbouring towns apart. Cookley is undoubtedly a small urban settlement, separated by a narrow area of Green Belt from the town of Kidderminster. I would like to argue that it is a town, but (with regret) I find that I cannot with sincerity argue so. It is better described as a large industrial village, originating as housing for those working in Cookley Forge (now the Titan Steel Wheels works). More detail on this is set out in appendix 2. I do not intend at the hearing to read this or my other appendix, as that do not strengthen the case I am making.

Openness

I accept that making a hole in the ground does not affect the openness of the Green Belt, but the erection of quarry machinery to process mineral inevitably does affect its openness, unless it is so much in the bottom of the quarry as not to be visible from outside it.

Landscape

NPPF para 174a requires the protection of valued landscapes, a term which it does not define. Part of the site is the side of a dry valley down which the A449 road runs, which is attractive (though unexceptional) landscape. During working, the quarry will inevitably alter the character of the landscape. In so far as the land will not be restored to its previous form, the landscape will be permanently altered. It is of course a matter of opinion how far this is adverse and even if it is whether this is unacceptable. Of course, there is the question of whether this bit of landscape is “valued landscape”. I value it, but mine is not an objective assessment. From what has been said by

¹ Based on manor court books (as in appendix 1).

² Based on title deeds deposited by me (for my former solicitors’ firm) in Worcestershire Record Office.

³ Date is from Sale particulars in my collection.

other participants today, it is clear that many of them also value it. More particularly, the proposal will permanently affect the setting of rights of way through and past the site.

Highways

I am also chairman of Hagley Parish Council. Its concern is with traffic on A456 east of Kidderminster. This passes through Hagley and divides my village so that it has a river of traffic flowing through it. This road is already highly congested at peak times. Traffic from the proposed quarry will only make that worse. It will no doubt be argued that the addition is at a *de minimis* level, but there has to be a level at which the system is already broken and nothing should be allowed to aggravate the problem. Hagley has an Air Quality Monitoring Area, no longer a Management Area, because the pollution level from traffic is just below the limit. We should not make it worse.

Very Special Circumstances

It seems to be suggested that a shortage of adopted mineral resources is a very special circumstance. I do not know of the precedents on this issue. However, I would point out that for the equivalent housing supply issue, there is at least a ministerial statement that a lack of housing land supply is not generally regarded as a very special circumstance. I believe there has been one appeal that went the other way, somewhere in Surrey, but I know of no case where there has been a major housing development in the Green Belt in this part of England.

Appendix 1 Historic Landscape Analysis

About 45 years ago I undertook what I would now call a tenement reconstruction in respect of the manor of Wolverley.⁴ I can set out the conclusions of this quite briefly, so far as relevant to this Inquiry.

- A449 road is the boundary between Wolverley Heath, a common inclosed in the 1780s on its east and land that has been cultivated since at least medieval times to the west, including the application site.
- B4187 is the boundary between the township of Upton to its south and the township of Wolverley to its north.
- Wolverley (later Little Wolverley) is a deserted medieval village, but its site is further west than the application site.
- The application site is thus within the open fields of Wolverley.

My conclusions appear in an article published in *Journal of Cookley and Wolverley Historical Society* in 1990s.⁵ This accords with statements (based on deductions from field patterns) in para 323 of the committee report.

Appendix 2 History of Cookley

The present Cookley is an industrial settlement owing its origin to Cookley Forge.

Cookley is one of about a dozen townships of the manor of Wolverley. However, the present settlement of Cookley is not part of it, for the village lay along the road from Cookley Bridge to Caunsall. The present settlement stands on the boundary between Austcliffe and a freehold property called The Lea, belonging to the Sebright family. South of The Lea was another farm called The Lea, which was leased by Worcester Cathedral, being the northern section of Lea Castle Park. South of

⁴ Based on manor rolls and numerous other documents.

⁵ P. W. King, 'The townships of Wolverley', *A Journal of the Wolverley and Cookley Historical Society* 3 (1992), 24-32.

that was the township of Wolverley (or Little Wolverley), which (surprisingly) is a deserted medieval village.⁶

The medieval name of Cookley was Culnan Clif and later Coclyff. I do not know when Cookley Bridge was built, but it carries a medieval main road from Gloucester and Worcester to Chester.⁷ In 1496, there was a fish-weir above the bridge called Culclyff. In 1609, a parcel of land in Cookley was leased so that a fulling mill could be built next to a corn mill.⁸ In Chancery litigation in 1654 concerning a partnership in it, a corn mill was alleged to have stood there since time immemorial, which William Winchurst of Stourbridge and Richard Fisher a slitter of iron had replaced with a slitting mill in c.1639.⁹ A forge was added to the slitting mill in about 1670 and passed through various hands in the following decades. It was one of a number of properties belonging to Richard Wheeler when he became bankrupt in 1703. He may have moved the slitting mill to Stourton in about 1698.¹⁰ Detailed annual accounts survive for the period 1692-7.¹¹

The 1703 purchaser seems to have been Richard Knight.¹² The forge was included in a partnership managed by his son Edward from 1725, for which detailed annual accounts survive until 1812, with Edward's son and grandson (both called John) succeeding as managing partner. It was one of them who built the former mansion called Lea Castle, having bought much of the land in 1748 and the rest in 1806. In 1812, a new partnership was formed in which John Hancocks had a quarter share, which with various changes in partnership operated the Cookley Works until 1886, when the works were moved to Brierley Hill. In 1864, there were 16 puddling furnaces,¹³ from which I would estimate an output of nearly 9,000 tons of bar iron per year.¹⁴ The original works was revived by another firm in 1904 and has passed through various hands.¹⁵ It is currently run by Titan Steel Wheels Ltd.¹⁶

The works was a finery forge with two finery hearths until 1800. Then it was used to draw out and finish bar iron from puddled blooms produced elsewhere. About 1816, there was a further change, Cookley becoming one of a small number of works in England and Wales that continued to produce charcoal iron long into the 19th century. This was the raw material for tinsplate which was also produced at Cookley. It also produced a high-quality iron for sale to Birmingham gunmakers for musket barrels.¹⁷

As stated, the present settlement of Cookley lies on the boundary between Austcliffe and The Lea. There must have been cottages for those working at the forge, but in the 17th and 18th centuries this would only have been a few men, two finers and a hammerman and their assistants with a forge carpenter and a stocktaker. In the late 18th century, the forge worked "doublehand", *i.e.* with a night shift, which would double the number needed. The number of workers is likely to have increased in

⁶ P. W. King, 'The townships of Wolverley', *A Journal of the Wolverley and Cookley Historical Society* 3 (1992), 24-32.

⁷ P. W. King, 'Some Roads out of north Worcestershire', *Transactions of Worcestershire Archaeological Society* 3rd ser. 20 (2006), 87-102. https://www.academia.edu/50067967/Some_Roads_from_N_Worcs

⁸ Wolverley manor rolls for the dates given, taken from transcripts made by Thomas Cave, now in Worcestershire Archives and Archaeology Service [WAAS], Palfrey collection; from originals in Worcester Cathedral library.

⁹ The National Archives, C 8/192/54; C 6/7/61.

¹⁰ Details of ownership in this period appear in Peter King, *A Gazetteer of the British Iron Industry 1490-1815* (2 vols., BAR British Series 652, 2020), 368-9 391-2.

¹¹ Herefordshire Archives and Research Centre, E12/VI/DEF/1-5.

¹² This is mainly deduced from sales of Forest of Dean pig iron, Cookley being specifically names in 1715.

¹³ *Mineral Statistics for 1864* (and subsequent years).

¹⁴ Using a multiplier of 553 tons per furnace per year, which I used for Peter King, 'Zenith of iron and the transition to mild steel in Great Britain', *Historical Metallurgy* 50(2) (2018 for 2016), 110-122.

¹⁵ L. Ince, *The Knight family and the British iron industry* (1991), *passim*.

¹⁶ <https://titansteelwheels.com/about-us/history/>

¹⁷ Ince, *Knight family*, 59-62.

the 19th century with the move to tinplate.¹⁸ This may be indicated by the subdivision of a field called Portway Piece on the corner of Castle Road and Austcliffe Lane in 1816, followed by the sale of one portion of that in 17 lots in 1844.¹⁹

Cookley differs from the typical village in that agriculture is not its *raison d'être*. It has long been primarily industrial, which would normally go with urban settlements. On the other hand, its size (with a 2021 population of 1,634) is not hardly enough to make it a town, being considerably smaller than either Tenbury Wells (3,938) or Upton upon Severn (2,903), not of which can be characterised as small market towns.²⁰

¹⁸ Ince, *Knight family*, 59-62.

¹⁹ WAAS, Wolverley manor court books.

²⁰ Data derived from 2021 census.