

## 'BUILDING HOMES WILL KILL OFF VILLAGE SQUIRREL POPULATION'

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Visitor: A squirrel in a tree at Clifton Hall, near WorkingtonJim Davis

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By Anna Burdett

GREAT Clifton's red squirrel population could become extinct if plans to build 51 houses are given the go-ahead, a planning inquiry has heard.

Persimmon Homes is appealing against a planning refusal by Allerdale council for the development in a field on the outskirts of the village near Workington.

But one of the country's leading experts, Craig Shuttleworth has warned that red squirrels could be scared off and never return.

He told the inquiry, which started yesterday at the Oval Centre in Salterbeck: "Due to the pressure of the road and the development, it all adds up to local extinction."

The development, opposite Clifton Hall, would be next to woodland believed to be one of the last habitats for red squirrels in the village.

Allerdale council turned down the application in April stating its fear for the squirrel population as one of the reasons.

Mr Shuttleworth, who conducted a survey for the council, found that squirrels made daily visits to the land and gardens of surrounding houses.

The development attracted 93 letters of complaint and a 1,495-strong petition.

Resident Ged Dempsey told the inquiry that he had already noticed a decline in the squirrel population since trees at Clifton Hall were felled in February.

And Chris Breen of the Great Clifton Residents Group said the development would increase the risk of flooding to some properties in the village.

Michael Druce, representing Persimmon Homes, claimed that Allerdale council had introduced an illegal supplementary planning document earlier this year.

The document, adopted in July, states that brown field sites in Workington must be developed before greenfield sites in Great Clifton might be released.

Bruce Armstrong-Payne, a town planner appearing for Allerdale council, said the guidance was not drawn up to justify councillors' refusing the planning application in April.

Persimmon made some changes to its application for the appeal, including reducing the height of some of the houses because they overlooked neighbouring properties, creating a new footpath to replace an existing one across the field and creating a larger play area.

The inquiry being heard by Government planning inspector Alan Boyland resumes this morning.