

# HDC's Revised Rookwood Proposal

## Summary

We welcome HDC's recognition that their original Rookwood proposal would seriously damage Warnham Nature Reserve and acknowledge that Horsham District will suffer if HDC does not approve a Local Plan.

However, building on Rookwood remains the wrong choice for Horsham Town and HDC can still choose to leave Rookwood out of the Local Plan, allowing time for meaningful consultation with local people and groups to create a viable plan for the whole site.

Claims that golf courses are ecologically barren are incorrect and old fashioned; our investigation reveals that Rookwood is actually an area of high biodiversity and a wildlife haven. Over 400 species have been identified at Rookwood in just five months; building on any part of Rookwood carries a high risk of damaging the site's biodiversity and the habitats that surround it.

To create the best plan for Rookwood, HDC should lead an open and collaborative coalition of stakeholders and expert groups and create a solution that addresses our modern challenges of climate change, retaining biodiversity and improving citizen wellbeing. This open approach should not be based on the presumption that "building on Rookwood" is the only way forward.

## What HDC Does Not Say

- That the new roundabout on Warnham Road will still obliterate the Reserve car park
- What will be built on the development land north of Warnham Road
- How Warnham Reserve will be protected from the development area in the North
- That the heart will be cut out of the green Boldings Brook / Riverside walk area to enable urban development
- That the access busway will still destroy Redford Avenue football pitch
- How the access busway can reach the development without cutting across the "protected" Riverside Walk, Boldings Brook and Red River area.
- That development is now closer to Redford Avenue and Rookwood Park
- How two thirds of the number of dwellings will be fitted into half the land area
- That Rookwood lake will be reduced to a third of its present size







## HDC's Revised Proposal

This response is informed by HDC's presentation to the Friends of Warnham Nature Reserve on Monday 12<sup>th</sup> October 2020 and the following statements from HDC's revised proposal:

1. "the fairways closest to the Nature Reserve would be allowed to revert to more natural green space"
2. "Housing would be focused on areas of current low biodiversity along the managed fairways of the golf course and on protection of existing trees and sensitive corridors such as Boldings Brook and the Riverside Walk."
3. "release the land north of the link between the Walnut Tree plantation and the Nature Reserve for public recreational access rather than only golf"

This graphic illustrates HDC's revised proposal and highlights areas of concern.



 Warnham Nature Reserve	 Development Area
 Recreation Area	 Red River / Boldings Brook and Riverside Walk
 Nature Reserve Buffer Zone	 New Bus Access at Redford Avenue

### Areas of Concern

1. Large development right in the middle of Boldings Brook / Red River / Riverside Walk
2. Partial protection for Warnham Nature Reserve
3. Access roundabout destroys the Reserve car park
4. Access bus route cuts across Boldings Brook, the Red River and the Riverside Walk

## What We Think

### Housing Density Increases by 40% to 62%

HDC's initial proposal was to build 1,100 dwellings on the whole Rookwood site and their revised proposal is to build 750 to 870 dwellings, mostly it seems on the southern land. This represents a 40% to 62% increase in housing density.

**The increased density must translate into either more tightly packed housing or taller tower blocks or both.**

To retain the housing density of the original proposal, HDC would need to build just 534 dwellings rather than 750 to 870.

### Loss of Amenity

The new proposal recognises that a growing population needs access to quality, accessible, natural green space for recreation and wellbeing. We provided research-based evidence of the positive impact on health and the savings to the NHS in our recent open letter.

45-50 hectares of accessible open space are retained but the change in amenity will devalue it for the wellbeing of residents.

1. The proposal diminishes the quality of the current green space. The popular Boldings Brook area will be overshadowed by built environment and a bus route. Open and natural views will be lost, traffic noise will dominate over birdsong and the well-being value of connecting to nature will be eroded due to the impact the development will have on wildlife. The area will also be more congested with use by families from an additional 870 homes. This in turn will make the area less hospitable for nature and so degrade its wellbeing value.
2. To access the green space north of Walnut Tree Plantation, residents will have to cross a busy road and so current local accessibility will be reduced.
3. The pay and play golf amenity will be lost without alternative provision. This golf course is popular and usage is growing with closure of other clubs. The club is making money. Although reserved for golf, it is managed in a way which allows others to use it (walkers, runners, cyclists, wildlife enthusiasts, photographers), and, of course, wildlife. The proposal also still drives a bus route through the football pitch and traffic free footpath and cycle route connecting Horsham to Warnham.

### Ecology Impact and the Benefits of Margins

The new proposal still demonstrates HDC's intention to build on the northern land next to Warnham Reserve and this continues to risk damaging our Local Nature Reserve.

The Boldings Brook / Riverside Walk area is both a valued amenity for local residents and an essential part of Warnham Nature Reserve's support network. Building on hole 15 (Tulip Tree) that lies between Boldings Brook and the Riverside Walk will:

- Surround Boldings Brook with development on both sides
- Significantly damage the ecology of this vital area
- Weaken Warnham Nature Reserve's support network

**This approach is contrary to HDC's assurances about protecting these areas and HDC's own green policies.**

Part of HDC's argument is based on the belief that golf courses are sterile, although ecologists no longer think this is the case. Golf courses are now considered valuable environments through an

enlightened view of wildlife and reduced use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. This is particularly so on urban fringes where there is a wealth of data showing that golf courses contribute positively to wildlife and biodiversity and have become de-facto wildlife havens.

**Rookwood Golf Course and Warnham Nature Reserve are part of one eco-system, damaging one damages both.**

Golf courses create a variety of habitats and by their nature provide significant lengths of “margin” where cultivated grassland borders wilder unmanaged habitats. These margins are particularly important to wildlife and modern literature considers the whole golf course, with its mixed and varied habitats, rather than just the isolated grass fairway.

There is clear evidence that sympathetic management promotes a mix of habitats and has a very positive outcome, with species diversity increasing considerably. One report for example found that golf courses had an overall 64 percent higher ecological value yielding better natural pollination and pest control.