

This is an extract from Horsham Denne Neighbourhood Council's wider response to the Local Plan

Rookwood Objection from Horsham Denne Neighbourhood Council

Horsham Denne Neighbourhood Council was shocked, for many reasons, to be told that HDC were putting the Rookwood Golf Club site forward for residential development. The proposal is for 900-1,000 dwellings which would put an unbearable strain on the already overstretched infrastructure in Horsham Town. There is nothing in the proposal that can mitigate the harm that would be caused by additional development. HDNC objects to constant extensions to existing settlements without adequate infrastructure & would prefer to see the development of new self-sufficient locations.

Strategic Housing & Employment Availability Assessment (SHELAA) 2019

The site is covered by two SHELAA: SA394 which covers the southern section within the Trafalgar area & SA 395 which lies north of the B2237 within the Denne Neighbourhood Council area.

The 2019 review stated "HDC was actively seeking submissions or updates to existing sites which are on its records. The SHELAA is a high level assessment that is used to identify what land may have potential for development in the future. It does not mean that a site in the SHELAA will automatically be given planning permission or be allocated in a local plan".

In fact both sites were included in the final report & coloured red as "Not Currently Developable". The SA395 report states:

"The site is owned by the District Council which has not resolved to release it for development, meaning the site is not available (as at December 2018). It lies in the countryside close to the western built up area boundary of Horsham, which is classified as the Main Town in Policy 3 of the Horsham District Planning Framework 2015 (HDPF) with a large range of employment, services and facilities and leisure opportunities. The eastern edge is at risk of flooding (Flood Zone 2 & 3) and the site surrounds and partially includes a Local Wildlife Site. The future of this site also needs to take into account that of SA394 because it will impact upon the current joint use. Unless allocated for development through the review of the HDPF or via a made Neighbourhood Plan, it is considered development would be contrary to Policies 1-4 and 26 with some conflict to Policy 31 and 38 of the HDPF. The site is therefore assessed to be 'Not Currently Developable'."

We foolishly assumed this designation gave the site some protection.

1) Outside Built-up area

The whole Rookwood area is outside the designated built-up area of Horsham Town.

While its development would meet some of the criteria in Strategic Policy 3 & Strategic Policy 4 it cannot be said to meet all conditions e.g. SP3.3 retention of community facilities & services; SP3.5 maintaining landscape features; SP4.2 contributes to leisure facilities; SP4.6 retains, enlarges or enhances green spaces.

2) Size of site

It should be noted that the size of the site quoted in the Local Plan is inaccurate: 39 ha. Refers only to the northern section & we were told by an officer at HDC that the entire site is 68ha. Even allowing for the additional hectare it is not possible to estimate the likely density of housing.

The submission does not identify how much of the site will be excluded from building because of flood risk & SuDS to mitigate additional flood risk; but this may severely impact the density of housing & create an over congested area.

It is acknowledged that the North section of the site would be an isolated development distant from other residential areas; this would impact on community cohesion.

3) Ownership

As HDC owns the land the site has obvious advantages in reducing the cost of development & making a high level of affordable housing more achievable but this does not outweigh the disadvantages of severe over-development in Horsham Town & the impact on the quality of life of existing residents.

4) Flood Risk

Boldings Brook forms the eastern edge of the southern section of the site (not the western edge as stated in the submission), it joins the River Arun in the Hills Farm Lane area.

The area south of the Rookwood location has been known to flood several times this century & it is undeniable that building in this area will reduce the permeable land & increase the run off into Boldings Brook. It sometimes happens that Boldings Brook fills its flood plain area & overflows onto Hills Farm Lane. High water levels also increases the flood risk along the River Arun in Horsham Town. At Christmas 2019 the excessive rainfall caused problems at Warnham Nature Reserve where the water level was at flood capacity & all of the storage for excess water was full for about 8hrs causing very fast moving water forcing its way straight down Boldings Brook due to no extra capacity on the floodplain. Without the permeable capacity at Warnham & the golf course land the problems downstream would be far greater.

The Council undertook a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) in 2019 & the Local Plan states that the recommendations of the revised 2019SFRA & Water Cycle Study have informed SP 40.2 policy to ensure flood risk is appropriately managed in the district. However this Study will not have taken into account the high level of flooding, blamed on climate change that was experienced throughout England in 2019/2020 – this indicates that the study may already be out of date.

5) Loss of a green lung

The north & west sides of Horsham have been increasingly encircled by development at Broadbridge Heath & North Horsham. The Rookwood area is a protective green lung on the edge of Horsham preventing coalescence & provides an important area for leisure activities which are beneficial to both mental & physical health.

6) Riverside Walk

The Riverside Walk is a much loved & well used circular path around Horsham & attracts visitors from outside the town. Part of the Riverside Walk runs through the Rookwood area & its importance as a District asset should be enhanced rather than diminished by urban development.

7) Golf Course

It has been stated that there is a decline in use of the golf generally but that is hardly surprising given the weather this winter. We are told by those who use the course that it is a wonderful amenity that has matured & is now considered to be one of the best public pay & play golf courses in the South East of England; Rookwood Golf Course has won awards for both conservation & environmental management. There is an excellent club house which is open to the public for functions & celebrations. There are good car parking facilities & the course is within walking distance of the town.

The golf Course could be better supported & advertised but the operators were clearly of the opinion that it has a good future as they have been investing in improvements including the introduction of a new fleet of Club Car Tempo buggies; the club is continuing to target structural improvements to the golf course such as bunker works & presentational enhancements associated with new green-keeping machinery.

The proposal to close the Golf Course is contrary to Policy 46 in the draft Local Plan: Community Facilities & Uses, section 3 which states that proposals resulting in the loss of sites & premises used for the provision of community facilities or services will be resisted unless replaced by equivalent or better & easily accessible facilities. Other clubs have closed or are destined for closure & so the options for affordable golf in the district will be severely diminished if Rookwood is lost. Even if golf is less popular now there will still be a demand for provision at an affordable level.

The following list has not been verified but gives an indication that the Rookwood Golf Club is needed:

Wildwood (Alfold) - 2017

Foxbridge (near Petworth) - 9 hole course for housing development - 2018

West Chiltington - now a Vineyard - 2016

Rusper - believed to be for housing development - September 2020

Mannings Heath - closed 9 holes of its King Fisher course for a Vineyard - 2016

Cotesmore - closed 9 holes of its Phoenix course for housing development - 2016

Horsham - Planning application for building on 9 holes of its 18-hole course.

Additionally Ifield Golf Course would be closed if development is agreed for the proposed West of Crawley Strategic Site

8) Biodiversity

The proposal claims that biodiversity gains will be achieved but no details are provided & it is hard to envisage how this will be possible, given the extensive loss of green space & the excellent environmental record of the Golf Club.

Originally the nature reserve covered a much larger area than it does now, but part of the Nature Reserve was deregulated, despite local opposition. The decision to turn the deregulated area into a municipal golf course for public use was acceptable & now there is a mature landscape, not just a mown grass space. This area provides a valued habitat & routes for wild life; if development takes place wild life would be initially disrupted by construction work & potentially permanently blocked by housing destroying continuous green ribbon thoroughfares.

It is also obvious that the introduction of a large number of domestic pets, especially cats will be inimical to wild life.

9) Infrastructure

The proposal recognises the need to provide additional community facilities but the offer is minimal: a primary school, community hub & a small element of retail. There is no proposal for secondary education or health care both of which are in short supply in Horsham Town.

10) Access

Last but by no means least the proposal is that both the northern & southern sections will have a single access point off the B2237. This is a dangerous stretch of road with vehicles turning off the A24 & speeding downhill towards Horsham. There is also a problem for pedestrians crossing the B2237 & which initiated a Community Highway Scheme to install a pedestrian refuge in Warnham Rd near the Nature Reserve entrance; this has successfully met criteria & reached the design stage with WSCC.

Having a single access to a site of potentially 500 dwellings is not satisfactory, as has been proved at the Highwood development where residents are experiencing problems getting out onto the main road. In the case of Rookwood there will be two single access sites opposite each other thus doubling the problem. There does not appear to be any alternative access for emergency vehicles to either site which could be a safety issue.

Along with all the other developments in the North Horsham area Rookwood would put additional pressure on the roads leading in & out of town especially at the junctions with Pondtail Rd & Wimblehurst Rd.

The submission advocates the use of both Littlehaven & Horsham railway stations but there is already insufficient parking provision at both stations.