

# Rookwood Petition Analysis & Summary

## Introduction

1. This document sets out the background, analysis and summary of a petition launched on the change.org website following Horsham District Council (HDC) publishing their proposal to build on Rookwood Golf Course. The petition had the following heading:-

**“No to Rookwood golf course future development for housing”**

2. As at 21<sup>st</sup> January 2021, the petition had received **10,290** signatures and **770** comments against HDC developing Rookwood golf course for housing.

## Background

3. In early 2020, Horsham District Council (HDC) published its proposal to build up to 1,100 high-density homes, up to 5 storeys high, on Rookwood Golf Course and land to the West of Warnham Nature Reserve. A six week public consultation period ended on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020.
4. The proposal was badly received by local residents, Horsham Neighbourhood Councils, The Horsham Society, The Friends of Warnham Local Nature Reserve and visitors to Rookwood. The main issue being the wanton destruction of a finely balanced green space that will have a major impact on the local environment and ecology. In addition, the existing green space is considered essential for good physical and mental health of the community.
5. To assess the public mood a petition was launched on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2020 to gather the views of the people of Horsham and surrounding areas. This petition is the baseline for this report.
6. In July 2020, following a Freedom of Information request, HDC released a large volume of paperwork indicating that work had been underway since 2016 on repurposing Rookwood but had not shared this information with the public. Again, the local community registered its concern that HDC had not been working with the community. The consultation period had long closed before important information was made available to the community.
7. On 9<sup>th</sup> December 2020, HDC published a revision to its original plans. This made some changes to North Rookwood and provided some additions to the Nature Reserve. However, the proposals for Southern sector of Rookwood remained virtually unchanged and are still considered unacceptable by the community.
8. Over the past few months local newspapers and social media have been full of criticism relating to the proposals for Rookwood. There is dissatisfaction over the lack of real

involvement with the community, and the fact that the wishes of the residents of Horsham are still not being listened to.

9. By continuing with this development HDC are flouting their own District Planning Framework, ignoring their own Green Space Strategy and directly countering the National Planning Policy Framework.
10. All through the process, residents and visitors feel that HDC has not been listening to their concerns. The Keep Rookwood Green Alliance (KRGGA) was formed to represent the community in saving Rookwood and to campaign on behalf of residents, raising awareness and reminding councillors of their need to listen to the public and, specifically, the residents of Horsham. KRGGA has been working closely with the Horsham Neighbourhood Councils, Horsham Society, Friends of Horsham Park, Friends of Warnham Local Nature Reserve, Friends of Chesworth Farm, Friends of The Rec, Transition Horsham and the people of Horsham to Keep Rookwood Green.

### **Analysis of Signatures**

11. The signatures included inputs from the whole of the UK and from overseas.

The following should be noted:-

- Signatories reflect both individuals AND Households. Many single signatories cover whole households. Where not, each member of the household can be identified if they have made an individual submission. This has been verified with local households.
- The location of the signatory may not be the same as their actual residence. For example, known Horsham residents have completed the petition remotely whilst either at work, travelling on business or on holiday etc. The petition records the location where they made their submission.
- Likewise, many local students at University etc are being recorded at the location of their University etc.
- 17 signatories from Overseas indicated a clear connection with Horsham through the comments they provided. Many signatories recorded away from the South East of England contain names of known Horsham residents.
- London shows a high number of signatories (735). This may be due to commuters completing the petition at work and the close proximity of former Surrey towns, inside the southern sector of the M25, being classified as London.
- 22 entries have been removed as no name provided.
- There were 1177 signatures from Hong Kong! This appears to be a random hack and have been removed from the total analysis.

## Analysis of Signatures by location

12. The change.org website identified signatures from all across the UK and from overseas. These have been categorised by region/country and is captured in **Attachment A**.
13. The detailed analysis has focused on the residents of Horsham District only, with specific focus on Horsham Town. All the signatories have been identified as being in Horsham District on the change.org website.
14. The total number of signatures from individuals OR households in the Horsham District in support of the proposition **“No to Rookwood golf course future development for housing”** is as follows:-

Zone	Geographical location	Signatures
1	Horsham Town (Trafalgar, Denne, Forest, North Horsham)	3,480
2	Horsham Town Neighbours (Broadbridge Heath, Itchingfield, Slinfold & Warnham, Rusper & Colgate, Nuthurst, Southwater)	251
3	Rest of Horsham District	203
<b>Total for Horsham District</b>		<b>3,934</b>

*Note: The above summarises the input for Horsham District. However, it should be recognised that a significant number of others, who live in Horsham but have been identified as being outside of Horsham in the petition, or those with close associations with Horsham, have also expressed their views by completing the petition.*

## Petition Comments

15. A total of 770 comments were received. The total number of comments from the Horsham District is as follows:-

Zone	Geographical location	Comments
1	Horsham Town (Trafalgar, Denne, Forest, North Horsham)	373
2	Horsham Town Neighbours (Broadbridge Heath, Itchingfield, Slinfold & Warnham, Rusper & Colgate, Nuthurst, Southwater)	49
3	Rest of Horsham District	39
<b>Total for Horsham District</b>		<b>461</b>

The key themes were:-

1. Loss of green space and impact on the environment
2. Loss of Health benefits
3. Loss of Golf Course
4. Excess house building in Horsham together with lack of associated infrastructure

**Attachment B** provides an extract of some of the key comments.

### **Summary**

**16. Based on the above, the number of letters of objections submitted to HDC and local councillors and the number of letters published in the West Sussex County Times, it is very clear that residents of Horsham want Rookwood to remain in its natural state**

*“You do not make a space greener by building on it”*

S Munro  
4 February 2021

## Attachment A

Zone	Geographical location	Signatures
1	Horsham Town (Trafalgar, Denne, Forest, North Horsham)	3,480
2	Horsham Town Neighbours (Broadbridge Heath, Itchingfield, Slinfold & Warnham, Rusper & Colgate, Nuthurst, Southwater)	251
3	Rest of Horsham District	203
<b>Total for Horsham District</b>		<b>3,934</b>
4	Rest of West Sussex	644
5	Rest of East Sussex (Inc Brighton & Hove)	375
6	Surrey	353
7	Hampshire & Kent	321
8	London	735
9	Rest of South East - Berks, Bucks, Oxford, Isle of Wight	157
10	South West - Bristol, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Glos, Somerset, Wilts	310
11	East - Beds, Camb, Essex, Herts, Norfolk, Northants, Suffolk	371
12	Midlands - Birmingham, Derby, Hereford, Leics, Lincs, Notts, Salop, Staffs, Warks, West Midlands, Worcs	392
13	North West - Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancs, Merseyside	289
14	North East - Durham, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear, Yorkshire	298
20	UK unattributed	200
S	Scotland	190
W	Wales	127
NI	Northern Ireland	67
<b>Total for UK exc Horsham District</b>		<b>4,829</b>
100	Overseas (Inc Republic of Ireland, Ex Hong Kong)	350
<b>Overall Total (Ex Hong Kong)</b>		<b>9,113</b>
200	Hong Kong	1,177
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>10,290</b>

Selected Comments

"There needs to be some green areas left inside the bypass especially after breaching the northern bypass with the North Horsham development . The Warnham Nature reserve is a very special asset for the town and will be degraded by the proximity of yet more houses. This housing will take out the green backdrop to the reserve. Horsham has already expanded beyond its natural area and it is not sustainable to keep doing this year on year."

"The golf course is beautiful as is the adjoining nature reserve."

"Losing this woodland will have a huge detrimental effect on the wildlife in the area. I walk my dogs here daily and see a healthy array of wildlife all in balance. My children and now grandchildren walk here, learning about nature! Newts in the little stream, grass snakes, weasels etc Horsham cannot support the developments it already has nor sell the new properties already built, be realistic HDC!! This is a beautiful, rich woodland surrounding an amenity which provides a much needed function with minimal impact to the surrounding area so leave it alone please!"

"This is a brilliant recreational facility to have close to the town. It is beneficial to golfers and walkers alike and would be a great loss to the community and for what? What will we gain in the long term from losing such a beautiful green space? Once this has gone it will be gone for good and Horsham will be a poorer place for it."

"We need to maintain green spaces in and around Horsham to maintain the character of the town and ensure residents can have access to expanses leisure and walking facilities. New homes are needed but development needs to be realistic and planned to create an attractive living environment."

"I've been walking this area for over 50 years and it is a beautiful breath of fresh air in what is becoming an overpopulated part of the UK. Please keep it free of development so we have some green space."

"Horsham has had enough new housing. More and more of our recreation and green land is being developed. It is just ridiculous how Horsham has changed. Get the infrastructure right before building more homes. Where are the Dr's Surgeries, where are the schools, where are the dentists, road improvements? HDC are a joke."

"It will spoil one of the jewels in the south of England. Warnham Nature reserve is a great haven for wildlife and the golf course helps to enhance the way the wildlife reacts."

"We love to walk along here. It's beautiful"

"We can't dredge rivers and clean out ditches because of upsetting the wildlife. Yet it's all right to cut down trees and hedges to destroy their habitat. I thought we were supposed to be planting trees not cutting them down and building houses! Haven't we got more than enough new houses in this area?"

"For physical and mental health reasons we need to keep our green spaces. Horsham is a wonderful town. We are spoiling it and paving over this golf course is a backward step when we will need these spaces more and more with so many houses being built."

"Building on the golf course would destroy one of the key amenities that makes Horsham an attractive place to live. If we have to have more houses why on earth would we build them on this wonderful facility. Horsham will need more of these spaces in the future, not fewer."

"Once again a community resource which has been heavily invested in overtime and now is a mature facility is in danger of falling to developers' greed. There is a responsibility to the community which extends beyond cashing in resources for short term gain."

"I am vigorously opposed to houses being built in this part of Horsham. It is one of the few green areas that we have left for our children and great grandchildren to make their childhood memories. Please do not build on it ."

"I think it's important to keep areas of green in our town and Rookwood is such a central point for those who walk along Red River and surrounding areas with their dogs and families. I think during this unprecedented time it has been more important than ever to have such a beautiful place to be able to access. We need these areas, it's about balance."

"This is a lovely green space right next to the river walk that so many people enjoy. It has so many different tree species and I would consider it to be one of the 'lungs Of Horsham'. Just yesterday I heard the lovely pecking of a woodpecker and was able to watch it in the trees. A few days before my daughter enjoyed watching a grey heron fly down to the stream in the middle of the golf course. This area is teeming with wildlife because of its close proximity to Warnham nature reserve. It is the only place we can walk to from our home on Trafalgar road to walk our dog and be able to observe nature. To build on this lovely habitat seems obscene."

"This is a haven of tranquillity with an abundance of wildlife, if this goes then there will be no going back we need our green spaces, HDC have encouraged the community to walk along the river for health benefits by creating the Riverside walk if this is built on all this will be gone forever."

"It would be an absolute tragedy to lose this amazing green space for houses. Although not a golfer nor a dog owner, I have walked extensively there over the years and when lockdown restricted people's movements the golf course was a Godsend for hundreds of families. It would be crazy to lose such a wonderful spot to more urbanisation especially since Horsham has been overrun by housing developments in the last few years. Once it's gone it's gone, and I hope the petition wins and gains overwhelming support."

"Land for wildlife around Horsham is disappearing at a huge rate with housing estates being built all around the town. It's time to stop this development and refocus on making the town a great place to live with the provision of recreational services that improve the quality of life for residents. The closure of the golf course and the proximity of the development to the nature reserve does not meet these objectives. There is also a complete lack of infrastructure in the area for yet more residents and commuters."

"Horsham needs green, recreational areas as much as it needs housing. Protection is also required for the Warnham Nature Reserve and Red River, which Rookwood Golf Course provides and supplements. We do not need to develop Horsham into a hard urban environment (the proverbial concrete jungle) without regard for the need for calm green spaces. Houses are not homes without open, green, ecological spaces to soften the urban landscape and provide a retreat for residents and wildlife."

"This area is a natural flood plain & floods regularly. It is also home to thousands of species of wildlife who have already lost a huge amount of their natural habitat due to the Holbrook House build, which

is only just down the road from this. Also, we do not have the medical, school or water facilities to accommodate further housing in this area."

"I couldn't believe that anyone would even consider building on Rookwood. The idea is as appalling as building on Horsham Park which I'm sure is greatly loved and appreciated by all Horsham residents. Rookwood is like a "second Horsham Park" - it's a beautiful public amenity and is very well used by golfers and walkers alike. It's also near the town providing local, therefore easily accessible, recreation along with the adjoining nature reserve. We must stop endlessly building more houses in Horsham and think more about the environment and quality of life of the people living here now and in the future."

"We have very little green space left in the surrounding area of Horsham and in particular Rookwood as it is so near to the town centre and has easy access for wheel chairs and those with walking difficulties. Rookwood is still a popular golf course. This land was sold to HDC by the Lucas Family with a covenant that it was for the people of Horsham!!!! Stop building in Horsham!!!!"

"This bit of green space and facility was promised to Horsham residents during the first wave of massive development in the 90's and now they're trying to steal it from us - enough is enough, they seem to want to destroy the character and environment that makes Horsham such a great place to live #"

"Horsham as a market town is being lost, swallowed up in endless ugly housing. It is horrendous what is being allowed to happen on its edges, green space is vital, not just for nature but for the well being of people, and a potted tree is simply not enough. Stop ruining our countryside for today's gain and think of tomorrow's generations"

"I have lived in Horsham for many years and only this year I visited Rookwood Golf Course for the first time. I really love it there and consequently went back this summer many times, not for golf as I don't play, but for long walks and recreational. If houses get built we will lose this wonderful area for ever & it will never be the same."

"Horsham council have displayed a staggering disregard for green spaces and the environment by approving unprecedented building in the area with no increase in infrastructure, health facilities or educational facilities."