



Neighbourhood Councils united in opposition to final Rookwood proposals

The three Neighbourhood Councils, Denne, Forest and Trafalgar represent the un-parished area of Horsham. Although we do not have the same legal status as full Parish Councils, we have never shirked our duty to confront controversial issues facing our residents and “speak truth to power” on their behalf. There has been no more serious example of this in recent years than the proposed allocation of Rookwood as a site for housing development.

We were first briefed by Horsham District Council (HDC) on this proposal in January 2020. The Neighbourhood Councils responded individually on various aspects of HDC’s Draft Local Plan and more specifically to the Rookwood proposal. Although each Council had its own particular concerns we were unanimous in objecting to the inclusion of Rookwood in the Local Plan.

Since then we have been consulted by HDC twice on amendments to the proposals. Thanks to overwhelming objections from the public and stakeholder organisations including the Neighbourhood Councils, Friends of Warnham Local Nature Reserve, the Horsham Society, the Keep Rookwood Green Alliance and Rookwood Golf Course users, the amount of housing in the scheme has reduced and some of the existing green spaces would now be preserved. However, none of these amendments have changed our opinion; that building on Rookwood at all would be irrevocably detrimental to the residents of Horsham.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought profound changes to the lifestyle and needs of many Horsham residents. Home working – which has surged this year – is unlikely ever to return to pre-COVID levels and the pressure on home life has led to a huge increase in demand for local open spaces. Our existing green spaces are therefore exceptionally valuable and Rookwood contributes a third of the green space in the town area. The future needs of our residents – particularly their physical and mental wellbeing and easy access to green space - must be properly taken into account.

Too many questions remain to be answered before an irreversible decision is made on the loss of green space at Rookwood:

- 1 We cannot agree that the current golf usage has reached the end of its natural life. The Golf Course is fully utilised and cannot be described as “surplus to requirements”. Under national planning rules, HDC would be required to provide

equivalent or better provision in a suitable location. Why not retain, share and enhance what we already have?

- 2 The inclusion of Rookwood for development within the Local Plan negates all the aims set out in the five year partnership between HDC and the Sussex Wildlife Trust. We strongly support the “Wilder Horsham” initiative, but if HDC does not practice what it preaches, isn’t this just “greenwashing?”
- 3 The latest proposal for 750 homes is actually below the threshold for consideration as a Large Strategic Site. Rookwood would therefore not make a significant contribution to achieving the housing numbers required for the Local Plan. Horsham is already overdeveloped and will have to absorb extra demand on its facilities from thousands of additional dwellings at the Novartis and North of Horsham developments. How can this loss of green space possibly be justified alongside the proposed increase in population?
- 4 It has become all too apparent that the planning case for building at Rookwood does not stand up to scrutiny and it is primarily financial considerations driving this initiative. We have received only vague assurances that the “country park” that HDC is now offering will stay green in the future, which have absolutely no legal substance and may not last any longer than an individual’s term of office or financial whim. Given that this element of the scheme will represent a net cost to Council Tax payers going forward, what guarantees do we have it will ever be delivered – let alone retained?

For these reasons the Neighbourhood Councils remain united in demanding that HDC withdraw the Rookwood proposal in its entirety from the Local Plan and that HDC consults on any future alternative proposals for the area properly in an open and transparent way, taking the needs of residents into account.

The recent Neighbourhood Council objection letters to the latest Rookwood proposal submitted individually to HDC can be seen in full on our websites:

Denne: <https://www.hdnc.org.uk/>

Forest: <https://www.forestnchorsham.org.uk/>

Trafalgar: <https://www.horshamtrafalgarnc.com/>

5th March 2021

Ends