



## Horsham Trafalgar Neighbourhood Council

Cllr Jonathan Chowen  
Deputy Leader, Horsham District Council  
Cabinet Member for Leisure & Culture

22 February 2021

Dear Jonathan

### **Final proposal for development of Rookwood Golf Course**

Thank you very much for presenting your final vision for the proposed development at Rookwood Golf Course on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2021. I subsequently relayed your presentation to the other members of Horsham Trafalgar Neighbourhood Council (HTNC) and sought their views.

Sadly our residents are not privy to the full details of the proposal, and have not been afforded the same opportunity to ask questions. It would have been preferable if a proper consultation of residents could have taken place on what the HDC Property team intends to put forward, because the final plans are quite different from those contained in the Regulation 18 consultation. This was requested in my previous letter of 3<sup>rd</sup> November last year. Until every Horsham resident is given the opportunity to examine the full proposals being considered, in order to formulate their own opinions and be able to put their view forward to the appropriate parties, we feel it would be very difficult for HTNC to back any proposals put forward.

However, since this has not taken place we must therefore base our assessment of the revised proposals on whether the many concerns put to us by residents in the meantime have been addressed.

HTNC also continues to take seriously our responsibility to comment from a Trafalgar perspective on both the pros as well as the cons of the various proposals put before us. We therefore note that attempts have been made in the latest iteration to address the most serious of the concerns raised by the community and various stakeholders. We are particularly pleased that HDC has heeded our warnings concerning the ecological and hydrological importance of the 15<sup>th</sup> fairway, and the key role it plays in supporting the Riverside Walk, by removing it from the area to be developed. The commitment to retain adequate parking for Warnham Local Nature Reserve to allow it to thrive as an attraction is also welcome.

## **Horsham Trafalgar Neighbourhood Council (HTNC) position**

Notwithstanding these revisions, HTNC remains firmly opposed to both the principle and the specifics of this latest proposal. As also stated in my previous letter, Rookwood Golf Course is a valuable asset to the community, both as a highly accessible golf course and as public green space used extensively by Trafalgar Residents.

Whilst retaining the area of the 15<sup>th</sup> fairway as open accessible land retains a portion of the current wildlife corridor, the total loss of green space for development purposes is considered unacceptable given the desperate need for open, accessible spaces for both wildlife habitat and residents' physical and mental well-being – both those who live here now and those who would join us if this proposal were taken forward.

Also, although a 'country park' in the northern section of the site might have merits there are significant problems with this element of the proposal. Firstly, there is a lack of clarity over what a 'country park' would consist of. The term doesn't seem to have any specific legal or regulatory meaning – it simply sounds 'green' because it contains the word 'country.' It could easily be something quite disruptive to wildlife. The golf course currently acts as an important buffer zone for the Nature Reserve in a way that a country park is unlikely to do.

Secondly, Councillors were not confident that the financial benefits shown in the proposal would actually materialise once the grounds maintenance costs of the new housing development and the new country park are taken into account. Councillors also lacked the confidence that the current proposal would secure the open access space being detailed as a positive benefit on a long-term basis.

In particular, HTNC notes that HDC currently receive an income from Rookwood golf course after all maintenance costs on the land have already been covered. Essentially, golf pays for the management of the land. Once the golf course is closed and the land utilised for housing, the proposed country park north of Warnham Road risks becoming a net cost to taxpayers and thereby a driver to close the park and build more housing further down the line. Councillors felt that the risk of losing these pockets of green space at a future date becomes more likely once an initial development has been established and the pressure for further "urban extensions" continues unabated. Is this merely the thin end of the wedge?

### **Safe – but for how long?**

In Trafalgar, we are seeing this threat materialise in the form of this very proposal. Many residents remember the public meeting held in Trafalgar in January 1992 when they were given assurances by officers, members and even the HDC Chief Executive that building Rookwood Golf Course, along with the houses at Rookwood Park - which fully financed the project - would safeguard the future of this green space. And yet within 25 years HDC was already making plans for the destruction of the golf course. If we were now to support the building of high-density housing on the southern site in exchange for the promise of a country park in the northern segment, what assurances do we have that we will not be in exactly the same position in 25, or 15 or even 10 years' time?

The reality is - by your own admission - we have almost none. Whilst we appreciate your undertaking as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture that the country park element of the scheme we will be delivered, it is untenable for us to base our judgement of this scheme on such assurances which have absolutely no legal substance and may not last any longer than your time in post or your term of office.

## **Conclusion**

Rookwood is an excellent golf course. It is very well used, including by Trafalgar residents. Participation in golf is increasing nationwide, and this is a highly accessible course available to the wider community due to its pay-and-play status and its affordable prices. It also plays a key role as a buffer for Warnham Local Nature Reserve against the urban environment whilst being a good neighbour to the Riverside Walk, a hugely important amenity for our residents. Walkers, dog owners and cyclists all use the space in harmony with each other, and there is plenty of scope for HDC to further enhance this shared use of the land with more and better walking tracks, without destroying what is there already.

Horsham Trafalgar Neighbourhood Council has always been of the view that the promotion of this site for development by HDC represents a clear breach of trust with our residents which should never have been allowed to proceed to Strategic Planning without proper scrutiny and community consultation. Every revision since that date has been too little, too late and as such we continue to vehemently oppose it on behalf of our community.

Yours faithfully,

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