

**FOREST NEIGHBOURHOOD COUNCIL  
RESPONSE TO THE ALTERNATIVE PLAN FOR ROOKWOOD**

**2<sup>nd</sup> November 2020**

Following significant public pushback and concern about HDC's proposal for future housing at Rookwood, HDC issued two press releases in September and October signalling an alternative proposal. Forest Neighbourhood Council (FNC) welcomes HDC's invitation for stakeholder feedback on the alternative proposal.

The alternative proposal purports to allay concerns about the protection for Warnham Local Nature Reserve and the wish to have publicly accessible natural green space for recreation in the locality. It is decreasing the number of houses from approx. 1,100 to 750-870 whilst increasing the site wide developable area to around 25.5 h. It focuses on land to the south of Warnham Road alongside a smaller development area to the north, incorporates areas that were not in the original plan, omitting a new school and the proposed development will destroy the current car parking area for Warnham Nature Reserve.

**Incorporating Areas that were not in the original plan**

Considering that HDC is looking at maximising the financial return from any Rookwood residential development, FNC cannot understand why "Fairway 15" was not originally included. It will be helpful for this Council to understand the reasoning for now including this wildlife corridor that is also a particularly sensitive ecological area.

"Fairway 15" runs alongside a very well used part of Horsham Riverside Walk and the proposed development will aesthetically compromise the route. Importantly this area is also regularly prone to flooding. FNC deem "Fairway 15" to be environmentally far too sensitive to be included in any developmental plan.

**Developing the Northern Site**

The intention to develop land north of Warnham Road for "general employment" purposes in the alternative plan is inappropriate. In principle, Forest Neighbourhood Council is in favour of developing employment opportunities (as defined by HDC) in the more appropriate town areas but not where it has the potential for leakage and contamination into the Nature Reserve. If anything is built at such close proximity to the Nature Reserve, it will cause noise and light pollution. It will also have the potential for leakage and contamination into the Nursing Reserve. All of this will impact and severely affect the Nature Reserve's eco system.

There are already large areas of alternative commercial/industrial unit accommodation becoming available. FNC would draw HDC's attention to potential development at the ex-Novartis site and land North of Horsham.

It should also be noted that under new planning regulations, these proposed units could be sold on or converted to any type of business beyond HDC's control.

**If Rookwood is included in the local plan as developable, FNC objects to any form of development on the Northern Side and the removal of the car park. It is unrealistic to expect all visitors to walk to the Reserve.**

### **Proposed Roundabout**

FNC considers the scale of the proposed roundabout which is the same size as the adjacent A24 Robin Hood Roundabout, is too large, even when considering the original Masterplan. It is not a major trunk road and physically it would cut this area off from the rest of the town. If development is solely on the south side, then FNC questions whether a roundabout is required at all.

### **Southern Side**

There is a significant reduction in the size of the main Pond (around 40%) and other ponds appear to be lost. There is also less green space resulting in a detrimental effect on wildlife that use these areas for feeding and breeding.

### **School**

The argument that the new proposed number, 750-870 units falls below the statutory figure for extra school provision, should not be the only factor that HDC takes into consideration when choosing to delete the provision in the alternative Plan. School Pupil Numbers will continue to rise throughout the district. Please would HDC explain the rationale for removing the school?

### **Bus Route**

FNC see no reason why, with reduced housing and not having a new school, the bus route cannot be the same as all other transport on this development. In fact, FNC would argue that there never was a need for a dedicated bus route. Importantly the proposed new bus route would cut through an area which the Masterplan identifies as being of principal ecological importance.

Redford Avenue Football Pitch is listed in the Horsham Neighbourhood Plan as a green space. As well as being accessible for leisure pursuits, it is well used by local football teams. The original Masterplan shows two football pitches within the proposed school grounds but as the school is deleted from the alternative Masterplan B, it is even more important that there is no change to the current pitch provision FNC strongly objects to using any part of the football pitch or laying a road through this environmental area.

## Cycle Route

It is disappointing that the alternative Masterplan makes no reference to walking and cycling provision and does not include any reference to Cycle and Walking Lanes into the Town Centre. FNC also note that the alternative Masterplan fails to fully protect the Nature Reserve

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## Conclusion

**FNC remain very disappointed with both proposals to develop Rookwood. FNC advocates that Rookwood remains in its present form.**

The Rookwood Golf Course is well used and, contrary to some reports, is often fully booked. At the time of its inception, Central Government was placing great emphasis on health and exercise (this is again being highlighted as a factor when fighting Covid-19). HDC was forward-thinking in adding to the variety of available sporting venues and this contributed to Horsham's high ranking as a good place to live. Now, Central Government's intention to impose an extraordinarily large number of new build house per year in this District, increases the need to maintain every outside facility, especially in the urban area.

However, if HDC still intends to include Rookwood as housing stock in its Local Plan, FNC have the following comments on the building design:

- This development is being promoted as a "Park", but the design and intensity is undermining this concept.
- There is insufficient green space.
- "Lockdown" photographs showing families looking out of windows graphically explains the need for individual outdoor spaces (gardens).
- Lack of car parking areas; these are woefully inadequate and there does not appear to be any provision for visitors parking, either socially or formally.
- It is vital to protect the integrity of the important and valued Nature Reserve.
- It is also vital to improve the Nature Reserve's ecological support network in the south.

**Finally**, FNC do believe that HDC should be looking to preserve its green spaces as its legacy for future generations. Whatever the way forward may be, FNC do not think that any decision on Rookwood should be hastily made. If Rookwood is deemed developable in the forthcoming Local Plan, alternative ideas should be put forward for this site, e.g. College, especially as this was a very well received proposal, both constructively and economically, when it was mooted for the Novartis site.