The Friends of Warnham Local Nature Reserve

Charity No. 1171924

Warnham Local Nature Reserve
Warnham Road
Horsham
RH12 2RA

30 August 2020

To Glen Chipp - Chief Executive Officer of Horsham District Council,

As you know, the Friends of Warnham Local Nature Reserve is a registered charity that exists to promote the benefits of the Reserve and to improve its physical and natural environment through education and promoting biological diversity. How we do this is through a partnership with you where the money that we raise is invested into the Reserve through enhancement projects.

In the 2019-2020 financial year, the Friends provided HDC with an income of tens of thousands of pounds by collecting admission fees. To date, our charitable benefit to the Reserve exceeds £100,000 and has been delivered through a range of completed and approved projects.

We welcome the good progress being made on the new Discovery Hub, which adds real value to the Reserve. However, in February 2020, HDC published the Regulation 18 draft 2020 Horsham District Local Plan, which identified Rookwood Golf Course as a potential strategic site for 1,100 dwellings as shown in Figure 1.

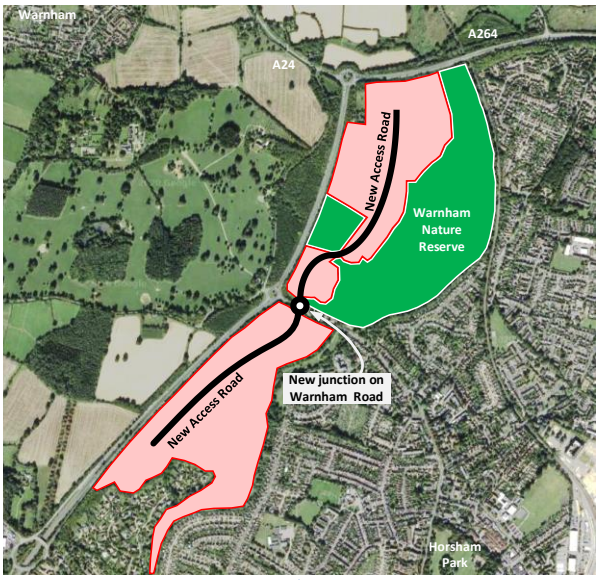

Figure 1 - Rookwood and the Reserve Context

We support HDC and Sussex Wildlife Trust's Wilder Horsham District Partnership[1], whose laudable aims to: "help wildlife thrive across the Horsham District" and "create networks of land that are protected and enhanced for wildlife" are impressive commitments.

In our view developing Rookwood would be the antithesis of these aims and call into question HDC's commitment to their new partnership. It would also demonstrate a striking failure to deliver the aims of their Green Space Strategy[2].

From a wildlife perspective, Rookwood Golf Course and the Reserve is one large green space; wildlife does not see the lines that we draw on maps.

Urbanising Rookwood as proposed will reduce the overall green space by 65% and sever the Reserve's connectivity and wildlife corridors to the Sussex countryside, leaving it surrounded by development on all sides. This significantly threatens the wildlife and the Reserve's viability.

[1] Sussex Wildlife Trust News - November 2019 https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/news/wilder-horsham-district
[2] HDC Green Space Strategy 2013-2023 https://www.horsham.gov.uk/parks-and-countryside/green-space-strategy

As part of the local plan consultation, HDC Property Department submitted a response containing their Rookwood development proposals. Some of these documents are dated 2017, showing that HDC has worked on the proposal for many years, but chose not to consult the Friends, despite the obvious material impact on the Reserve.

HDC has commissioned an independent ecological study on the Rookwood development and this shows that the development will build on all the land which the report identifies as posing the greatest risk to the Reserve as shown in Figure 2. In addition, HDC's development documents highlight a new east-west cycleway that will cross the Reserve, providing 24-hour human access and consequent constant disturbance to the Nature Reserve's wildlife.

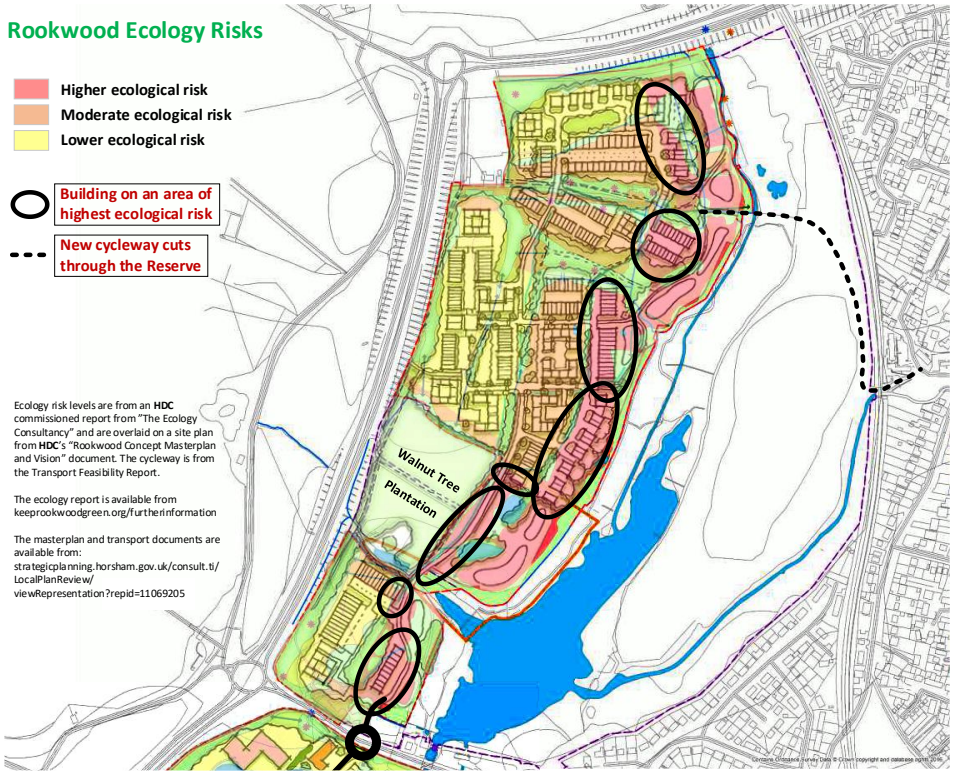

Figure 2 - Ecology Risks to the Reserve

Building on Rookwood, as proposed, will clearly damage the Reserve and, after several years, likely result in it no longer being viable as a Nature Reserve. The new Discovery Hub Rural Development Programme grant business case is built around the Reserve being more attractive and popular, but this will be very unlikely if there is a huge adjacent housing development and the Reserve's wildlife is driven away or preyed upon by domestic cats!

It seems to us that a decision to develop Rookwood can only be made by undervaluing the Reserve, which HDC, as both the owner on residents behalf and the planning authority, has a duty of care to protect.

It is with regret that we find ourselves having to write to you in this way, but we cannot see the commitment from HDC demonstrating that it values the Reserve and is prepared to fully exercise its duty of care. We sincerely hope that we are mistaken in our conclusions.

Yours sincerely,

John Alsop, Andy Roberts, Neil Henry, Peter Simpson and John Wilks
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