

Rookwood – A Public Relations Exercise But is it Fact or Fiction?



Have you seen the HDC Rookwood website, or one of the many promotional articles in local papers and magazines? Horsham District Council is certainly going full out on a public relations exercise.

“The proposal to develop Rookwood is ambitious and forward-thinking and would be a sustainable development of the highest standard. The aim is to create an award-winning scheme, with the health and wellbeing of wildlife, ecology, landscape and people at its heart”. Or so say Horsham District Council.



However, when you start to read the details, it doesn't all add up:

“The new homes would be in the southern more urbanised setting, retaining much of the open space, vegetation and landscape and protecting the two river corridors.”

At present this area for development is not urbanised, it is a golf course! How can 750 homes be built on undeveloped land retaining much of the open space? A determiner of much is abundant / plentiful / considerable / substantial – does this fit? No housing is proposed in the northern area. That is fine, but HDC have shown on numerous occasions that they have changed their proposals. The verb 'propose' means to suggest. A definitive statement that there will be no housing to the north just might have garnered support. The same can be said for the statement that there is no proposed development for the Red River / Boldings Brook corridor. There categorically needs to a statement saying that development there will never be allowed.

The northern area is also to be the site of a new public park, dedicated to recreational activities, but there are no details of just what this means. This could be something positive, yet depending upon the plans it could have a negative impact on the environment with greatly increased vehicular movements. The plans for a new school adjacent to this would also create the same issues.

The government's Road to Zero policy is quoted as a significant ecological factor in this development. The target date is 2030, but that only applies to new cars, and therefore a more likely date for positive impact is 2040, and during this time the ecological damage will rise.

Schools, and particularly the parents of the pupils, are extremely difficult to guide. Everyone agrees to the ideals of being environmentally friendly. However, it only takes wet days, the need to drop the children off and get off to work, or just a bad start to the day with a stropy toddler in tow and out comes the car. I talk from experience of being a Headteacher for twenty-five years trying initiative after initiative, and writing numerous School Travel Plans. We never gave up, and made some progress, but did not achieve our goal.

HDC's proposal states key deliverables which will make the site notable. It would be designed to the highest quality, incorporating climate change technology. It states that at least 35% of the housing would be affordable. That figure is one that HDC have used for other developments, notably that of North of Horsham. The reality is that once developers move in, they can challenge those figures. North of Horsham is now likely to provide less than half of the proposed affordable homes. When challenged, HDC said that it was beyond their control. What is going to stop this being repeated at Rookwood?

The Council has listened to the feedback from a range of organisations and individuals, and as a consequence has made some changes. But these are proposed statements, rather than definitive.

Their web page also appears to contradict itself. It says that there would be no bus route through the football pitch in Redford Avenue, but also says it is key to achieving sustainability ambitions that the development has access to public transport to the town centre, reducing dependency on private cars.

It has consulted with Metro Bus, and suggest these linkages can be achieved either through the main access to the southern part of the development, or by linking through to Redford Avenue. If, as promised. they are not

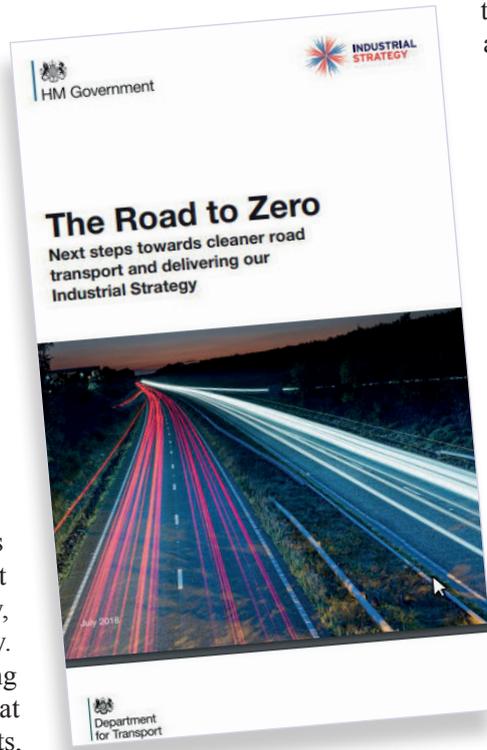
going to put road access across the football pitch, then access from Redford Avenue would have to be through woodland, across bridges over Red River and Boldings Brook, cutting right through the existing and re-proposed wildlife corridor. Yet further on in their statement it says that there will be no development in this area, and the bus link is removed!

HDC also state that the site is a reasonable walk from Horsham Town Centre, and it expects that car trips would be low. I question just how many families would walk over thirty minutes in each direction to visit the town, and that's just from the centre of the site. Would you always walk into town from beyond Hillier's Garden Centre, Horsham Football Club, Coltsfoot Drive Post Office, or the Millennium Hall, Roffey? If schools cannot get local families to walk, there is little chance that a large proportion of new residents would do so of their own volition.

Finally, HDC proposes a new Community Consultation Board to ensure that key stakeholders and representatives from the community would be actively involved and could influence the detail on an ongoing basis. What does that actually mean? The Council have already consulted with the publicly elected Neighbourhood Councils, and yet have ignored their requests. They state that this Board could influence the detail. But, of course, the Council could do as it does now, continue to ignore the wishes of the majority and pay lip service to consultation.

If you want to visit the website follow the link below, it is not easy to find it on search engines! www.rookwoodhorsham.co.uk.

Malcolm Willis



Horsham Town Centre's Public Realm Strategy & Design Guide



6. Protect Horsham's historical character and architectural heritage
7. Support pedestrian and cycle users of the town
8. Create a green and sustainable town centre
9. Promote vibrant and active streets
10. Ensure that all public realm projects support the proper functioning of the town centre

In future issues of the newsletter I will examine in depth the details of the strategy.

The Society fundamentally had concerns over three areas, and some of these concerns remain. We still disagree over unmarked shared pedestrian / cyclist access, particularly in Carfax. On market days, and during other events, there are larger numbers of pedestrians and we believe an increased likelihood of accidents involving cyclists. Even on quieter days, pedestrians will not be prepared for cyclists alongside them, unless there is a clearly marked area.

Blackhorse Way is the town's biggest eyesore, and is an issue we have been raising with HDC for a number of years. There are suggestions, and we hope that the solutions proposed address this blot on our town.

For over two years the Society has been working with HDC, and specifically Project Manager Clive Burley, on the draft Public Realm Strategy. The Strategy sets out the future approach to Horsham Town Centre's streets and spaces. Horsham Town has undergone a number of changes, but with a piecemeal approach. Therefore, there has been a lack of coherence to the design principles, and a realisation of the need for an agreed strategy to ensure that this mismatch was not to be perpetuated. As a consequence, HDC approved the final draft of the Public Realm Strategy at the beginning of April.

The Society has had a number of face-to-face meetings with Clive and the BDP Consultants, feeding back our thoughts at different stages of the consultation. I was impressed with the openness of the discussion and the reasoned responses to our comments. I am pleased to report that much of what we have said has been taken into account and appears in the adopted document, which is seventy-five pages long. In the last draft we made over one hundred and thirty comments and nearly all of these have been addressed!

We pointed out the uniqueness of the Sussex dialect, and the document now uses the term 'twitten' instead of path or alley. I am also pleased to see that the name Carfax is now used correctly, without the frequent, and incorrect, prefix 'The'.

The overall proposals are pleasing, recognising the need to plan for future changes. There are ten guiding principles:

1. Put people first. Design spaces for people
2. Simplify the streetscape and improve legibility
3. Ensure consistency in design
4. Create memorable and identifiable spaces where people want to be
5. Design spaces to be flexible and suitable for multiple uses



With the western section of Bishopric, our concern is the opening out of its entrance. At present it has character and a charm to its layout. Why move the central planted island? The proposal ignores the interest generated by turning a corner and discovering new and exciting spaces. The trees and shrubs are required to screen off Albion Way and reduce pollution from vehicle fumes. Otherwise, the design of the soulless Forum, and the wind tunnel that Piries Place has become, will be repeated. Shade and space are required for outside dining. People will not want to sit outside a café with a clear view of a large road junction and be surrounded by fumes. The opening of the area next to the traffic lights and the Olive Branch will lead to pedestrians attempting to cross adjacent to the lights, an area which is not pedestrianised. It should be left blocked off for safety.

At present these lights are too intelligent for the majority of people and used incorrectly. Please read the piece on Pelican crossings further on in this newsletter.

Having referred to the Forum, it is interesting to note that this strategy has been adopted, yet the pages are still labelled 'To be completed.' This is a key area and needs detailing as soon as possible. The water feature is a major attraction and something special for the children. It is successful in other towns and cities and should be kept. The Strategy does not welcome children, or consider their needs. When asked, children refer to three key highlights – Horsham Park, The Maze and the Water Feature. They should be listened to.

The final piece that we believe is missing is the taking into account of the recommendations of the Cycle Infrastructure Design Local Transport Note 1/20, and the adopted Horsham Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, September 2020. Both of these documents state that shared use should not be applied and that distinct tracks for cyclists should be made. The Society has made clear its objection to those proposals.

Overall, HDC and Clive Burley should be congratulated on their efforts, and for enabling meaningful consultation. We hope that they will continue to listen to our comments.

Malcolm Willis

Too Intelligent for Most?

Are you aware that the Albion Way crossing adjacent to the Bishopric is a Puffin crossing? This stands for Pedestrian User-friendly Intelligent Crossing. Although it is supposedly user friendly, it is unfortunately too intelligent for many of its users, who have yet to take advantage of its capabilities.

Pedestrians generally expect crossings to follow a repetitive sequence, and are caught out when the Puffin does not have a set sequence. On Puffin crossings the relevant red and green figures are above the control box on your side of the road. They are deliberately placed so that you look towards oncoming traffic. Press the button and wait for the green figure to show. Infra-red cameras attached to the traffic light are used to detect people waiting to cross the road, so make sure that you stand within sight of the cameras, not on the other side of the traffic light column. The cameras extend the time that cars are stopped so that the elderly, those with differing abilities, or young families aren't at risk from the traffic. As long as you have started crossing whilst the green figure is showing, the traffic will be held back until you have finished crossing. This is an important safety feature.



This system also uses heat sensors to tell if pedestrians are waiting on the pavement, and can even override the red light shown to drivers if the pedestrians have quickly got to the other side. This reduces delays to motor vehicles, and improves crossing conditions for everyone by automatically varying the crossing times.

That, however, is where the intelligence of the crossing is superior to some pedestrians. There is no fixed sequence. If there are more cars coming from one direction then the lights will adjust themselves accordingly. If no one has pushed the button then the cars will continue as if there is no one waiting.

I use this crossing daily and have found it to be the most efficient crossing I have experienced. Tell the crossing you are there, and it will let you cross as quickly as it is able to. If you are sat in a queue of traffic, it will let you move as quickly as it can. Pedestrians, seeing cars driving northwards come to a stop, often assume it is safe to cross. They don't realise that unless the button has been pushed traffic in a southward direction will continue to flow. Anyone who has started to cross when the figure is red will be trapped in the middle of the crossing.

What is confusing is that if you are crossing Guildford Road between the kebab shop and the Thai restaurant it is different. Here are two crossings, and the lights always follow the same sequence. Consequently, pedestrians know what to expect and therefore feel happier with it. They also know the time gap between phases, and when crossing from the middle, southwards, cross quickly between phases whilst the figure is red. They may be alright, but other pedestrians following without checking could endanger themselves.

HDC, as part of their Public Realm Strategy, will be looking at the Puffin crossing. I hope it is kept as it is certainly the most efficient way of controlling the traffic. They just need to educate the pedestrians how to use it, but that's not easy. When the crossing was initially installed instructions were fixed to the posts, but people didn't read them. Recent research shows that between thirty and seventy per cent of people do not read instructions. The older you are, the more likely it is that you will stop and read. It does not need to be complicated. A sign saying 'Push Button to Cross' just might make a difference.

Editor

Cycling Wheels Grinding Fine

In 2015 the 80th anniversary of the first driving test occurred and this year it will be the 90th anniversary of the first issue of the Highway Code. There must be at least one edition of this drab but useful manual lying in every house in the land, usually as thumbed and dogeared before the dreaded test as it is ignored afterwards. At the time of the first test, road deaths numbered 7,000 a year with only 2.7million drivers on the roads. Today the number of drivers has risen ten-fold to 27 million and deaths have fallen to about 1,800 p.a. That's about a forty times improvement in terms of road deaths per number of drivers.

The Highway Code is now in its seventeenth edition and further revisions are currently under review. Circumstances have changed greatly and so too have social attitudes. The emphasis used to be on vehicles, mainly private cars, and how other members of the public would interact with them. Today there's too many for comfort.

The changes to the Highway Code now being pondered reverse the trend of past decades and begin with a very different perspective. The question asked is who are the most vulnerable road users and what can be done to protect them better? That means the starting point is pedestrians, then cyclists and other non-motorised users of the highway. Consultations are continuing and revisions to the Code will eventually be made; whether for better or worse according to motorists is yet to be seen.

Closer to home, here in Horsham, we too are affected by these alterations in national outlook. The very shape of our inner roads reveals the past solutions to traffic problems. Albion Way is a brief section of dual carriageway slap in the middle of town, cutting through some earlier roads and isolating the centre from the park and beyond. At the time it was built there were no other dual carriageway roads for miles, yet the thinking was that eventually all roads would be built to this standard. That hasn't materialised but traffic flows have relentlessly increased to where we could seriously wonder whether Albion Way was all a rather avoidable error, based on unreachable forecasts.

At the end of last year Albion Way was the site of a rather hurried experiment, devoting more space to those vulnerable road users who are central to the revised thinking on priorities. The experimental cycle lane, which appeared to have been constructed in haste with unexpected funds from



Mark Treasure

central government, caused numerous letters of complaint to the pages of the West Sussex County Times and flooded social media. From the evidence on the ground there seemed to be much disruption for marginal gain.

That was unfortunate as it discredited the idea of making special pathways for users such as pedestrians, cyclists and mobility scooters. There are many routes across and through town which could well benefit from restricted use, if upgraded appropriately. It would indeed be a pity if their implementation were hampered by the single awkward installation along Albion Way. The wheel has come full circle and it's time to plan again.

Oliver Farley

Editorial

Cycling, partly as the result of the pandemic, has received a bad name. Somewhat unfairly. Pedestrians complain about people cycling on pavements and paths, especially along West Street. Often, we don't hear the sound of the bike approaching, especially from behind. The lack of a 'ding,' letting you know a cyclist is coming leads to many near accidents. But should all cyclists be tarred with the same brush? Do we think all motorists are dangerous because of the behaviour of those who speed? The majority of cyclists and motorists put safety first.

During the pandemic, with greatly reduced numbers of vehicles on the road, the idea of pop-up cycle lanes was developed. I witnessed many of these in London and they were a good idea. I am not a cyclist, but I could see the sense they made and that the cyclists and motorists cohabited with little problem.

Months later the West Sussex scheme came along. It worked well in some parts, particularly areas of Shoreham, but others were a disaster. The one in Horsham was set up to fail from the start. Initially there was supposed to be a lane north and south along Albion Way for cyclists AND pedestrians. The intention was to give sufficient space for social distancing and to encourage a reduction in the number of cars. However, when it was installed, it was in one direction only and did not include pedestrians. So, it was safe to ride in a northward direction, but not south. HDC made the decision to only have one route, and in doing so put it on the most challenging side. The northwards route crossed seven junctions, with cars having to potentially cut across the cycle lane. This was bound to cause problems. If it had been on the southwards section there would have been only one place where cars would have to cut across. Should a cyclist be guided on a safe route on one side of the road, and a free for all on the other?

Understandably cycling did not increase along these routes as there were safer alternatives. Equally, the motorists were frustrated by the traffic queues. Social media was full of anti-cycling comments and this perpetuated the belief that the road is there for the car user and anyone else is a nuisance. Oliver's article 'Cycling Wheels' raises the importance of routes for all users and, following my editorial, is an article on 'Carfax Cycling' by Francis Vernon. Please read the three pieces and let me know your opinion. How can we encourage cyclists, motorists and pedestrians to cohabit safely? What do you think of the Cycling Forum's idea? Do you have any alternative suggestions? Please share your thoughts with me via editor@horshamsociety.org and I will pass them onto Francis. They may well help to inform HDC and the Public Realm Strategy.

Making the Carfax Work for Everyone

The Carfax is the heart of Horsham, and a special place to be both preserved and enhanced for the future. It's a people-friendly area, with low, one-way traffic flows, easy to access bus stops and a 20mph speed limit.

Here's an idea which could make the Carfax better still without major changes, and help keep us more active and healthy at the same time – let's allow two-way (or 'contraflow') cycling through the Carfax one-way system, and also have a cycle route into the Carfax from Albion Way via Medwin Walk.

This would make bike journeys across the town centre easier and safer from Chart Way, the park and London Road, thus attracting more people into town. Keeping bikes on the road or on a marked cycle lane means that pedestrians will know where to expect bikes to be. And if we can make more journeys into town by bike, we can keep active and healthy for longer, whilst keeping the town more vibrant.

What changes would be needed?



On the road, low traffic speeds and volumes mean you don't need a fully segregated cycle lane, and bikes could safely travel two-way as happens now in Horsham on Park Terrace East. But you would need changes at some key places – the corner at the Crown Pub and the junction of South Street and Blackhorse Way for example.

Medwin Walk is well used by pedestrians (including older people going to Park Surgery) and is also a key entry point to the Carfax for people arriving by bike from London Road or the park. It's wide enough to cater for bikes and walkers, but would need some careful design to meet the different needs of older people, children, those with disabilities – everyone, however they're travelling.

Maybe the answer is a cycle track on the side by Boots, in a contrasting colour to the pavement, so if you're on foot you know where to expect bikes to be. And of course the junction at the north end would need changing.

What changes would be needed on the ground? People will need to be aware of the change, so signs and markings showing

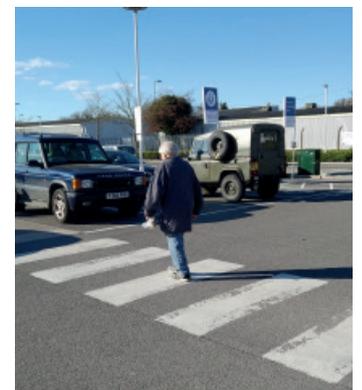
two-way cycling would be needed at either end, and at corners like that beside Barclays Bank.

The Crown pub corner is quite wide, but vehicles tend to swing across the inside of the bend. Having bollards 2m out from the pavement would keep southbound cyclists safe here.



The busy junction of West Street, Middle Street and South Street could have an 'informal zebra crossing' (i.e. zebra crossing lines without the Belisha beacons, as often seen in car parks) to give greater pedestrian priority at this point.

At the Blackhorse Way/South Street junction buses swing right across the road when turning the corner, making it unpleasant for people on the pavement by the estate agents, and also a possible conflict for southbound bikes. A simple solution could be to change the road priority so that traffic from Blackhorse Way would give way at this point, so drivers would need to slow down and look carefully before making the turn.





Medwin Walk is a key cycling and walking route into Carfax from Albion Way, London Road and the park. It's wide enough for a designated cycle track, preferably on the side by Boots so it doesn't pass close to the shop doors.

Below is an English example of a cycle track in a pedestrianised area in Salford. Would a contrasting colour and low kerbs work well in Medwin Walk for visually impaired people, amongst others?



Catriona Swanson

could be simply to remove the hedge and add a dropped kerb and bollards to give cycle access to the Medwin Way service road.

Changes such as these are not major in terms of highway engineering and could be put in quickly if there was the political and public will to do so. Making it safer and more convenient to cycle will bring more people into the town centre and help keep us active and healthy for longer – and now's the time to do it.

Francis Vernon
Horsham Society member and
Chair of Horsham District Cycling Forum

Horsham Society 2021 AGM

On Wednesday 7th April, not being able to meet in person due to Covid 19 regulations, we held our first Zoom AGM. This was very well attended. Fifty-nine members logged in through their digital devices, and a further nine members shared their screen with another household member. I am pleased to say that the gremlins kept away and things ran smoothly. Indeed, following the meeting, I received a number of emails thanking us for a successful meeting.

A brief report was given on the matters arising from the 2019 meeting, covering four points. The issue of the Groundsman's Cottage has progressed no further as there are legal discussions underway over vehicular access. Relationships with Horsham District Council were covered, and Horsham Society continues to be consulted on a number of issues. However, it does appear that in certain areas a decision has already been made. The third point related to 'Spy Horsham'. The first print run of one thousand copies had been sold, or distributed to local children, and a second edition of five hundred copies was printed just before we entered lockdown. It is hoped that the changes to Horsham Museum will not impact on the new edition. Finally, the Society are still looking for an Editor, as well as someone to help with the Website and Social Media.

Following this, the Chairman gave his report for 2020-2021, previously published in the March Newsletter. It has been a steep learning curve as to how best to cope with the events of the last twelve months. The Executive has continued to work hard, and faces the major challenges being presented regarding HDC development proposals for existing town amenities. Working in conjunction with Keep Rookwood Green and the Friends of Horsham Park, Horsham Society is submitting an application for Rookwood to be registered as an Asset of Community Value.

The Chairman thanked members for completing the 2020 Questionnaire. This provided valuable information about our members' interests and has enabled the Executive to reflect on how best to develop the Society.

Our Treasurer, David Clark, presented the accounts which were duly adopted. These were running as expected with no concerns.

Following the election of the Executive, the proposed changes to the 2015 Constitution were all adopted.

The Members' Forum at the end of the meeting raised two key points. It was suggested that the Drill Hall should be registered as a listed building. The members asked the Planning Sub-Committee to investigate the possibility. The second point, which was very strongly supported, was that as Horsham District Council has paid little attention to the wishes of Horsham residents, we would be better off if we had a Town Council. The Executive was tasked to look into this.

Malcolm Willis

From the Planning Committee

Smith & Western – DC/20/0614:

This application was refused by HDC. The client has instructed a new architect, who has kindly forwarded a copy of the revised proposals to Horsham Society for comment. They are a vast improvement on the original submission. The building now comprises two blocks, thus reducing the massing and incorporates a pitched roof, with accommodation within the roof space. Elevational treatments, whilst something of a pastiche, are more in keeping with the street scene. We have passed comment on the proposals and hope that some if not all will be incorporated into the revised design.

Land North of Horsham – DC/21/0066:

Proposals have been submitted for the construction of 197 houses and associated parking, being the initial residential phase of this project. The design is uninspiring and the percentage of affordable housing proposed is non-compliant. Furthermore, there is no indication of Green Energy saving, or provision for the charging of electric vehicles. Whilst Horsham Society have objected to the application, undoubtedly HDC will 'rubber stamp' and approve the scheme, which will lead to yet another unimaginative development in the Horsham area.

Sussex House – DC/21/0236:

Revisions to this project are being submitted on a regular basis to HDC. One of the latest proposals is the addition of an extra floor, which would create 8 additional flats. Horsham Society have objected to these proposals.

Kaya Cafe – DC/21/037:

This was a retrospective application, to which Horsham Society objected. Revised drawings have now been issued and which have been circulated to the members of the Planning Sub Committee for comment, before we respond to HDC.

Newhouse Farm – DC/20/0470:

This project for the construction of 473 house, to which Horsham Society objected, and which was refused by HDC, is to go to appeal. This will take the form of a hearing. We have contacted the Appeal Inspector and advised that we stand by our original objections.

Rookwood:

Objections continue to be raised by Horsham Society to this proposed development. Generally, these take the form of letters or articles in the WSCT and our newsletters. Horsham District Council have been made very aware of our concerns and overall objection.

David Griffiths

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The Executive Committee usually meets at 7.30pm on the first Wednesday of each month in the Manor Room behind the Causeway Barn. However, until further notice these meetings will be held via Zoom.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Annual Membership: £10 per household

Family Life Membership: £150 per household

Postage is added to the above rates at £7 per annum for out-of-town members

www.horshamsociety.org

Newsletter correspondence should be sent to the Editor:

Malcolm Willis, 19 Curzon Avenue, Horsham, RH12 2LA email: editor@horshamsociety.org. Other matters should be referred to the Hon Secretary. The Newsletter is published monthly except August and opinions in it, whether the Editor's or contributors', are not necessarily those of the Society.

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