



West Grinstead Parish Council, The Parish Office Village Hall, High Street, Partridge Green, West Sussex. RH13 8HX

Cowfold Parish Council, 117 Acorn Avenue, Cowfold, West Sussex, RH13 8RT

Nuthurst Parish Council, 107 Morris Drive, Billingshurst, West Sussex RH14 9ST

25 November 2019

Dear

### **Proposed development of 3,500 houses at Weald Cross (Buck Barn)**

The Parish Councils of West Grinstead, Cowfold and Nuthurst represent some 7,000 people. The Councils have taken the unusual step of writing to you jointly to ensure that officers of HDC and elected members are left in absolutely no doubt about our communities' opposition to "Wealdcross" becoming part of the District's Strategic Plan.

This opposition emanates from both individual and communal anxieties. To our knowledge, at least one householder has been told by Thakeham Homes that they intend to buy her house in order to knock it down. Communal opposition arises because this development would have very serious repercussions on the lives of all the people living in our three parishes.

### *The already over-burdened road system.*

Many of our communities' concerns centre on the impact of "Wealdcross" on the already over-burdened road system in the Low Weald. Adding potentially another 7 to 8 thousand cars to local roads seems senseless. Commuter rates within the District are already very high and there is no doubt that the vast majority of people who purchase/rent a "Wealdcross" house would need to travel to either the Gatwick Triangle, or London to work. There is no nearby rail station, poor public transport and therefore, heavy car usage is inevitable and feared.

Cowfold is already particularly badly affected by the high pollution levels that result from traffic queues at its roundabouts. The future respiratory health of the 120 children in St Peter's School near to the A272 is of concern, as well as the polluting effect on the fabric of its ancient church and the environment nearby. No mitigating measures suggested by Thakeham Homes will even begin to address the problems of our already inadequate road system. Thakeham Homes have no powers to institute 'bus services, increase train services or enlarge station car parks.

The proposed "improvements" to the A24/A272 junction are widely seen as unnecessary and unwanted; "unnecessary" because the traffic lights already control the traffic flow satisfactorily with very few delays; and "unwanted" because any flyover/large roundabout would simply cause problems elsewhere.

Completely free flowing traffic would increase the dangers faced by traffic wishing to access the A24 from the many side roads as there would no longer be pauses in the A24 traffic (caused by the traffic lights). This is significant because traffic from these side roads would be trying to access the A24 along which vehicles can travel up to 70mph.

Additionally, the removal of the traffic lights at Buck Barn would increase traffic congestion at the already mentioned Cowfold roundabouts, and at Washington.

If any road improvements are needed, then an extensive and co-ordinated programme of works across the whole of the Low Weald needs to be instituted, not just at one location.

### *Viability and deliverability of the proposal*

Our communities are very aware of the site's terrain at "Wealdcross". It has inherent constraints, ones that have not been acknowledged to date. These raise the costs of developing the site and cause local people to question the viability and deliverability of Thakeham Homes' proposal. The high voltage electric pylons and overhead wires present just one constraint. The land below and near to the pylons cannot be built upon, or alternatively, the electricity supply needs putting underground at an approximate cost of £7m per pylon; either way resulting in a considerable loss of profit.

The site is also constrained by the tributary to the River Adur that is subject to flooding. It is categorised as Flood Zone 3. Here again, there are sections of the site that cannot be built upon, with another loss of profit, and then there are the costs of providing flood control measures. The issue of flooding is likely to worsen, due to climate change and heavier rainfalls. However, no costs for dealing with the two constraints of the electricity pylons and flooding have ever been provided but cause us to fundamentally query the viability and deliverability of Thakeham Homes' proposal.

### *Loss of bio-diversity, views and peace*

There is an increasing awareness that time spent in the natural environment is conducive to good physical and mental health. The site, which is bounded by the Downs Link and traversed by many public rights of way, should be highly valued for that reason alone.

Indeed, it is an area well used by people living in our Parishes. They are therefore very conversant with its flora (including a field of rare orchids and veteran trees of some 600 years old), and fauna. The Sussex Wildlife Centre (SWC) has provided data showing that some 68 different species have been recorded on this site, 39 of them with important international/national designations. Altogether, the SWC have 525 records of different species at the site. The potential loss of this open countryside with its views of the South Downs, wealth of wildlife, peacefulness and benefits to peoples' health is causing much annoyance locally. Thakeham Homes assertion that fifteen years of construction on this site will result in an improved bio-diversity is seen as ridiculous.

### *Concluding remarks*

The Parish Councils trust that they have conveyed local peoples' feelings strongly to officers and elected members. They are not expecting to see what is in effect a new town built across open countryside, isolated from any other settlement, and with exceedingly poor transport links to the places where new residents might find work. They most certainly do not want to see this very unsustainable site at "Wealdcross" included in HDC's Strategic Plan.

Many people are questioning why HDC is being required to compensate for Crawley, Brighton and Worthing's shortfall in housing numbers? Increasingly, this is being seen as an unreasonable expectation by Central Government, one that is causing an enormous problem for the people who live in the District, and one that therefore should be challenged by our elected members.

However, for the time being, if the numbers of new houses need to be increased, then those sites that are more sustainable, less isolated and wreck less countryside than "Wealdcross" should be chosen.

The three Parish Councils finally conclude with this remark: the site now known as “Wealdcross” was assessed in the SHELAA less than a year ago as “Not currently developable”. This was because it could not be demonstrated that the site could “be sustainably developed and ... not cause significant harm”. The Parish Councils consider that nothing has happened in the past eleven months to change that assessment. Therefore, this site should be dropped from any further consideration for inclusion in HDC’s Strategic Plan.

Yours sincerely

West Grinstead, Cowfold and Nuthurst Parish Councils

Sent to:

Glen Chipp, Chief Executive, HDC

Barbara Childs, Director of Place, HDC

Catherine Howe, Head of Strategic Planning, HDC

All HDC Cabinet members