



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

April 2021

Dear

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

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 Buck Barn becoming part of the District's Local Plan.

Road safety and pollution

Many of our communities' concerns centre on the impact of Buck Barn on the already over-burdened road system in the Low Weald. Adding potentially another 7 to 8 thousand cars plus delivery vehicles 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 "Buck Barn" 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 causing higher levels of pollution to damage people's health. HDC should be seen to improve pollution levels and not make them worse.

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 the already inadequate road system in the Low Weald. And, please note that Thakeham Homes have no powers to institute 'bus services, increase train services or enlarge station car parks in order to reduce car movements.

Thakeham Homes' 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 system would simply shift problems elsewhere as the following example shows.

The removal of the traffic lights would create completely free flowing traffic along the A24. This in turn would increase the dangers faced by traffic wishing to access it from the many side roads because there would no longer be safe breaks in the A24 traffic. Instead, traffic from these side roads would face the problem of a continuous flow of traffic on the A24 with vehicles travelling up to 70mph.

Additionally, the removal of the traffic lights at Buck Barn would merely increase traffic congestion elsewhere at the 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. Addressing just the Buck Barn junction is nonsense.

Ecology and Knepp Castle

The Buck Barn development completely undermines HDC's "Wilder Horsham District" initiative as the following example illustrates.

The Knepp Castle re-wilding initiative to make the estate profitable is nationally and internationally renowned. Now, with the proposed development of Buck Barn on its doorstep housing perhaps up to ten thousand people, Knepp Castle faces being over-run with people using its public footpaths, inadvertently under-mining the estate's re-wilding efforts.

The proposed Buck Barn development also dramatically blocks off any attempt to link the Knepp Castle estate to St Leonard's Forest. Yet, if such an ecological corridor could be established, then HDC might use it to achieve an important national designation.

Knepp Castle has proven that re-wilding can be economically viable whilst at the same time improving the well-being of the environment and local people. HDC need to support Knepp Castle by removing Buck Barn from its Local Plan. Inevitably, and especially in view of its "Wilder Horsham District" initiative, there will be widespread criticism of HDC if it fails to support Knepp Castle's important ecological venture.

In view of the scale of destruction caused by the Buck Barn development, 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 do not want to see the highly innovative scheme at Knepp Castle wrecked and they most certainly do not want to see this very unsustainable site at Buck Barn included in HDC's Local Plan.

The three Parish Councils finally conclude with this remark: the Buck Barn site was assessed in the SHELAA three years 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 three years to change that assessment. Therefore, we three Parish Councils urge District Councillors to eliminate this very unwise site from HDC's Local 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 District Councillors