

# Rookwood Development Concerns

## Introduction

The regulation 18 draft Horsham District Local Plan, published for consultation by Horsham District Council (HDC) in February 2020, identified Rookwood Golf Course as a potential strategic site for the development of 1,100 dwellings. The golf course site is adjacent to Warnham Local Nature Reserve (the Reserve) and there is obvious concern about the impact that the development will have on the Reserve and the surrounding area.

HDC placed details their proposed Rookwood development into the public domain at the end of March as a response to the Local Plan consultation. This took the form of a master plan<sup>1</sup> together with seven supporting technical documents covering transport, environment and ecology.



Figure 1 - Proposed Rookwood Development

In addition, HDC commissioned an ecology impact report<sup>2</sup> on the Rookwood development from an independent consultancy, “The Ecology Group”, which was circulated to interested third parties at the end of May 2020.

The report’s terms of reference were to: “Assess the potential impact on Warnham Mill Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and Horsham Riverside Walk from the proposed development of Rookwood Golf Course, Warnham, Horsham, West Sussex, RH12 3RR.”

This document brings together information from the development proposal and the independent ecology report; its conclusions are drawn purely from information provided by HDC.

<sup>1</sup> <https://strategicplanning.horsham.gov.uk/consult.ti/LocalPlanReview/viewRepresentation?repid=11069205>

<sup>2</sup> [www.keeprookwoodgreen.org/s/rookwoodecologyreport.pdf](http://www.keeprookwoodgreen.org/s/rookwoodecologyreport.pdf)

# Transport Concerns

## Rookwood Road Access

The Appendix F - Transport feasibility Report provides a scale drawing of the proposed new Warnham Road access roundabout. This is shown passing right through the middle of Warnham Nature Reserve’s car park splitting it in two and destroying its only entrance. No consideration is given in these documents to how the Reserve will continue to function without a car park.



Figure 2 - New Rookwood Roundabout

Loss of access is especially important since HDC is the Reserve’s statutory Local Nature Reserve protector, and is currently making a grant-funded enhancement to the Reserve through the Discovery Hub and Garden project. Removing the Reserve’s car park will reduce the number of visitors preventing this project from delivering its proposed benefits to the public.

## Bus access from Redford Avenue

The Appendix F - Transport Feasibility Report provides a scale drawing of the proposed new bus access from Redford Avenue into the southern Rookwood land. This shows the access road, north of Saxon Crescent, truncating the Redford Avenue Football pitch and damaging this significant public space.

To get to the development, which is to the west, the road will:

- cut through two areas of “Highest Ecological Importance” shown in Appendix C - Environment and Technical Constraints Plan
- pass through a flood zone identified in Appendix C - Environment and Technical Constraints Plan
- bridge two rivers in the most sensitive part of the site: Red River and Boldings Brook
- disrupt the Riverside Walk by passing across it



### Key

White - Football pitch outline  
Grey - Possible route towards the development

### Junction Layout

From Appendix F - Transport

Figure 3 - Bus Access from Redford Avenue

The bus access will clearly render the football field unusable and divide one large green space into two smaller portions. The HDC documents provide no proposal for the current football field should this bus access be built.

## Endangering the Nature Reserve

The following image overlays the proposed building layout given in the masterplan on the ecology risk heat map from the Ecology Consultancy's independent report.

This shows that significant building is planned to the east of the land adjacent to the Reserve where building is deemed to be of highest ecological risk to the Reserve.

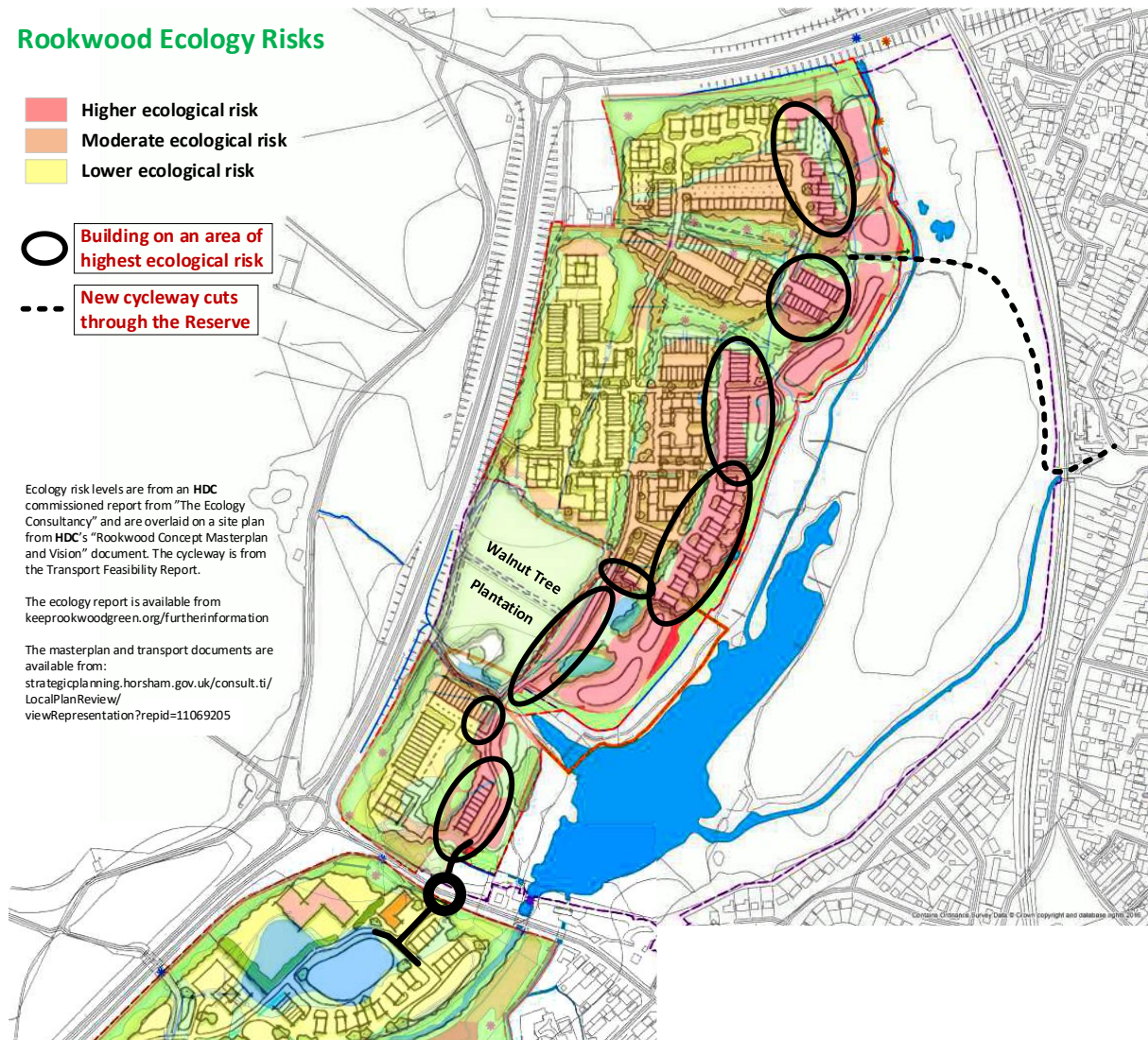


Figure 4 - Endangering the Reserve

Building is not planned in just one or two areas but on almost every area that represents a higher risk to the Reserve.

A cycle path is proposed between the northern part of the Rookwood development and Gorringes Brook. This would split the Reserve in two and generate constant daytime and night-time disturbance to resident wildlife.

The northern access road cuts through several ecological high risk areas that are also identified in HDC's Environmental and Technical Constraints Plan (Figure 5). It is particularly damaging where it cuts through Local Nature Reserve land immediately to the south and east of the Walnut Tree Plantation.

## Building on Areas of High Ecological Importance

The following image overlays the proposed building layout given in the masterplan on the Appendix C Environmental and Technical Constraints Plan. For clarity, key intra-development roads have been highlighted in black and areas of concern are outlined in white.

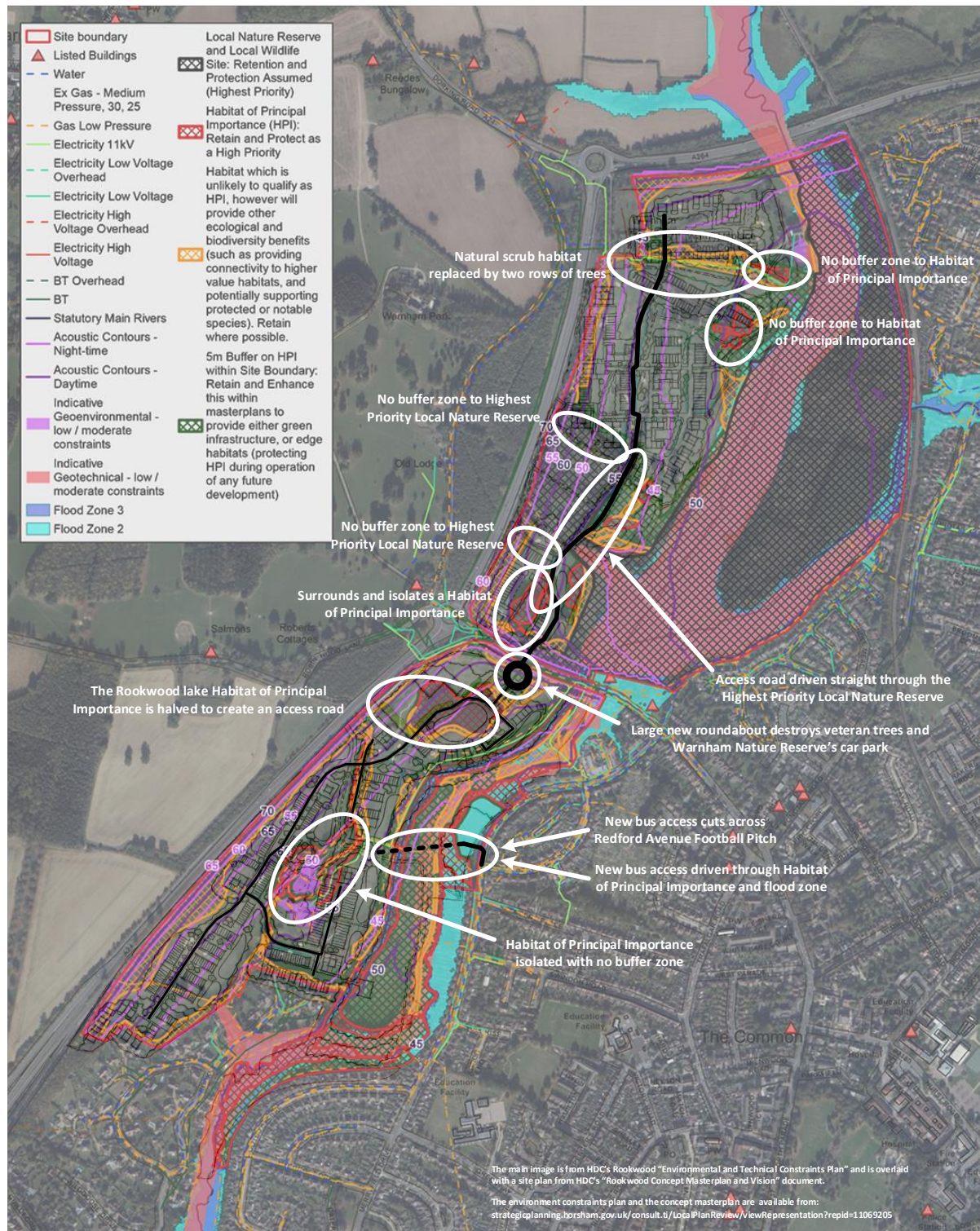


Figure 5 - Building on Areas of High Ecological Importance

A number of "Habitat of Principal Importance" areas are identified in this map, but in many cases, these are built on, destroyed by the access road or have no buffer zone to protect them from surrounding urbanisation.

Of particular note is the way that the access road, north of the roundabout, passes through land identified as “Local Nature Reserve and Wildlife Site - Retention and Protection Assumed - Highest Priority”. This is the most protected land within the proposed development and yet this classification is disregarded in order to provide the access road.

The design does not always provide buffer zones of adequate size despite HDC’s Ecology Opportunities report section 3.6.3 recommending that buffer zones should be “as deep as the canopy is high”.

## Conclusion

HDC’s policies and annual plan contain clear and positive statements about protecting the environment, however, it seems that maximising housing density has been HDC’s primary principle when constructing this proposal.

The HDC proposal shows that developing Rookwood will:

- damage areas identified as being of ecological importance
- build on areas that must be preserved in order to protect the Reserve
- reduce the overall size of the Rookwood / Reserve ecosystem by two thirds and thereby damage the Reserve
- isolate the Reserve by destroying its wildlife corridors
- diminish public access to the Reserve

Sussex Wildlife Trust identified the Reserve as “one of the jewels in Horsham’s crown”<sup>3</sup>, however, the Rookwood proposal does not reflect HDC’s duty of protection to the Reserve and will inevitably lead to the Reserve’s long-term decline for the reasons cited above.

The best way to protect the Reserve is to retain Rookwood as green space and not to build on this land.

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<sup>3</sup> Henri Brocklebank - Sussex Wildlife Trust <https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/news/wilder-horsham-district>