



by David Griffiths

Horsham Society

Should Covid-19 delay planning?

Outline planning application DC/20/0470 submitted by Fairfax Properties for land South of Newhouse Farm was validated by Horsham District Council on March 5.

Comments regarding the application were due to be lodged with HDC by March 30 and the application has to be determined by June 4. However, the ability of all sections of the community to function in a meaningful manner has been prevented by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The application submitted by Fairfax Properties proposes that the site be developed for 473 residential dwellings. The site is not included for future development in the local plan, which has been produced by HDC. Furthermore, the site which comprises two fields and an area of woodland, is sited on the Northern side of Horsham Town, where it only abuts the town settlement by approximately 200 metres, the balance of the site is separated from Horsham by an area of informal open space.

The proposed site is situated in an area of outstanding natural beauty, and furthermore contains an area of ancient



Plans for land at Newhouse Farm

semi-natural woodland, as designated on Natural England's Ancient Woodland Inventory. The site is also bisected by a historic routeway (public footpath), of which there is a similar one following the Southern boundary. A major concern has been expressed by the Environment Agency regarding the connectivity of the site to the foul drainage network. West Sussex

County Council, which will be advising on a number of matters including connectivity of the development to the road network, has advised it has been unable to visit the site location due to Covid-19 measures.

Sustainability must form an integral part of all new applications, if we are to improve the conditions under which we live. The design and access statement, which forms a part of the submitted package alleges that the site is in a sustainable location, being adjacent to a road. Clearly little thought has been given to this important element of the application, to which the writer has clearly only paid lip service!

We must consider the continued violation of green field sites to satisfy the alleged needs for new housing. Under a new formula which the Government has imposed, Horsham District Council will be obliged to construct 965 houses per year. This figure is made up of 600 units, based upon population and household growth, and the balance of 365 units is imposed as an 'affordability adjustment', as the price of housing in Horsham is excessively high in comparison to wages! The Government has committed to constructing 300,000 houses nationally per annum by the mid 2020s.

However, this commitment may not be evenly split over the UK, and as a result the call upon HDC to produce new housing may be excessive.

Due to restrictions imposed by Covid-19, the Government has advised the Planning Inspectorate to handle appeals online in a 'virtual' situation.

However, such action must not be applied to planning applications such as Newhouse Farm, where earlier comments highlight a number of matters, which will require site visits or meetings. Surely it would be undemocratic for HDC to decide the fate of this application by June 4, until limitations imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic have been relaxed sufficiently, to enable the public to make physical visits or attend meetings.

The Horsham Society is concerned about the past, present and future of the town. It seeks to promote good planning and design for the built environment and open spaces. Membership of the Horsham Society is open to anyone who shares these concerns. For more information, visit the website www.horshamsociety.org or phone 01403 267712