



The countryside charity
Sussex

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Councillors Paul Clarke and David Skipp
Horsham District Council

By email

30 June 2021

Dear Councillors Clarke and Skipp

Potential for development near the Knepp Estate at Buck Barn West Grinstead (Weald Cross) to damage Sussex's nature recovery network and jeopardise the Horsham District's own Wilder Horsham project

I am deeply concerned by the major proposal to develop land near the Knepp Estate that will cut across important aspects of the wildlife network around Horsham. I know the Council is keen to support this network as it will bring great benefit to both residents and biodiversity. The Council makes clear its interest in these matters in the first few paragraphs of the document on the Wilder Horsham project where it is partnering with the Sussex Wildlife Trust. I believe the nature conservation value of much of the Buck Barn land is known to the Trust so developing this land would surely run contrary to the aims of this new constructive partnership.

The proposed major development would likely adversely affect the benefits already accruing to people's wellbeing and health from use of the routes towards the South Downs. If the land near Knepp remains undeveloped these benefits will likely progressively accrue over decades and do much to improve health. Health and social care costs could be reduced in consequence of the Horsham population being more connected with nature.

I am aware that the developer intends to invest in biodiversity net gain and has a high target figure. But, as laudable as this concept is, given the time it will likely take to deliver it, it cannot be known with any certainty whether gains will exceed losses especially as Knepp is nearby. It seems inevitable that in the short to medium term, partly because of the amount of tree felling that accompanies infrastructure and other works (over which neither the developer nor the Council will have much control), losses will outweigh gains. I am particularly concerned about net gain in this instance as some of the developer's preliminary proposals seem inconsistent with the situation that already exists on the ground. Statements about ancient woodland, hedges and how people will be helped to interact with nature all seem to be insufficiently clear and suggest some elements of the land have been misunderstood.

Knepp and its associated nature network is too valuable a resource to put at risk by development on a greenfield site that has poor sustainable transport links and which would consume land that

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could otherwise be used to deliver a range of ecosystem services and whose natural capital would be enhanced by the links to Knepp as these develop over time.

We need land to grow food, store carbon, manage water flows and provide wildlife habitats and the kind of landscape we can all enjoy. We need to maintain as much flexibility as we can in land management in order to tackle climate change. Building on land takes that land out of any other use.

It would appear from various surveys and election results that increasing numbers of people value the time they can spend in green and open spaces rich in biodiversity, recognise the need to manage land sustainably and feel that developing open countryside (especially in the vicinity of a nature gems like Knepp and ancient woodland) is not what they want to see happen.

I realise the pressure that planning authorities are under to meet housing targets. But, as the government itself says, the figures are only a starting point for a reasoned discussion. It seems to me deciding not to develop the land in question could be supported by a strong case linked to developing a nature recovery network around Horsham that has Knepp as a vital node. I hope this is the kind of approach you will be able to take in your forthcoming meetings.

Yours sincerely,



Dan Osborn,
Chair CPRE Sussex

cc Roger Smith, CPRE Sussex Horsham District lead
Kia Trainor, Director CPRE Sussex
Charlie Burrell, Knepp