



Highworth Town Council

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Councillor Gary Sumner
Cabinet Member for Strategic Infrastructure, Transport & Planning
Civic Offices
Euclid Street
Swindon
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2 August 2021

Dear Councillor Sumner,

Re: Public Consultation

Highworth Town Council has been inundated with questions from the Public regarding the inclusion of the Old Golf Course site within the Emerging Local Plan.

The questions that Highworth Town Council were unable to answer have been collated into one document and attached to this letter, please respond as a matter of urgency.

This document along with your response will be made public due to the high volume of interest.

Yours sincerely

D. Rose

Deanne Rose
Town Clerk

CC: Phil Smith
Councillor Richard Williams
Councillor Julie Murphy

Public Questions

1. Before destroying an area that has already been designated for recreation by Swindon Borough Council, why do they plan to ruin this extremely well used area that is also haven for wildlife and is also vital for wellbeing and the environment. There are numerous Brownfield sites that should be used before Greenfield and Swindon Borough Council have a responsibility to use them.
2. The Town is struggling with the existing road network. What is Swindon Borough Council proposing to do before increasing the number of houses & with it, extra vehicles, to enable the roads to cope?
3. We have benefitted enormously from this open, green, and increasingly bio-diverse breathing space. Last year, the space kept us healthy and brought us endless pleasure and comfort during testing times. We were also thrilled to observe an ever-growing range of flora and fauna, including but not limited to barn owls, kestrels and kites, woodpeckers, Jays, meadow pipits, hares, rabbits, moles, mice and foxes, butterflies, dragonflies and bees as well as a wonderful range of wildflowers, from poppies to wild orchids.

I believe we are not alone in having witnessed the 're-wilding' that has taken place since the Golf Course closed, and I understand that people have also seen bats on the site! I do not object to house building, especially truly affordable housing. All that being said, they also need green spaces, especially those that are a haven for animals and insects and help to create a cleaner, healthier Town. The site is mentioned on the Woodland Trust Website, and it is recognised that greenery in urban spaces lessens the impacts of climate change as well as helping to improve air quality.

There are so many social, psychological, and physical health benefits for people who have access to green spaces, including stress and anxiety reduction and a lowered risks of depression as well as greater mental and physical wellbeing. We are privileged to have this space, but we are also it's guardians. Would the space not serve us better as a natural, wild space, perhaps with areas for specific community activities, for example a community gardening scheme, forest schools, ecological education, green gyms etc?

I believe this is an environmental fulcrum moment for Highworth and an opportunity for the Town Council to make a difference to the Town, its people, and the fight against climate change in line with the climate emergency Highworth Town Council had the foresight to declare in 2020.

4. Swindon Borough Council (in their Local Plan Review) appear to have allocated a projected supply of houses in Highworth of 866 between now and 2036 (ie 15 years away). Why is Highworth expected to accommodate this significant no. and is this in addition to the housing already approved or in the pipeline at Redlands (70 homes) and on Shrivenham Road (250 homes) and Wrag Barn (50 homes)? And now we hear there is a proposal to build 350 homes on the "old" Golf Course!

With continuous building Highworth is likely to lose its valuable Market Town atmosphere. In the document reference is made to increasing employment however TS Tech is about to close with the loss of over 700 jobs. Has this been taken into account? (Highworth is also likely to be adversely affected by the closure of Honda.) Many people already living in Highworth commute (in some cases long distances) and this is not appropriate if the UK Government is serious about reducing carbon emissions.

Does Highworth have adequate infrastructure (e.g., doctors, schools, road access) to support the increased population in these proposed houses and, if not, how will this be organised/arranged?

Is Swindon using Highworth to bolster its housing quota?

Some of the recent approved new housing in Highworth is in areas outside the existing Town boundary, i.e., on green field sites. In general, surely, it's better to build on brown field sites

and there are plenty of them locally (e.g., parts of South Marston Industrial Estate). Cats Brain Farm (a recent proposed building project) is near the outskirts of Swindon but is on a greenfield site and not adjacent to other housing. This could potentially lead to housing development scattered all the way along the A361 between Swindon and Highworth.

5. I enjoy the accessibility and wonderful open feel of the old Golf Course. It is one of those areas which feels restorative to health and wellbeing, something which we sorely need just now. It is beautiful there, with stunning views across the countryside, the sort of place which should be cherished as a resource for the local community and visitors. While it is true that Highworth is surrounded by countryside, it is not quite the same as visiting the old Golf Course where Mums and Dads can meet up with children, people can picnic, jog, walk their dogs etc without feeling on top of one another and generally have the space to think and unwind. The old Golf Course delivers that in spades! To shove such a wonderful gift under roads and houses would, in my opinion, be a total travesty. As it is Highworth is becoming more and more busy traffic wise. With several housing developments now under way, this can surely only get worse.
6. The plan states that 30% would be allocated to 350 dwellings. Do we know if the 350 dwellings make up the 30% and then the proposed school would be part of this 30% OR would this be dwelling only and then the school would eat into the remaining 70%?
7. Will 35% be allocated to affordable housing?
8. We are not averse to development and appreciate housing is a requirement, however, can Swindon Borough Council please look at alternative locations to suggest forward to prevent this space being built on. Roundhill Mead although impact views would not remove an essential recreational space. What other spaces could be used instead of this site that would offer housing opportunity but not at the detriment of this green recreational space.
9. How can we guarantee the planned 70% remains as protected land? Ideally becomes common land. How does Swindon Borough Council plan to protect this space for the long term and prevent any further development?
10. Why can't Northview School be utilised rather than build another School on the Golf Course?
11. Where will access to the development be built? Cricklade road or off the new Redlands roundabout?
12. What additional sports facilities and enhancements will be provided to Highworth by the developers? 4G football pitches?
13. How will the already congested Cricklade road be managed with an additional 350 houses?
14. What type of housing is planned? What % is affordable housing, town houses, can we ensure it's only 2 storey homes and not townhouses at 3 stories.
15. Will the allotments or current football pitches be affected, or the road widened and losing the car park space either side of football field current entrance?
16. Greenspace and wildlife loss – Can we consider this area to be a wildlife nature park, resource for education, rewilding project, any development and removal of wildlife, plants, trees, hedges will take over 20 years, even a generation to grow and replace or if developed on this could be lost forever.
17. Climate change commitments – 350 houses release around 2.5 tonne of carbon each year, in heating alone. What are the environmental plans to make the houses meet high environmental standards?
18. The development could also arguable add an estimated 500 cars to an already congested Cricklade or Redlands Road. With the development also happening at Blunsdon this will only increase at the Highworth traffic lights and cause queues down to Hampton. The volume of houses being built in Blunsdon needs to be considered as part of this development as it will increase traffic from Cricklade road all the way into Blunsdon.
19. The proposed siting of this development is ill-considered: it is on an open greenfield site used by many. We have often seen Deer, rabbits, badgers, and bats on the land when

walking. What steps are you taking to protect these animals / protected species and maintain the current environmental benefits of having open rural areas? What green spaces will residents of Highworth have left to use for recreation purposes? The open spaces in Highworth are one of the main reasons we chose to live in the Town.

20. The Old Golf Course is used as a walking field by many. It's a space for people to switch off and enjoy a 'breathing space' away from the hustle and bustle of the town and busyness of day-to-day life. Highworth is already being over developed, Redland's site phase 1 and 2, Wrag View 50 homes, 250 + dwellings on land adjacent to Wrag Barn on Shrivenham Road, 75/80 new dwellings proposed on land behind Wrag View (adjacent to Shrivenham Road), 50 homes proposed on Wrag Barn, Pentylands development and 350 homes at Blackworth. Why is there a need to build more houses on an area that is loved and used to walk by so many? What other areas could Swindon Borough Council use instead of this site that would offer housing opportunity but not at the detriment of this green recreational space?
21. SBC have said that they will only build on 30% of the Golf Course. How can you guarantee that the planned 70% remains as protect land?
22. Why can't our old Highworth Golf Course be this side of Swindon's 'Lydiard Park'? Lydiard Park is so well used by many people daily, it hosts many different well attended events throughout the year. It has a lovely café, a great kid's playground, and woodland climbing area.
We could have the same, creating permanent areas like football, golf, pitch and putt, adventure play area etc... a place that can be used by everyone, young and old.
Why are we destroying such a beautiful habitat with concrete? More cars, more pollution, and hundreds of extra people for our small town to cater for! Does it always have to come down to money? It will be an absolute travesty to build on this land.
23. What other brownfield (such as TS Tech which is up for sale), or even green field sites have been considered rather than building on recreational ground used by the whole community.
24. If this development does go ahead what legal guarantees will there be that the remaining land will be protected for ever from development.
25. Has population migration been considered? We have lost a major employer in Swindon and the replacement warehousing will not provide the same level of employment. Nationwide is selling off many of its buildings because people are now working from home and there is no plan for this to change in the future. Many people who now work for Nationwide, don't live in Swindon.
26. How will the damage to the environment through the loss of the mature trees, wildflowers and natural habitats be mitigated.
27. Can this site be given Local Green Space Designation? It qualifies based on its beauty, recreational value, tranquillity, and richness of wildlife.
28. I am seriously concerned about the proposal for an extremely high number of houses on one of the few communities green spaces that allow a life line of freedom and opportunity to breathe in a green environment.
29. How can we guarantee 33% doesn't creep to 50% or 70%? Maybe a trim to 150 houses now or at least place them on the noisy and accessible Swindon Road. We have up to 1000 cars an hour on Cricklade road and there is no easy logical access to the Golf Course.
30. Please don't interfere with the kids football. But if we must have some extra housing, I vote Swindon Road which is easily access off the new roundabout.
31. Already the large swathes of new development and the possible large development across from Wrag Barn are impacting our road network enormously. The results from survey for Shrivenham Road impact recently predicted only a couple of extra vehicles an hour at the Swindon Road roundabout, this causes strong concerns about the accuracy and transparency of the survey.

32. I am currently part of Community Speed Watch and as such have direct accurate information on the number of vehicles within our Town. Even at 6am the number of vehicles per hour using Cricklade road is in excess of 700, this increases exponentially throughout the day with over 1000 at busy times. There is no way that we can saturate our roads with more development, this is also not considering the enormous number of excessive speed incidents that are occurring even now. Any further development with resulting road traffic will cause a serious safety issue within our Town, our present road network is not substantial enough to absorb further traffic.
33. Before part of the old Golf Course is released for development, can the remainder of the land be registered as common land?
34. I think it is inevitable that Highworth will expand, and unrealistic to expect it not to happen. But the Old Golf Course is a beautiful area which is much used by many local people as well as people from local villages and towns and even from further afield. It is an open space where people can breathe, without being hemmed in by buildings between which there are so called 'green spaces'. The land is a refuge for ground nesting birds whose habitat is shrinking year by year as well as for other birds living in the trees and hedges and other wildlife including deer, foxes, hares, bats, and a multitude of insects. It's a hunting and feeding area for raptors. Wildflowers grow there. The open vistas to the sloping hills beyond also give a sense of 'air' and wellness for the humans appreciating this precious local space. All these things cannot be replaced by manicured 'park' areas which are always secondary to the houses they're peripheral to and often end up tired and unloved. True open and semi-wild spaces such as the Old Golf Course are rare and precious. I do recognise that housing is important for any thriving Town, but I am STRONGLY opposed to the development of the Old Golf Course for housing in ANY way. I'm opposed to the 350 houses currently in review, and I don't believe that, if those houses are approved, there will not be further building on, or 'gentrification of' the open land. I think that development within Highworth should follow the carefully put together Neighbourhood Plan. Ignoring it, as is apparently happening, is bound to upset local people.
35. It seems to me that ever increasing building in the Town is already ignoring the current infrastructure like the already difficult access into and through the town due to the existing traffic pressures. Adding considerable extra traffic onto already pressured roads is a recipe for disaster.
36. New building needs to be appropriate to the Town in style and suitability. The proportion of smaller houses needs to be at least equal to, if not more than, large houses which most people at early stages of their home buying journeys cannot afford. ALL new houses/flats need to have suitable parking (and consideration to the needs of increasing EV use, seeing as legislation is changing within 10 years, should be factored in at pre-build stages). Restricting parking spaces per house doesn't result in people using public transport. It results in cars parked awkwardly all over the place, restricting access and making easy use of pavements and roads alike difficult.
37. I believe that planning decisions need to be made by people who can at least visit the site, and ideally people who live within our area - i.e., NOT only people living in Swindon, or even further afield, and they need to be consistent. The decision to turn down the application of Eastrop Barns, which is a brown field site development, while allowing 250 houses to be built right next door, is a case in point. The reasons given for the refusal of the Eastrop Barns project would apply just as much to the 250 house estate. So why is one passed, and the other not?
38. I think we need to feel that expansion of the Town is done while maintaining the Town's own 'Market Town' and historical identity, NOT fearing constantly that we are going to be absorbed into an extension of Swindon. Thus, Swindon Borough Council needs to STOP thinking of Highworth as Swindon. All towns change over time, and we need to evolve, but

we need to do it as Highworth, keeping our Town's individual identity, and not as a Swindon suburb.

39. It must be patently obvious to the Town Council that the Town's infrastructure cannot possibly support any further development around the fringes of the Town without a significant expansion of health care facilities and education services. The Town struggles even now with parking, and at times congestion, and that's without the building of the additional houses planned for Shrivensham Road, not to mention future housing planned in the Roundhill's Mead area. Such developments are totally at odds with nature conservancy or protecting the rural environment of this Historic Hilltop Town.
40. The Town rightly boasts of being 'gateway to the Cotswolds' and should therefore not become a gateway to the Swindon 'urban sprawl' that pervades all around.
41. What is the most effective way to oppose the proposed house building scheme on the Old Golf Course? You don't need me to tell you that the Golf Course was a lifeline for many during the recent lockdowns. Wildlife including Barn Owls and Woodpeckers etc. were regularly seen by many. The golf Course represents the type of green space that the government promotes, but seems reluctant to protect, and that every town requires, but without it Highworth and the people of Highworth are left with a lesser town in my opinion. I also think the argument that I've seen for rejuvenating the High Street is a poor one as Highworth has a substantial enough population that if this was the fix it would have already happened. The fact remains that the High Street is small and already struggles with sufficient parking etc.
42. The old Golf Course is an asset to the Town, providing precious and well used green space for residents. In a Town where there are already high volumes of traffic, travelling at excessive speeds (as evidenced by speed watch surveys and ongoing community speed watch), the old Golf Course provides a safe space for walking and recreation.
43. The Golf Course closed in December 2020 and is now proposed for housing. Given this background there is a low level of trust in any development plan for the Golf Course. There is public interest in maintaining the green space as an asset for the Town. Why was the assurance made in 2019 not upheld? And now that the course is closed will the Council commit to working with the community to protect the old Golf Course as an Asset of Community Value or protect through mechanism such as Fields of Trust?
44. What consideration has been given to the concerns of Highworth residents regarding this proposal?
I understand there's mention of a primary school, however is this really what we need given the closure of Northview just over ten years ago?
I genuinely feel the area has the potential to become a destination for not only Highworth residents, but also those from our surrounding communities, much like Nightingale Wood is for South Marston. Not only would this protect the space for residents but would encourage others to visit our town and its shops, pubs, and restaurants, ultimately bringing more benefits to the community in the long term than 350 new houses.
45. With the proposed changes for new housing and roads on the golf club site we have concerns. The wildlife is constantly being pushed away, destroying habitats. Where do these creatures go and how do they survive? Increased roadkill as they are forced to find new homes. What does the future hold for our wildlife?
More houses and roads equal more people and cars and pollution. To accommodate the masses, we need increased health services, recreation facilities and access to shops. Highworth will lose its uniqueness which why we chose to live here.
As an allotment tenant I talk to lots of people passing by walking their dogs. I hear the younger people enjoying the gorgeous area of the Golf Course. In fact, I was surprised how many people use the area. Do we want to stare at brick walls all around us or can we continue to enjoy the views across the fields?

Please consider all the concerns that Highworth folk have and let's keep this area safe from the changes.

46. Will there be extra supermarkets (whatever happened to Aldi?) as I can't see the co-op coping either.
47. The proposal is for 350 houses to be built on the land that used to be used as Highworth Golf Course, one of the notes in the planning document states, no more than 30% of land to be developed. Government data for 'Effective use of land' state an average of 41 dwellings per hectare, therefore a maximum of 8 hectares of land would be required for this proposal (10 football pitches approx.)
48. Can it be confirmed that this is the final development proposed for this plot of land, a statement along the lines of ... 'there will be no further development of this land' is expected. Note, 'there are no current plans to develop further...' Is not the same as 'no further development'
49. Could Councillors please explain what Swindon Borough Council's thoughts are on the building of this land. Will they intend to get Planning Permission from their own Planning department and build on this land themselves or will they get permission then sell the land on to a builder at a great profit?
50. Does Highworth have a say where the houses should be located i.e., if a couple of areas are under consideration can Highworth choose which they'd prefer?
51. Will a maximum of 30% of the Golf Course area be used and kept to as noted in the plan, i.e., would the possibility of a school be included in the 30%?
52. How much would become available to spend on the current football area and rec ground?
53. What other ideas or options are there to enhance the area for the community of Highworth and would funding be provided for that?
54. Depending on location of the houses, keeping to a maximum of 30% used for all development including a school, and then guaranteeing the rest of the area be protected would assist towards Swindon Borough Council housing target whilst making funds available for rejuvenation of the current surrounding recreation and community areas, as well as increasing them. It would be wonderful to see a large child friendly play area, with zones for different ages, whilst keeping the area open to ensure visibility of your children and ample rest areas. Fairford Park is a good example of this. Nature and woodland areas would be wonderful too, taking advantage of the stream and offering an educational resource and a calm, quiet area to assist with mental health and wellbeing. Coate water offers wooded areas, play parks, water parks, mini golf area, picnic, and rest areas. Taking elements and ideas from this area to offer a fantastic community environment and rest space.
55. Swindon Borough Council should consider all options if this land is developed what benefits can this bring to residents of Highworth.
56. The landowner could sell this land to a commercial entity, and we will be faced the same situation as the Gladman site. This could include the whole area. What guarantee will Swindon Borough Council give to ensure this will not happen.