

Goring and Ilex Conservation Group

Notes for Gap appeal zoom inquiry 18th January 2022

I am Bob Niall, Secretary of the Goring and Ilex Conservation Group with around 1600 members in the Goring area. We distribute 2000 copies of our annual newsletter to members and local residents and work with other local groups where appropriate.

There is a great deal of detailed documentation in this appeal and a good number of experts so I will try not to repeat what is in the documentation nor the detail of our previous objection to these proposals. Rather, I would like to give residents, group members and committee's perspectives and comments on Goring, the application and the value of this part of Goring Gap.

Firstly, however, with respect to the Inspector, we do find the timing of this appeal difficult bearing in mind the position of the emerging Local Plan following the November hearings and the Inspectors post- hearing advice letter. It seems that there are two Government Inspectors considering at similar times the same piece of land. We would have thought that the final agreed version of the Local Plan would be in place before the appeal would be heard.

We would also like to note that recently, Worthing was stated to be the most densely populated authority in West Sussex although it may now be ranked second.

Also, in July 2021 it was reported that Worthing has the least amount of green space per person out of all major towns and cities in Great Britain. According to Ordnance Survey research from 2018 it has less than a snooker table's worth of green space per person. This is only slightly higher than Hong Kong. Milton Keynes, which has Great Britain's highest amount of green space per person has more than 12 times the area of green space per person than that of Worthing.

Last year a House of Lords committee on the effects of Covid noted that "the demand for green spaces has increased as a result of the last year"

West Sussex County Council has included Worthing in the 25 priority areas where action is most needed to prevent flooding. (Local Flood Risk Management Strategy 2021-26. Meeting 30th September 2021.)

Chatsmore Farm forms part of the Goring Gap which affords broad vistas from the south downs National Park and Highdown to the coast and vice versa. Persimmon state that this vista loses importance because of the ribbon development along the railway line. This is, however, generally of low level established bungalows and becomes lost in the tree line. The North and South Gaps therefore visually become one. The recent refurbishment of the finest chalk garden in the UK has taken advantage of the current views and opened up the vistas to the sea. Even dining at the Swallows Return at the foot of Highdown and the downs, the traffic becomes inconsequential as the views across the gap are enjoyed.

The current A259 and feeder roads' traffic situation is difficult and we understand that the works underway do not take account of any increase in traffic from these proposals. Even on a Sunday afternoon, there is traffic queued from Angmering to Titnore Lane. Although much is made of the proximity of local transport – railways etc. – the reality is that people

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love their cars and the estimates of car ownership on this development do not reflect reality. I remember when my children were growing, at one time in a three bedroom house we had four cars plus at times an animal rescue van. This is not unusual, especially on an estate of younger age groups with growing families. Not to mention the explosion in delivery vehicles, be they for food or other goods. The vehicle movements are growing not shrinking and this trend is likely to continue with more working from home. People wanting to escape their homes in leisure time and those relocators who form a good percentage of people moving in Worthing wanting to visit friends and family elsewhere. Traffic will increase and congestion with its accompanying pollution likewise. A survey by the Rail Delivery Group found that 15% of rail commuters planned to travel by car once lockdown eases only adding to the road congestion.

Housing shortfall against target, We see the targets and opportunities changing. It also seems likely that post-Covid there will be further opportunities for brownfield housing following what is now probably an oversupply of retail and office space in Worthing through full or partial conversion into dwellings. One such example being the now empty Debenhams store. The Government's levelling up agenda sees resources focused on less fortunate areas of the country. Will housing targets be adjusted to meet this agenda with those for Worthing falling in comparison?

We also see the infrastructure under immense pressure. We all know the difficulty in finding an NHS dentist in the area but with doctors, there is no point in building surgeries if these cannot be filled. My own doctor merged with another practice not too long ago due to a lack of doctors to cover the patients. Feedback from a local paramedic shows that especially at this time of year and well before the Covid outbreak, the hospital was full with ambulances queuing to offload their patients depriving emergency patients of support. It is the same with schools – the nearest secondary - St Oscar Romero's – is usually well over subscribed. You can't just throw money at the infrastructure – you need the people to make it work.

We see that Persimmon have said that, should the proposals be approved, they may consider gifting the remainder of Chatsmore Farm to Worthing Council. It's a shame that they haven't already done so but the expression "beware Trojans bearing gifts" comes to mind. Persimmon say that they are only proposing to develop part of the area but if this goes ahead, the due to the scale and height of the proposals, the value of the remaining portion will be severely diminished. This is likely to lead the council having to consider allocating that portion for future development, possibly considering neighbouring settlements, much to Persimmon's advantage.

Chatsmore Farm is currently not only farmland but an important part of the local ambience whether appreciated consciously or sub-consciously just by being a pleasant open space, it is a facility for walking, for children to understand farming through the seasons, an aid to mental and physical wellbeing, a soak for rainwater to help with alleviating, a lung between habitations, cutting carbon emissions not increasing them as development would and of

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course a haven for wildlife. We need to remember that once such a green space is lost to development it is not recoverable – it will disappear forever.....