

The Myth of Bio-Diversity Net Gain in West of Ifield

Homes England promise to deliver a 10% bio-diversity net gain, but it is obvious from a simple overview of the proposed site that this is impossible.

This document provides a simple walk through of the proposed Homes England West of Ifield site from west to east and identifies the wide range of habitats that it would be difficult to find in an equal area anywhere in the UK, let alone within the Horsham District. From young woodland plantation to ancient woodland encompassing arable and grazed farmland, with marshy areas and water ways rich in wildlife alongside ancient meadows that host a range of wild flowers. This all supports a huge range of birds, fish, mammals, amphibians and reptiles.

Starting in the west of the site, we have a large young woodland plantation interspersed with mature tree specimens. This forms the surround for an area of managed mowed grassland with sand traps and water hazards that make up the area of Ifield Golf Course. This range of habitats supports a number of native species and migrating birds.

Progressing east from here we enter arable farmland with fields planted with a range of crops and surrounded by mature and ancient hedgerows.

Further east we move into grazed farmland, again surrounded by mature and ancient hedgerows.

Further to the east we enter areas of ancient woodland, mostly undisturbed by human interaction.

Running through all this we have the river Mole and Ifield Brook flowing out of the Ifield mill ponds. And to the south, open grass and wild flower meadows.

To the north we have marshy areas that form the Ifield Conservation Area, an area of varied habitats in marshy reeds and tussock grasses between the ancient woods.

This wealth of inter-connected habitat areas forms a kaleidoscope of places for the huge variety of flora and fauna to breed and thrive and it challenges anyone to find a wider range of habitats in such a connected arrangement anywhere.

The whole area forms part of one of the key wildlife corridors identified within the made Rusper Neighbourhood Plan and as such deserves very careful consideration. More recently, it has become clear that the area also supports a breeding colony of rare Bechstein bats. It is clear that a development of the proposed scale would destroy this important environmental area.

Even if extreme efforts are made to protect key areas, it is impossible to see any way in which this area could be enhanced in bio-diversity terms and destroying even half of this area would result in a significant bio-diversity loss.

The current Horsham District Planning Framework (Ref. 5.2) includes an Objective Theme “to safeguard and enhance the environmental quality of the district, ensuring that development maximises opportunities for biodiversity and minimises the impact on environmental quality including air, soil, water quality and the risk of flooding.”. It is hoped that given the current Climate Emergency, the new Horsham Local Plan would include a similar or enhanced objective and that objective would rule out any significant development in this area.