

West of Ifield consultation - **It's ambitious but flawed**

Objection

The UK, which includes the West of Ifield, is one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth, languishing somewhere in the bottom 10%. This is an outrageous fact, especially considering the UK ranks in the top 10 globally for total household wealth. We recognise the importance of environmental protection and often lecture poorer countries on safeguarding their ecosystems—yet these proposals aim to build on fields and green spaces. This is likely just the first step in a “build, build, and build” programme involving 10,000 new houses.

The habitat loss affects a vital green corridor linking Ifield Brook Meadows to Ifield Mill Pond and the surrounding areas toward Horsham. Ifield Brook Meadows would become surrounded by development, isolating this green space—despite widespread acknowledgement that green spaces must be connected. Just this summer, the area was enjoyed by many on numerous occasions. Red- and amber-listed bird species (according to the British Trust for Ornithology) visit and live here. In recent months, red-listed species such as skylark, greenfinch, and house sparrow have been seen, while amber-listed birds of concern include song thrush, redstart, little ringed plover, dunnock, and kingfisher. It's also a joy to observe the many green-listed birds, including the very vocal robin and chiffchaff, and to witness the magnificent buzzards that visit Ifield Brook Meadows—often mocked by jackdaws, crows, and magpies before retreating to the open field area behind for sanctuary.



I took a photo of a brown hairstreak butterfly—slightly out of focus and pixelated—adjacent to Ifield Brook in September 2025. Ifield Brook Meadows and the surrounding area are an important habitat for the brown hairstreak butterfly. These are GB red-listed

and have high conservation status, primarily due to habitat loss and a declining distribution trend. Many other butterflies, not red-listed, also frequent the fields and meadows, including the abundant gatekeeper butterfly, which on a summer morning warming up on the grasses is a spectacular sight due to their numbers. There is a plethora of other wildlife in this area too, beyond butterflies and birds. [REDACTED] and bats are regularly seen.

It wasn't long ago that Covid-2 restrictions were in force, and local access to outdoor areas was highly valued and sought after for both health and sanity. We were arguably lucky with this pandemic: unlike Covid-1 in 2003, the mortality rate was much lower, although the incidence and prevalence were far greater. Golf had ceased, and the entire area was open for walking and jogging during our allotted daily exercise time. This space was widely used and deeply appreciated. When the next pandemic arrives, this area should remain available to those who value this invaluable asset. In the meantime, the golf course can be enjoyed by golfers during the day—and by wildlife too.

I'm not particularly a bird or butterfly watcher. I mainly use the fields and meadows for jogging and dog walking, and I frequent this area daily. Many others also enjoy this oasis of countryside for similar activities, including occasional off-road cycling and horse riding. In my opinion, it would be morally criminal to isolate and degrade the environment, which is precisely what this planning application proposes—including the construction of hard-surfaced footpaths across Ifield Brook Meadows, artificial lighting, and a proposed Gypsy/Traveller site adjacent to Ifield Brook. On the four occasions I've encountered Traveller sites, each time the area and its surroundings were left trashed with debris and rubbish.

These proposals involve building on prime agricultural land. According to the Main Report to the National Preparedness Commission: Just in Case – Narrowing the UK Civil Food Resilience Gap, *the UK is at risk due to its food import dependence*. Just over half (60%) of the food consumed in the UK is produced domestically. Therefore, the UK relies heavily on imported food—not just for exotic fruits and vegetables, but for 25% of its cereals. The report states: *“The UK reliance on imported food has increased, with more cereals, dairy, fruit, meat, starchy roots. The current situation is a mix of high import dependency and low home production.”* Introducing food resilience includes “...issues such as reserving best land for food growing, protecting it from being built on...” This planning application proposes removing agricultural land and building on it. It was not that long ago, during the Great Recession of 2007–2009, that several countries—including Australia, the United States, Ukraine, Russia, and China—faced drought or dry conditions, triggering a global wheat and bread crisis. Prices rose worldwide, and in developing countries, hunger and protests erupted—illustrating the very need for resilience that the report calls for. This risk will only increase with climate

change. The removal of such land is therefore detrimental to the UK nationally and should be avoided.

Knowing that we need both agricultural land and wild spaces, these proposals should be rejected. If housebuilding is required, it should be done on brownfield sites. Personally, I reject the notion that more housebuilding is required—though I appreciate this goes against the national conversation. However, consider the facts: the birth rate in 2024 was 11.17 births per 1,000 people and is projected to fall to 11.08 in 2025, giving a fertility rate of 1.41 children per woman (according to the Office for National Statistics). All things being equal, this would equate to a halving of the UK's population in about 47 years—an exponential decrease—reducing the population to a quarter within 100 years. (Of course, well before the 47-year mark, there would already be a significant reduction—over 15% within 10 years.) The destruction of green spaces, the environmental and ecological damage, and the loss of agricultural land are irreversible. These consequences will remain with us for generations. I understand these statistics challenge the prevailing narrative around housing need, but that narrative lacks joined-up thinking and is flawed. The current population increase is driven by immigration. Yet, the same national conversation also includes calls to reduce immigration—which in turn would decrease the need for building on green field sites. The “build, build, build” mantra to “grow, grow, grow” the economy is a flawed model. It ignores the less quantifiable but more important aspects of environmental integrity and quality of life. Doughnut Economics offers a more holistic model—one that values what truly matters. This short-sighted thinking should not be allowed to scar our landscape for now and for future generations.

Of further concern is the increased traffic and congestion around Ifield and along the narrow country roads—both during construction and afterwards. These plans do not appear to address these concerns and will likely exacerbate congestion and travel times along Ifield Drive and parts of Rusper Road. It must be noted that sections of Rusper Road have narrow pavements, with no room for expansion. The road itself is already narrow given its current usage, and cycling during busy periods feels unsafe.

These roads are already at capacity, particularly around the Ifield Drive and Overdene Drive junction—home to Ifield Station and a primary school. This junction is already overwhelmed during peak times. Queues along Overdene Drive can be horrendously long—sometimes nearly an hour—and have on occasion caused congestion along Gossops Drive in both directions, even spilling onto the A23. Some vehicles currently use Hazelwood and the petrol station as a shortcut to access Overdene Drive and Ifield Drive. Even a small increase in traffic here would be hugely problematic.

The Ifield Drive to Ifield Avenue junction is also busy at peak times. Travelling east on Ifield Drive can take over five minutes to pass through this junction—even on a dry, mild day at the end of summer. The Crawley Avenue / Ifield Avenue roundabout and the Crawley Avenue / Horsham Road roundabout are also heavily congested during peak hours. The plans do not mitigate the consequences of this development, even a small increase in traffic volume can have outsized effects.

Alongside traffic congestion comes the inevitable increase in pollution—noise, air quality, and safety concerns. Even electric vehicles contribute to air pollution through tyre and brake wear.

The plans have not adequately addressed the consequences of increased traffic. I believe the traffic models in any case are overly optimistic, and the reality will be far worse. The recent development of Kilnwood Vale failed to mitigate traffic congestion effectively. When roadworks were carried out on Horsham Road, they lasted for an extended period and left the road in a worse state for cyclists. The A23 / Horsham Road roundabout (Cheals Roundabout) remains precarious for both pedestrians and cyclists. This does not inspire confidence in the current modelling.

Ifield village was first designated as a Conservation Area in 1981, for its historical and architectural value and its location close to the meadows and the countryside. The character of Ifield will be changed detrimentally and irreversibly and is a reason for objection and ceasing these development proposals.

In conclusion:

We all have our biases, so I sought an unbiased view using the latest tools available. I asked Copilot AI, verbatim:

“Do you know about Crawley West of Ifield building plan. What do you think? Is this a good plan or not. Please be succinct.”

AI’s response:

“It’s ambitious but flawed. The housing need is real, and the biodiversity pledges are strong on paper — but the scale risks overwhelming Crawley’s infrastructure, erasing green space, and gutting local identity.”

It is for all the above reasons and more that this planning application should be

REJECTED.

