

Sent: 10 September 2025 12:55
To: Planning
Subject: West of Ifield

Categories: Comments Received

The application proposes the redevelopment of Ifield Golf Course for housing. While Horsham District Council does not presently have a five-year housing land supply, and the presumption in favour of sustainable development applies, there are overriding policy conflicts in this case.

1. **Loss of a valued sports facility** – Ifield Golf Course is a thriving private members' club, offering a high-quality sports environment to its members. It is well used and demonstrably not surplus to requirements.
2. **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph 99** – The NPPF is explicit that existing sports and recreational land should not be built on unless:
 - o An assessment shows it is surplus; or
 - o It is replaced by provision of equal or better quality and quantity; or
 - o It is replaced by an alternative recreational use which clearly outweighs the loss.

The current proposal fails these tests. No equivalent replacement of the golf course is offered, either in terms of quality or accessibility.

3. **Sport England's statutory role** – As the statutory consultee, Sport England is expected to object to the loss of this facility without adequate replacement. Such an objection would carry significant weight at both local and national level.
4. **The tilted balance** – Although the Council's housing shortfall must be acknowledged, **case law and recent appeal decisions confirm that the protection of valued sports and recreation facilities is a strong policy safeguard**. In this instance, the adverse impacts of losing a well-used golf course without suitable replacement would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of additional housing.

In light of the above, I respectfully submit that the application should be refused in line with national policy, and in recognition of the important role Ifield Golf Course plays in serving the health and wellbeing of Horsham residents.

Thank you again for your attention to this matter, and for your continued support to the residents of Rusper and the wider district.

If you have time to read my full objections they are listed below.

West of Ifield Planning Application Objection DC/25/13/12

Response to Planning Application – Loss of Ifield Golf Course reference GOLF COURSE ASSESSMENT PART 1: WOI-HPA-DOC-GOL-01

I wish to object in the strongest possible terms to the proposed development at West of Ifield which would result in the closure and loss of Ifield Golf Course.

1. Loss of a High-Quality Facility, Not a Like-for-Like Replacement

Ifield Golf Course is a long-established, high-quality, members' golf club. It is not simply a pay-and-play municipal course but a carefully maintained 18-hole parkland course with a proud history and a committed membership. The suggestion in the applicant's assessment that mitigation could be achieved by investment in other facilities such as Tilgate, Goffs Park, or Rookwood does not equate to the loss of Ifield. These venues are either municipal, short-course, or mixed-use facilities and cannot replace the unique quality, competitive opportunities, and community of a full members' club.

2. Junior Development and Accessibility

Ifield Golf Club has worked hard to attract young players through discounted junior memberships, coaching, and outreach. At a time when national governing bodies such as England Golf emphasise the importance of bringing more juniors, women, and beginners into the sport, removing one of the very few affordable, welcoming junior pathways in the district would be entirely counterproductive. No mitigation package proposed offers an equivalent commitment to junior golf.

3. Existing Closures Already Reducing Provision

The closure of Horsham Golf & Fitness (for which planning permission has already been granted) represents a very significant reduction in provision locally. Added to this, the earlier closure of Rusper Golf Course has already created pressure on remaining facilities. The combined effect of these closures, plus the proposed loss of Ifield, would be catastrophic for golf provision across

Horsham District and Crawley. This context is not adequately reflected in the applicant's "needs assessment," which presents an artificially balanced picture of supply and demand.

4. Lack of Capacity in Remaining Clubs

The assessment assumes displaced members from Ifield can easily be absorbed by other courses. In reality, no local club has the spare capacity to take on Ifield's 500+ members. Courses such as Copthorne and Mannings Heath already operate at capacity or with high costs and joining fees that are not accessible to many golfers. Simply claiming there are "vacancies" ignores issues of affordability, accessibility, and suitability.

5. Quantity vs. Quality – Not Just Numbers of Courses

The applicant's analysis focusses heavily on numbers of courses within a 20-minute drive time. But golf provision cannot be measured purely by quantity. The quality of the offer, the tradition of a members' club, and the role of a stable, community-centred facility like Ifield cannot be replaced by piecemeal upgrades to municipal sites. A floodlit driving range or a pitch-and-putt facility is not equivalent to the loss of a par-70, 18-hole course with nearly 100 years of heritage.

6. Failure to Meet NPPF Requirements

The National Planning Policy Framework (para. 104) makes clear that existing sports facilities should not be built on unless:

- a) an assessment shows they are surplus to requirements, or
- b) they are replaced with equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality, or
- c) alternative sports provision outweighs the loss.

The applicant has not demonstrated surplus provision. Nor is there any like-for-like replacement of equivalent quality and accessibility. The proposals therefore fail the NPPF tests.

7. Homes England's Responsibility

Homes England, as the applicant, should be expected to provide sports and recreation facilities for a new community of this scale in addition to retaining existing provision. Instead, they appear to be offering the bare minimum of general leisure space while removing a well-loved, well-used, and historic sporting asset. This is mitigation in name only, not in substance.

Conclusion

The loss of Ifield Golf Course would represent a permanent and irreplaceable blow to sports provision in Horsham District and Crawley. The mitigation proposed is wholly inadequate and fails to address the specific qualities, capacity, and community role of Ifield Golf Course. The closure, taken alongside the recent and pending closures of other local courses, would leave a serious deficit in provision for current and future generations.

I therefore urge the planning authority to reject this application on the grounds that it fails national and local policy tests and does not provide appropriate mitigation for the loss of an important community sports facility.

