

Hawkhurst Golf Club Proposals *Update*

A planning application for a long-awaited relief road and around 400 new homes on the site of Hawkhurst Golf Club has recently been submitted to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

The proposals also allow for new community facilities including a car park to serve the village centre and a new village park between Hawkhurst and Gills Green. The woodland around the borders of the site will be retained and enhanced, and there will be extensive green space within the development.

Although the need for a relief road was identified more than 20 years ago, no progress has been made to date in providing one, despite the worsening traffic situation. Without the relief road, average peak period delays could increase from three-and-a-half minutes to nine minutes (see back page) by 2033, even if no homes are built on the golf course. Kent County Council has recently acknowledged that there are no other viable improvements that can be made to the crossroads in isolation.

The plans for the redevelopment of the golf club were unveiled at a two-day public exhibition in the village earlier this year, which attracted nearly 600 visitors. Feedback from attendees resulted in a number of alterations to the original plans including changing the access to the northern part of the site from Slip Mill Road to the A229 Cranbrook Road.

Since the exhibition, additional traffic surveys and modelling have been undertaken to better understand the impact the new relief road would have when combined with the proposed closure of the Cranbrook Road arm of the village centre crossroads. These show an improvement in traffic flow even when allowing for the new homes on site, with immediate and ongoing reductions in delays and queueing.

Moreover, the changes would also provide an opportunity to create a new focal point for the village and create a traffic-free pedestrian route through the village on the north side of the high street.

The bigger picture

The Government has increased the number of new homes that must be built in the area covered by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council from 300 a year to 678 a year – a total of 13,560 by 2036. Identifying suitable sites is a particular challenge for the borough council as more than three-quarters of the land within its boundaries lies within the Green Belt.

While all of Hawkhurst, including existing built-up areas as well as the golf course land, is within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, it falls outside of the Green Belt and the village will be set its own housing target by the borough council. Its recently-published draft Local Plan allocates 706 new homes to Hawkhurst.



With Cranbrook lined up to accommodate a similar number of homes and a further 235 proposed in surrounding villages (Sissinghurst, Gills Green, Benenden and Sandhurst), congestion in the centre of Hawkhurst caused by the traffic light-controlled Highgate junction of the A268 and A229 will only get worse.

If nothing is done, by 2033 peak period queue lengths on the Highgate Hill and Cranbrook Road arms of the junction could increase to in the region of 100 vehicles, with average delays reaching nine minutes.

The masterplan

A mix of housing

– affordable, sheltered, starter homes and family

The proposed new homes would be of various sizes with 383 on the golf course land and 34 on the adjoining Springfield site which has already been allocated for housing in the adopted Local Plan. The plans provide for 35% of the homes being affordable, giving a stock of lower-cost housing for people who would otherwise be barred from getting on the local property ladder.

The site provides the opportunity to provide a mix of good-quality housing, close to existing village services, while making a significant contribution to meeting the new homes quota, which cannot be met solely from developing smaller brownfield or infilling plots.



1: North

The northern part of the development, which vehicles will only be able to access from the Cranbrook Road, expresses a linear character area in which the residential buildings are arranged sensitively around trees. There are many ribbons of trees due to the current use of the site as a golf course. The pre-existing trees and historic field boundaries dictate the positioning of the houses. The area is adjacent to the current development within Gills Green.

2: Parkland

This area, which was previously private access only for members of the golf club, will be opened up to the public as a village park, with pedestrian and cycle links into the village from both Gills Green and the northern development parcel. In addition, the park will be equipped with play zones as well as ecological and environmental features. The parkland zone also acts to keep the smaller village of Gills Green discrete from Hawkhurst.



3: South

The south of the site is a culmination of different character areas, dictated by the natural landscape. For example to the south, housing parcels form clusters which have been influenced by the contours of the existing golf course landscape. Aspects of the development closer to the high street and existing focal points of Hawkhurst are arranged with higher density and create a new 'village centre' with parkland spaces, an overflow car park for the village and the potential for new community facilities.

4: Springfield

The Springfield site, which covers around three acres and is the closest part of the development to the village centre, is subject to an existing planning application and has already been allocated for residential development. The inclusion of this area in the golf club proposal aims to better integrate the site within the wider plans and to use it as a key bridging point between the proposed development and the village centre. Its design respects the significant landscape buffer and stream to the south.



Traffic studies

Hawkhurst crossroads is currently having to operate well above its design capacity during both the morning and evening peak periods, with maximum queue lengths of 42 vehicles in the morning peak hour on the Highgate Hill arm of the junction and average delay per vehicle of three-and-a-half minutes.



If nothing is done

By 2033, if nothing is done, peak period queue lengths on both the Highgate Hill and Cranbrook Road arms of the junction could increase to in the region of 100 vehicles, with average delays reaching an unacceptable nine minutes per vehicle as a result. Not only would this affect residents and emergency vehicles trying to pass through the village but it would likely lead to increased 'rat-running' on unsuitable rural routes in the area.

An integral part of our proposals is a new relief road linking the A268 High Street with the A229 Cranbrook Road near Gills Green. This would serve as the access road for the new development and will assist in diverting through-traffic away from the centre of the village – cutting delays at the Highgate junction for motorists and the emergency services, as well as reducing air pollution and rat-running, to the benefit of current and future residents.

As part of these highways changes, the Cranbrook Road arm of Hawkhurst crossroads will be closed to through-traffic, although measures such as retractable bollards can be installed to maintain access by emergency vehicles.

With the golf club scheme and relief road, the Cranbrook Road closure and other committed developments in and around Hawkhurst in place (assumed to be in 2023 for the purposes of the planning application), average delay per vehicle at the crossroads would reduce to less than two minutes in the morning peak and around two-and-a-half minutes in the evening peak. By 2033, average delay at the junction would still remain lower than it is currently.

Following consultation with Highways England and Kent County Council, improvements to Flimwell Crossroads are also proposed to accommodate the traffic arising from the proposed new housing as well as other committed developments in the local area.

Additional approach lanes will be provided on the A21 from the south and the A268 from the east and the central island will be relocated to help HGVs turning left from the A268 to the southbound A21.

Next steps

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is undertaking a formal consultation on the planning application, details of which can be found at www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/residents/planning. The Golf Club application reference number is 19/02025/HYBRID.

Further details about the proposals can also be found at www.hawkhurstreliefroadandhomes.co.uk.