Introduction

Rural Planning Group Ltd have been instructed by the Knepp Castle Estate to prepare and submit representations on the 2019-2031 West Grinstead Neighbourhood Plan Submission Plan (Regulation 15).

The Knepp Castle Estate extends to 3,500 acres of land within the Horsham District, including Shipley Parish, with a portfolio of residential, commercial, equine and agricultural property as well as a nationally important conservation program. It directly employs the equivalent of 33 full time employees (staff and contractors) who are engaged in property maintenance, food and farming, tourism, nature conservation, forestry, gamekeeping, administration, gardens and housekeeping and a further 230 people work on the Estate in let commercial premises, with planning consent for further offices at Floodgates Sawmill. In 2018 the camping and tourism business entertained 6,600 visitors and a further 7,000 visitors attended events in the park, many of which help support local hospitality businesses.

Within the West Grinstead Parish, the Knepp Castle Estate owns land in and around Dial Post village including Swallows Farm, Blakers Yard and New Barn Farm.

Swallows Farm comprises a selection of redundant farm buildings which have recently received planning permission for conversion to a new farm shop and café (planning permission reference DC/19/2014).

New Barn Farm comprises a collection of agricultural buildings with the majority in agricultural or equestrian use. The Estate runs various tours and safaris from this site and hosts an eco-campsite and yoga garden business.
Blakers Yard is located in Dial Post village and has extant Outline Planning Permission (reference DC/17/1000) for a mixed-use development comprising flexible commercial floorspace and 12 houses. Progress on the Reserved Matters application continues.

This document sets out representations on the West Grinstead Neighbourhood Plan Submission Plan (Regulation 15).

Overall, the Knepp Castle Estate supports the Neighbourhood Plan, however it is considered that better recognition could be given to the Knepp Castle Estate in the plan and how rural sites in the Parish can positively and proactively contribute to the future economic growth of the Parish and Horsham District. It is also considered that the viability of Dial Post as a sustainable location for future growth should be better reflected.

**Parish Profile**

The Parish Profile is set out within Chapter 2 of the Neighbourhood Plan (Submission Plan) and provides the context to the Plan, including sub-headings relating to ‘Environment and Heritage’, ‘Community Infrastructure’, ‘Housing’, ‘Economy’ and ‘Transport’.

It is welcomed that greater recognition has been given to the Estate within the Environment and Heritage section of the Parish Profile in relation to both the rewilding project and to Knepp Castle itself as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. However, as the Estate is also a significant landowner in the Parish it is considered that this should be recognized within the economy section.

Estates such as Knepp are important contributors to the rural economy and offer significant potential for sustainable rural development to support the rural economy.

Greater mention could be given to the important role that rural diversification schemes can play in contributing towards the rural economy, particularly in light of the scheme granted planning permission in January 2020 for the conversion of Swallows Farm to a farmshop and café which should be recognized as an important opportunity for the Parish.

**Vision and Strategic Objectives**

Chapter 3 of the Neighbourhood Plan (Submission Plan) sets out the Vision and Objectives for the plan period up to 2031.

Although this is generally supported, it is still considered that the Vision and Objectives could be more positive and creative and look for opportunities to actively promote and support appropriate sustainable development within the Parish. This approach would be more in line with that which is put forward by the adopted Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF) 2015 and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019.

The Estate as a landowner in the West Grinstead Parish has landholdings and properties which have the potential to bring many benefits to the sustainable rural
development of the Parish, which in turn will enhance and support local services and the vitality of the community.

Chapter 6: Housing

The important role of small development sites or rural conversions could play outside of Partridge Green should be recognised to help meet the housing requirements of the Parish and the District Housing Land Supply.

Strategic Objective 1 of the Neighbourhood Plan seeks to promote a variety of housing that reflects the needs of the Parish as a whole. Therefore, it is also essential that the needs of the people in Dial Post have also been positively planned for too. There is not enough emphasis on this in the Neighbourhood Plan as it stands.

The Knepp Castle Estate have land that is available in this area to meet housing needs. In due course a Reserved Matters application for Blakers Yard in Dial Post shall be submitted. Outline Planning Permission for this site was granted in February 2018 for a mixed-use scheme comprising employment use as well as 12 houses. The proposals for this site make a valuable contribution towards the housing numbers of the Parish as well as meeting local housing needs.

Chapter 7: Economy

Chapter 7 of the Neighbourhood Plan (Submission Plan) sets out the approach to the economy, including three draft planning policies covering retail, employment and redundant farm buildings.

As previously stated, regarding the strategic objectives, overall, it is felt that the approach taken to the economy within the Neighbourhood Plan could be more proactive and supportive of proposals for commercial uses that support the local economy and provide jobs locally.

Horsham District Council’s Local Plan and National Policy looks to promote economic development in the context of a lack of employment land in the District and poorer quality existing stock. The policy could therefore reflect this to a greater extent by promoting good quality commercial and tourism accommodation to attract and retain businesses in the area.

The retention of local services is highlighted as important to the West Grinstead Parish and the way to do this is through policies which actively seek to promote local businesses.

The general approach to the economy is supported by the Knepp Castle Estate, however, it is felt that more emphasis could be given to the enhancement of the rural economy and enhancing visitor spending through tourism as outlined clearly in the HDPF. Swallows Farm is an important new project developing within the Parish which will build upon the success of the Knepp rewilding project as well as the Estate safari...
and camping business at New Barn Farm. These businesses are important to the rural economy of the Parish and this, together with the importance of tourism to the rural economy in this area should be recognized within the Neighbourhood Plan.

Policy 8: Employment

The approach to employment that is taken within Draft Policy 8 is supported by the Knepp Castle Estate as it recognizes that in rural areas both conversions and well-designed new buildings will be necessary to support businesses.

Policy 9: Redundant Farm Buildings

Draft Policy 9 of the Neighbourhood Plan is supportive of the conversion of redundant farm buildings – this approach is generally welcomed by the Knepp Castle Estate, however, as submitted previously, it is considered that this policy could also include not only redundant but also disused buildings which is more consistent with the approach taken in the NPPF.

It is considered by the Estate that all potential use classes should be considered for redundant and disused rural buildings, depending on the individual merits and circumstances of each case. This is more in line with National Planning Policy which (at paragraph 79) is supportive of the conversion of redundant buildings to residential use which enhance the immediate setting. Paragraph 83 of the NPPF is also supportive of ‘the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas both through the conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings.’ In relation to business uses it should be noted that at a national level there is no requirement for the building to be redundant or disused for a conversion to business use to be considered and accepted in principle. It should also be recognized that there are now a range of permitted development rights available for agricultural buildings to change use to a number of different uses which is not currently acknowledged within Draft Policy 9 at present.
The Knepp Castle Estate recently obtained planning permission for:

‘the demolition of an existing pole barn, concrete barn and substandard additions and the erection of a new farm shop (A1), the conversion and extension of existing agricultural buildings to provide a café (A3), a warehouse (B8), and ancillary office (B1) and education building (D1) together with associated new access from the A24, car parking and landscaping to include the extension of woodland and the creation of permissive paths.’

It is understood that the scheme is supported by the Parish Council and therefore the publication of the West Grinstead Neighbourhood Plan would be an ideal opportunity to express support for the scheme as a good example of the policy for the redevelopment of redundant rural buildings.

Conclusion

Overall, the Estate supports the production of the West Grinstead Neighbourhood Plan, however it is felt that the Plan could be more positive and proactive particularly towards business and the local rural economy especially in light of the support that is given at a national level within the NPPF.

The redevelopment of Swallows Farm to provide a mixture of uses which will provide great benefit to jobs, tourism and communities in the area. It is felt that the Plan would benefit from including proposals such as this as a good example of rural development.