Success and Disappointment in Horam (part 1), Cornelie Usborne, candidate, ESCC elections, May 2021

Horam on the Parish Council's website

This website reads: "The southern slopes of the High Weald AONB touch Horam on its northern fringe. Old established rights of way allow you to walk in the fields and woods. It is possible to find peace and solitude in Horam's countryside even though you are never far from habitation. The landscape is cut by streams which have carved valleys, by trees and hedgerows, and by narrow winding lanes. One of these valleys is on the line of a fracture or "fault" in the rocks beneath, but nobody has any worries about an earthquake occurring here (perhaps we should be concerned!)."

When I arrived here in 1987, Horam was indeed embedded in green fields and woods. The High Street was bustling with shops, from bakery to butcher and greengrocer, ironmonger to pharmacy.

Merrydown, the cider factory (founded in 1946) produced c 35,000 bottles a day and dominated local employment; the Station Inn was a popular pub. 35 years later much has changed: The pub is now a Co-op and Merrydown has become a large housing estate:

Now many shops have gone and so have many of the green fields. New mass housing, especially in Horebeech Lane (eg. Rosemead Place, built on the former Rosemead farm) saw to that.

photo of Rosemead Place

Many more housing estates have been built since, south of the recreation ground, or are planned like one next to the May Garland Pub and along Chiddingly Road, amounting to something like 150 new dwellings; on top of this there are new applications in the pipeline on Little London Road.

The roads are busier, the High Street noisier and the air more polluted.

Horam Parish Council is right: no earthquake has occurred, but we have suffered plenty of flooding and raw sewage spills. Many long-term residents have now lost their green surroundings, their peace and their country walks. Instead, they are engulfed by concrete and brick, having to put up with the noise and dirt of builders' cranes and lorries. Not surprisingly quite a few want to move away. (I was told this by several people who wrote to me when they heard about this workshop).

As a candidate in this year's County Council elections, I received more complaints about overdevelopment than any other issue: Why so much building in a single village? Why outside the building boundary, so that cars are needed for shopping? Why are there no plans for buses, more doctors' surgeries and local schools? Why so many executive homes when locals cannot afford them? We need small houses and rented accommodation for our youngsters. Why are developers not forced to build 35% of (truly) affordable homes as they promised? We cannot see solar panels on the new houses, should we not build sustainably? Where will all this end?

So, I decided to focus on overdevelopment in my campaign

My first newsletter is just one example

BUT, **all is not doom and gloom**.

Let's celebrate the way local residents have acted so passionately and patiently with the problem, determined to stop the concrete spreading. Every new application for yet another housing estate resulted in a huge number of local submissions. The voices in our community are loud and clear and have reached those who can do something about it. But if you want to check the number of objectors, you won't find them anymore. Sadly, as soon as the go-ahead is given to an application, these protest letters are taken off the website.

Some important success stories: just 2 examples

Field opposite Rosemead estate, belonging to Old Orchard House

First: In 2019, the application by a developer for 60 houses (again with 3-5 bedroom houses) next to Old Orchard House in Horebeech Lane went to appeal.

The independent inspector ruled against the developer as well as the Council. The Council had shamefully supported the developer despite fierce local opposition. It showed that the councillors involved did not understand their own policies; they should represent the electorate and not the government's imposition on local building numbers. The inspector rejected the development a.o. as it would be "harming the character and appearance of the rural setting" echoing local concerns. Needless to say, in January 2021 the developer applied again, reduced by just 7 dwellings! But in early September this year, the application was withdrawn.

Second: In 2020 a developer applied to build 60 houses on the green fields east of Rosemead Place, and behind the private dwelling called Cauldavon.

Cauldavon

In Sept 2021 the inspector recommended refusal on several grounds. If it reads a bit like the comments made about the Old Orchard development opposite, this is no coincidence. They had inspired them.

> "The site lies outside any development boundary and within open countryside. The principle of residential development would therefore not be acceptable. ..
> The proposed development ….fails to satisfactorily demonstrate
> that the site would be capable of accommodating the quantum of development proposed without resulting in an unacceptable and inappropriate form of development, that would significantly impact up on the visual amenity of the rural landscape character of this edge of settlement location. ..
> The Planning Statement speaks positively about delivering a policy compliant scheme to secure affordable housing, custom and self-build. No mechanism exists to secure an appropriate package that would ensure delivery of these matters and as

a result the proposed development is contrary to …the Affordable Housing Delivery Local Plan 2016, Spatial Planning Objective…and …the Wealden Core Strategy".

The inspector also expressed his doubts about an adequate provision for sustainable drainage and that the development would not lead to increased risk of surface water flooding.

Since then, however, the developer has contacted all the neighbours of Cauldavon, offering a price for their houses and gardens well above the current market value. So, sadly this saga has not finished.