

Bexhill Heritage

☎ 01424 575065
🌐 bexhillheritage.org.uk
✉ info@bexhillheritage.org.uk



Caring for Bexhill's past,
present and future

Planning Department
Rother District Council,
Town Hall
Bexhill.

21st September 2021

Objection to Planning Application RR/2021/1455/P

Bexhill Heritage's committee is unanimous in opposing this planning application. We do so for two principal reasons:

1. The proposed use is not suitable for the area

The open space currently occupied by Gulliver's Bowls Club is the sole green space of any significant size in eastern Bexhill. As such, the site has considerable further potential to fulfil the vital need for recreation and amenity in this part of our town.

The importance of this green space has been recognised by our forebears for one hundred and forty years.

When this part of eastern Bexhill was first developed in the 1880s on land owned by the Earl De La Warr, the site was purposefully designated as a public amenity known as Cantelupe Gardens. It became a traditional 'square' similar to those currently found in such developments throughout the British Isles and elsewhere.

In 1927, the Earl De La Warr sold the park to a croquet club, with a restrictive covenant in place to protect the land from being lost to development. Land Registry entries show a restriction of a maximum of four detached houses set back by fifty feet from their Knole Road frontage (the building line following the curve of the now listed terrace opposite) or for open space and gardens.

More recently, Rother District Council has:

- Recognised the site as having a 'high value' to the District 'fundamental for the effective planning for future provision for outdoor sports facilities'. The site was identified as one of only three such 'high value' sites across Rother in the Council's Open Space, Sport and Recreation study of May 2007.
- Registered the entire site as an Asset of Community Value under the Localism Act of 2011 and rigorously defended this designation in the courts. Moreover, the Council's resolve in opposing development on the site was praised in Parliament in April 2014.
- Opposed all previous applications to develop the site on the grounds of public amenity. In 2006, the Council's reasons for refusal included the pertinent observation that the one of the greens falling into disuse did not indicate that the land was 'surplus to requirements and could not be used for other sports'.

These decisions demonstrate without doubt that our ancestors valued this important green space in its entirety, intended it to be used for public benefit and sought to preserve it for our enjoyment.

The applicant claims that his plans are not detrimental to the amenity value of the site. This is not the case. There is a significant loss of open space and air. Without any development, 91% of the site is undeveloped. With the current proposal, existing residents and the population of Bexhill in general are left with 26% of the site undeveloped with significant areas to be hard landscaping.

2. The development of the site would do little to provide affordable homes for local people

Bexhill Heritage applauds the Council's aspiration to provide more affordable homes for local people.

The application does little to help the Council realise this vision.

The applicant states that these homes would be suitable for first time buyers or elderly residents looking to downsize. Given the nature and location of the proposed development, there is little prospect that the likely purchase price of one of these units in this location would be affordable by a first time buyer. While we acknowledge that some elderly residents may be able to 'downsize' into one of these units, we predict that most will end up as second homes or properties to let on *AirBnB*.

In conclusion

The Council is being asked to trade the preservation of an important public amenity for eight housing units that are likely to bring little benefit to local people.

We urge Council Members to resist the developer's rather dubious offer and to be steadfast in emulating their predecessors' wise judgements by protecting this important community asset in its entirety. Should the application be approved, the Council will have difficulty in defending what little remains of this important community asset against further development. Please reject the application.

Yours faithfully,

Steve Johnson, Vice-Chair, Bexhill Heritage

