

Epsom Civic Society

shaping the future, safeguarding the past

NEWSLETTER No - 165 – WINTER 2020/2021

CHAIR'S COMMENTARY

Dear Members,

Since early Spring, every one of us has been faced with adapting to significant changes in our daily lives. Opportunities vanished for us to get together in the summer for our quiz night and a local guided walk, our customary autumn buffet supper did not happen, and no pre-Christmas outing is in prospect. It was a different world when the Society held our last, and very well-attended, open meeting at the end of January in the United Reformed Church. Despite the loss of these events, our sense of community endures, and the Society remains resilient thanks to your continued support. Ian Muirhead joins the Society's committee as Hon. Secretary, and it's my great pleasure to welcome him on behalf of us all. Ian has a wealth of local knowledge, having lived in Epsom for many years, variously serving as a councillor and as chairman of his local residents' association. Ian has long been a member of the Society and brings extensive professional experience to the role.

*To all our members from
everyone on Epsom Civic
Society's committee, wishing
you all a safe and happy
Christmas and New Year!*



Planning Reform

The Society has responded to the Government's two consultation papers, and I am grateful to my fellow committee members and to ECS member Geoff Delamere for their insightful comments and contributions. Truly a team effort. The Society acknowledges that parts of the system would benefit from reform and welcomes an increased focus on design, but we are not in favour of proposals that will limit local democracy and reduce opportunities for community engagement. Nor are we convinced that current proposals would deliver affordable housing. The Society's detailed responses are available on our website and on request via email: chair@epsomcivicsociety.org.uk

Space Standards for "Permitted Development" Homes

The Society has previously opposed the extension of Permitted Development Rights due to concerns about the risk of proliferation of 'rabbit-hutch homes' resulting from office to residential conversions where full planning permission is not required. I am glad to report that on 30th September the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announced that new homes delivered through Permitted Development Rights will have to meet the Nationally Described Space Standard. The space standard begins, for a single occupier, at 37m² of floorspace for a new one bed flat with a shower room (39m² with a bathroom). This change comes into force on 6 April 2021.

Local Plan

Unsurprisingly, there is little to report regarding progress with the draft Local Plan and its publication date in light of the Government's planning reform proposals and in consequence of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government now formally re-calculating the algorithm for housing numbers. We hope our housing target will go down. Options for the way forward may go before the Council's Licensing and Planning Policy Committee scheduled for 21 January 2021. Pending publication of our next newsletter, we will keep members updated via our website and Twitter account.

7 Stoneleigh Station Approach

We featured this application at last January's open meeting as giving cause for concern. I have had the pleasure of working with members of Stop Stoneleigh Tower Block Action Group (SSTBAG) in their campaign's final weeks leading up to October's Planning Committee where the application was unanimously rejected. The grounds for refusal related to the unacceptable scale and height of the proposed development and consequent harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area, failure to provide affordable housing, and lack of parking causing a lack of amenity contrary to local policies.

Congratulations to all at SSTBAG on a sustained (15 months), well-researched campaign.



The Stop Stoneleigh Tower Block Action Group secured over 1000 objections. Their campaign resulted in the application being refused.

The Wells Estate

The Society continues to support everyone campaigning to save the Wells Community Centre. The Planning Committee deferred a decision on the Council's own planning proposal to replace the Centre with 23 flats and a vastly reduced community facility. The Society objected to the development proposals and I was one of three objectors to address the Committee. In our view the unacceptable harm to the existing community outweighs the benefit of an extra 23 homes. The Centre has served The Wells, Stamford Green, Woodcote, and the wider community from 1996 until the Council decided to close it. It is, as the campaigners say, 'Still Needed, Still Loved, Still Here'. The Epsom Wells Community Association (EWCA) would like to take ownership and run the centre for the whole community. EWCA is now pitching for £1,000,000+ from Your Fund Surrey. Here you can publicise your support: Join The Local Conversation | Your Fund Surrey - Ideas Map <https://yourfundsurreymap.commonplace.is/> You can keep updated on the campaign via the Save The Wells Centre Facebook account and Twitter feed: @SaveWells

On 27th October, the Council's Strategy and Resources Committee agreed to the preparation of additional feasibility work on options for a revised scheme. While we await the results with interest, from what we know of the revised scheme so far, we are not convinced that the proposed on-site community facilities will be an appropriate replacement. Surrey County Council's £100 million Your Fund Surrey launched

on 16 November 2020. Information at this link: <https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/people-and-community/voluntary-community-and-faith-sector/funding/community-projects-fund>

Neighbourhood Planning in Stoneleigh and Auriol

The Licensing and Planning Policy Committee resolved on 12 November to designate both the Stoneleigh and Auriol Neighbourhood Area and Neighbourhood Forum, key formalities prior to detailed work on producing a Neighbourhood Plan, which will be the first in the Borough. Once adopted, a Neighbourhood Plan forms part of the Borough's development plan.

Celebrating Community Arts and Heritage

'Music in the Marketplace' during August and September brought to us by our friends MGSO4 Epsom and Ewell Arts teaming up with Go Epsom featured an excellent programme of professional solo artists, duos and trios in a Covid-compliant setting, entertaining us with a range of music genres while we were out and about.

Satisfied Eye International Film Festival's home this year was a mixture of live screenings at the Odeon and online events, running from 9 – 11 October. A delight for film lovers.

The Horton community arts and heritage centre is on schedule to open in 202 and the Emily Davison statue will be installed on 8 March 2021 (International Women's Day) in the marketplace.

If you have not seen Judy Boyt's 'Evocation of Speed' Bronze sculpture (pictured right) now relocated to the marketplace, please do take a look. It depicts the very first winner of the Derby - Diomed - versus the 2000 winner - Galileo. Both are fragments from our memories of the past, racing through the winner's circle to the future.



Langley Vale Wood Month of Remembrance

The Society has been a long-time supporter of Woodland Trust's Centenary Wood commemorating the fallen and those who participated in the First World War. Follow the way-marked trail, not least to experience the series of twelve life sized sandstone soldiers created by sculptor Pat Walls set among a newly planted 'regiment' of trees. Access is presently via bridle paths.

Details here: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/woods/langley-vale-wood/>



And finally, I wish you all a safe and happy Christmas and New Year.

Margaret Hollins

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The last 18 months has been extremely busy with a number of contentious applications coming forward. As we report, some of these have been decided but what is noticeable are those which remain outstanding with some over 12 months since their validation. This indicates that they are complex with a great deal of detail to be examined and reported upon. COVID 19 hasn't helped with officer site visits being restricted. One also wonders whether there needs to be some re-thinking on what was a 'flight to flats' with their high density with the work at home culture requiring a house with suitable study/office space and a garden for some relaxation even if only short breaks in working hours.

22/24 Dorking Rd (19/01365/FUL): This application is to demolish two detached family houses and redevelop with a block of 20 flats with underground car parking. The Society opposed. The application was **refused** at the September planning meeting despite the Officer's report to committee supporting approval. The refusal reasons are as follows: 1. Density, scale, massing and bulk; 2. Not being compliant with the adopted car parking requirements.

7 Stoneleigh Station Approach (19/00668/FUL): Not surprisingly, this application for a block of flats up to 7 storeys high having generated over 1,000 responses was firmly **rejected** at the October committee. We understand that an amended scheme is to be presented but we have no details to date.

88 High Street (20/00671/FUL): This scheme to refurbish the commercial property opposite the Clock Tower to provide commercial areas along with 8 flats was **approved**.

24/28 West Street (19/01021/FUL): There is no news on amending the original application to construct a 13-storey high-rise tower block in the Epsom Town and West Hill Conservation Areas. Interestingly, an agent's sale board has appeared advertising this as a 'Town Centre Development Site'.

Multi-Storey Car Park (MSCP) for Hospital Site (20/00249/FUL): This application for a stand-alone six storey car park (ground level plus five storeys above) on the Epsom Hospital site is still **awaiting decision**. Whilst we acknowledge car parking at the hospital at times can be problematical, the proposed ugly six storey utilitarian structure is inappropriate. We wonder if the refusal of the Guild Living proposals (see p. 5) puts back this decision despite it being said that the two applications are not linked.

2 Pine Hill (20/00958/OUT): We reported previously the most recent application, after numerous ones for this site, involving the demolition of the large house and redevelopment with three detached houses. This application was **approved** in outline with design details to follow. We are satisfied that this proposal is much more acceptable than the earlier intensive over-development proposals. We look forward to seeing the design. A 'For Sale' banner is now posted at the site with the benefit of approval at £1.65m.

Various applications for uPVC replacement windows in Conservation Areas: We are pleased to note a more recent 'tightening-up' of a policy of not allowing uPVC window replacement particularly on the front elevations of buildings in Conservation Areas. In recent applications there have been refusals in the Linton Lane and Worple Road Conservation Areas. In contrast, we wrote in support of the former Art College at 1 Church Street (pictured left) and its application for new timber double-glazed replacement windows. There are now high quality timber double-glazed windows available. We strongly favour their use.



Michael Arthur

CONSERVATION AND HERITAGE

The pandemic rolls on and we now realise that it is here for the foreseeable future. But, on the plus side, I have never seen so many of our residents making the best use of our open green and beautiful local areas. Everyone is out there on their bikes, walking the dogs, exercising the family on The Downs, Commons, Conservation Areas and Langley Vale Centenary Wood. We really are fortunate to have such delights on our doorstep.

We are also very fortunate that four green spaces within our Borough have been recognised by the Green Flag Award Scheme as some of the very best in the world. These are Epsom Common, Ewell Court Park, Alexandra Recreation Ground and Rosebery Park. Local Councillor, Barry Nash said: “We are absolutely delighted that four of our parks and green spaces have once again won the Green Flag Award, a testimony to the hard work of our staff and also to the input and support from community groups and volunteers”. This surely must send out the message ‘hands off our Green Belt’ to help keep Epsom a ‘green and pleasant land’.

One of our concerns relating to planning applications over the last three months has been the lack of commitment to the inclusion of Green Issues, Climate Change and lessons learned from the impact of COVID 19. Also, in many cases the quality of design has been awful with the emphasis on cost reduction. At our monthly meetings with Viv Evans (Head of Planning) we have been able to voice our concerns and to hopefully offer ideas for improvement.

Here are the planning applications of concern and some updates:

Friars Garth Offices and Affordable housing (20/01229/FUL):



View towards Friars Garth, The Parade, Epsom. Proposals to build a multi-storey block of flats would impact the character of the neighbourhood.

The ECS wrote a strong letter of objection to this application on 7 October 2020. Whilst supporting the need for 18 affordable flats we were aghast at the extremely poor elevation designs, which resemble a 1980's office building. This four-storey building covers the full site, without any external grass areas or residents' parking. The green sylvan visage of The Parade would be dramatically affected. We will continue to monitor this application and actively support the local residents. Yet again, we are concerned that the Developer prepared this design in participation with our council planners. Yes, we do want more social/affordable housing but not in a way which destroys the character of the neighbourhood.

64 South Street, Mitchells Yard (Application 20/00041/FUL): This application to change the use from business to residential including demolition of existing builder's yard and construction of 6 two-storey, small two-bedroom dwellings within the **Woodcote Conservation Area** has been **refused**. Reasons given include lack of evidence demonstrating the site is not viable as a future employment-use generating site; insufficient information regarding risk of pollution to controlled waters; failure to provide robust

ecological mitigation or monitoring to ensure no loss of biodiversity; and insufficient information to demonstrate that surrounding residential properties would not be affected by loss of daylight and sunlight.

Langley Bottom Farm Buildings (20/00475/FUL): We continue to monitor this application for 20 new homes on the site of the existing farm and located within the Green Belt. As a local Langley Vale resident I take great personal interest in this special area immediately adjacent to our village. One of the key statements by the developer was that the farm buildings were derelict and not serving a farming purpose. I am happy to record that the farm has never been busier! There is a large flock of sheep along with attendant rams, the hay barns are full, the grain silos are in operation and the open barns have farming machinery. The Council has always pledged to protect these precious boundary Green Belt areas. The farm areas along with the fields and adjacent Langley Vale Centenary Wood have served an excellent purpose over the last eight months for our recreation and wellbeing. We are hopeful of a positive outcome when this application is considered at the January 2021 Planning Committee Meeting.



View towards the hospital site on Woodcote Green Road where demolition continues despite refusal of the Guild Living planning application to build a multi-storey retirement development.

Guild Living residential home, Epsom Hospital site, Woodcote Green Road (19/01722/FUL): This application for the demolition of hospital buildings and redevelopment of the site to provide a new care community arranged in two multi-storey buildings was reviewed at a special Planning Committee Meeting on 18 November and we are pleased to confirm that the Council has **refused** the proposal. Quite oddly the Council had approved the Demolition/Enabling Works planning application (**20/00885/DEM**) ahead of any approval for the main scheme and this work continues.

Usually the demolition works would be part of the planning application for a new project. As such, why demolish if the new scheme does not gain approval? The demolition approvals were controversial as the Council wanted to include special conditions (e.g. site access, car parking). These were eventually agreed as part of the application.

Chalk Lane Hotel (20/01185/LBA): In our Autumn Newsletter we reported there was a revised planning application submitted 24 August along with a number of documents and detailed Heritage Impact Statement plus proposals for reparation to the damage caused to this listed building. The amended application to redevelop the building into 21 units also included proposals to build a high brick wall around the front of the building, blocking off the main entrance from view in addition to other new amendments. We objected to this latest application (29 September). The wall would severely change the key view of the site at the junction of Chalk Lane and Woodcote End. The sight lines from Maidstone House and the other properties to the west side of Woodcote End would also be affected by the height and location of this wall. When assessing this proposal we concluded that it did not comply with the Chalk Lane Conservation Area Appraisal Study. Since our letter, the Conservation Officer gave his assessment (26th October 2020). We have now written in support of Lance Penman's comments relating to this proposed boundary wall. He states that the proposed boundary wall is over 2m in height (with railings)

and blocks off the view of the front elevation of the building. This, he states, should return to the low hedge, proposed in the previous planning application. We do support the restart of this problem-prone construction site and hope to see the works carried out to repair the previous builder's mistakes!

6 The Grove (20/00313/FUL): Unfortunately the developer has chosen to **appeal against the Council's refusal** to the application. The Council refused this proposal to demolish a house and replace it with a three-storey block of 9 flats in the **Church Street Conservation Area**. Our local MP, Chris Grayling has written, stating his objection to the scheme and his support for the Council in their refusal.

Clayhill Lodge & Allonby in West Hill (Application 20/00031/FUL: This application for 14 flats and 9 houses is still **under consideration** (since March 2020).

Church Street Police and Ambulance Station: A **viability assessment** is now in progress for this McCarthy & Stone retirement scheme.

Bob Hollis

WELCOME TO OUR NEW HONORARY SECRETARY



We are delighted to welcome **Ian Muirhead** to the Society's committee. Ian, a retired solicitor, has joined the committee as Honorary Secretary. He and his family have lived in the same Edwardian house in Epsom for 47 years which he saved from demolition at the hands of what he describes as 'unscrupulous' developers. Among improvements over the years, all with his own hands, are a swimming pool, a garage and a prize-winning gazebo. In the 1980s, Ian was Chairman of College Ward Residents' Association (CWRA) and, briefly, an Epsom Town Councillor. As a result of CWRA efforts during his tenure, another Edwardian house was rescued from developers and the area was accorded the status of a Conservation Area. In his new role, Ian is keen to assist in preserving what remains of Epsom's heritage.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

We have run out of excuses!

The UK government has legislated for Net Zero emissions by 2050. Surrey's Climate Change Strategy's ambition statement for housing is to 'create low carbon homes that reduce emissions, have lower running costs and improve the wellbeing of the community'. Epsom and Ewell's Climate Change Action Plan states that they will 'actively seek to develop the borough's carbon neutral homes' even going as far as trying to adopt Passivhaus (see footnote on p.8) standards or similar. These are all excellent and laudable objectives.

The skills exist and the knowledge, the technology, the policies, regulations, standards, and guidelines and the vision. These now need to be put into action. Like so many things, it is the initial inertia that is difficult to overcome; therefore we need to start small.

This is what I would suggest should happen:

- 1) Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) identifies just **one** plot for development that will meet their housing sustainability agenda. For example the design requirement could be a Passivhaus inspired specification in which u-values and air tightness targets are made a contractual requirement. Other requirements could also include height restrictions, social housing ratios, provision of green transport alternatives (charging points, improved cycle provision), biodiversity targets (green walls, ponds, nesting sites) and construction materials (timber frame vs concrete slabs) all within build/purchase cost parameters.
- 2) EEBC goes out to competitive tender to seek aspirational architects and developers that have experience and interest in this field for design submissions.
- 3) EEBC could then organise a popular vote to a previously agreed ratio between the Council and residents to identify the preferred winning design to be built from a shortlist.

As residents and ultimately occupiers of housing, we deserve to see designs from developers and architects that share our local objectives and aspirations. It is demoralising to be faced with so many similarly un-ambitious development applications - yes some may have a green roof, or a water butt, some may propose to add a bird box or plant some native hedges but this is not *really* design. These are after-thoughts; neither are they consistent or ambitious and nor do they meet truly sustainable development objectives such as BREEAM or Passivhaus that EEBC aspires to.

The UK Passivhaus Trust (<https://www.passivhaustrust.org.uk>) holds annual awards to recognise UK design expertise in this field. In 2014 their objectives were to demonstrate that Passivhaus standards could be built cost-effectively. These awards showcase many examples of social and/or larger scale residential developments that combine housing need, sustainability and beautiful yet simple architectural designs.



The award-winning and Stirling Prize nominated Goldsmith Street development for Norwich City Council. Just shy of 100% Passivhaus homes that are designated for social housing have recently achieved certification. (Source: Mikhail Riches/architect).

Another recent development which was much publicised is the Goldsmith Street development in Norwich. There is no reason why our Borough should not benefit from equally well crafted homes.

We are lucky to have many committed and experienced people within Epsom Civic Society that already give up their time to ensure that Epsom and Ewell's housing needs are met whilst safeguarding the past. I am sure that should EEBC agree to the 3-step plan above, the

Society would assist where, when and if required through public communications, planning input, and other matters should the need arise.

Footnote

1. Passivhaus buildings provide a high level of occupant comfort using very little energy for heating and cooling.

Aur lie Paoli

THE DOWNS



We await with interest more details about the plans to use the Epsom racecourse exhibition centre as a mass vaccination hub for the Surrey region.

In the meantime, I have been asked by members why the London Road Car Park remains closed. The closure is due to ongoing concerns by the Training Grounds Managing Board about the huge increase in visitors as a result of the pandemic, many of whom were unaware that Race Horse

Training takes precedence until midday daily. Horses and riders have been put at risk by people traversing or walking along the gallops unaware that horses were fast approaching. The increase in litter has also been a concern and the fact that windblown litter found on the gallops can 'spook' a racehorse and cause accidents. The Downs keepers and rangers wish to remind users of the racecourse and visitors to dispose of their litter properly – they themselves have enough to do! I have written to the chair of the Conservators regarding the car park closure.

A related concern to the increase in visitors is the maintenance and upkeep of public conveniences. Like many organisations, the Conservators' budget is limited. I did not know that it costs £18,000 per annum to maintain the public conveniences on the Downs, and was dismayed to hear a suggestion that the present temporary closure could become permanent. We have expressed this dismay to the Chair of the Conservators.

In other news, Ian Muirhead will now take on the role of reporting on developments with The Downs.

Angela Clifford

TREE FUND



We are pleased to report that we have passed on the balance of our Tree Fund (£702.00) to the **Epsom & Ewell Tree Advisory Board**, who will use it to plant or replace roadside trees.

Please do help us to help keep Epsom green. Any donations to our Tree Fund are much appreciated and we can ensure your donation goes toward planting beautiful trees where they are needed working in partnership with the Tree Advisory Board.

Nick Lock

EVENTS

Ian West had a walk planned for this summer in Ewell, but he will now rearrange it for next year. The Quiz Night is now re-scheduled for **19 June 2021** at **The Epsom Club**. Further details will appear in later Newsletters and the website. Save the date!

Sheila Wadsworth

OUR WEBSITE

<https://epsomcivicsociety.org.uk/>

Frequent visitors to our website may have noticed its appearance has changed recently. This is due to software ‘improvements’ outside the Society’s control which have rendered our old format obsolete and inoperative. Most obviously, the previous ‘pull-down’ menu bars for the content have disappeared. Fear not! All the old content (bar a few pictures) is still there, and can be accessed by clicking the little box with three horizontal lines at the top right hand corner of each page. This brings up a list of the available content, so you just have to click on the category you want to see. Your webmaster and hosting service are working on a better, more permanent solution, but in the meantime you should still be able to see all the posts reflecting the work the Committee is doing on your behalf, including, most recently, our responses to the two recent Government consultations on the planning system.

Mark Bristow

MEMBERSHIP

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The majority of our members have paid this year’s subscriptions despite the difficulties faced with the pandemic. Thank you! However, there are some who have not yet paid, either online or direct to me. If you are one of those, either your Rep. will have called when delivering this Newsletter or will have attached a slip to remind you. If you have any queries feel free to check with me. You can arrange payment online – follow instructions below – or deliver / post direct to me at the address below.

Go to the website www.epsomcivicsociety.org.uk/membership, click on ‘Join us’ and select the PayPal option at the bottom of the page. Select individual (£2) or household (£3) membership as appropriate, or pay a different amount if you wish to make a donation. Please include your surname, post code and house number so we can identify you as having paid. When you select the yellow ‘Pay Now’ button, you will be taken to the PayPal website. If you have a PayPal account, you can sign in; if not, you can make the payment by credit or debit card without signing in.

HELP PLEASE!

Following the very sad loss of our Postal Rep., Jessie Hinrich, in July, I have been managing our Postal members. I would very much appreciate someone coming forward to take this on. The job entails sending out our Newsletters to approximately 70 postal members who live outside the main areas of the Borough and dealing with those postal subscriptions. Ideally someone who can use a computer. This is not a time-consuming task but would be very helpful to the Society. If you think that you would like to contribute to the Society in this way or would like more information about becoming our Postal Rep. please do get in touch with me directly.

Membership Secretary (01372 438361) or email: membership@epsomcivicsociety.org.uk
By post: 9 Sheraton Drive, Epsom, KT19 8JL

Ishbel Kenward

PLEASE DETACH AND SEND TO MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

I/We enclose.....in payment of my/our Society subscription for 2020 (£2 for single member, £3 per household)

Mr and/or Mrs/Ms/Miss.....

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