

Epsom Civic Society

formerly Epsom Protection Society

shaping the future, safeguarding the past

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Customer Services
Epsom & Ewell Council
Town Hall
Epsom

15th April 2020

Dear Sirs,

Ref Planning Application 20/00475/FUL, Langley Bottom Farm - OBJECTION

The Epsom Civic Society is extremely concerned at the proposal to construct 20 new houses on the existing farm site at Langley Vale. This is one of the most delightful Green Belt locations within the borough. Langley Bottom Farm dates back to the 1300's with associated farm buildings being used up to current times. The farm sits immediately adjacent to the new Woodland Trust fields, to the east and south. We have reviewed this planning application in conjunction with the possibility of residential development on the field to the north of the farm.

Whilst some of the farm installations on the north side of the site are now redundant, the main farm buildings and barns are still being used for farming purposes (ie hay bale storage, farm machinery and livestock shelter). The site, over recent years has been allowed to accommodate ancillary users (eg stone mason's office, breakdown vehicle parking and repairs). The farm buildings at present, in our view, **do not constitute a derelict brownfield site!**

The main challenge for the proposed scheme is that the farm lies within our precious local **Green Belt**. The ECS is keen to protect this outlying farming area at the southern part of the borough. We understand that the Green Belt may be considered for



development purposes but strongly suggest that these perimeter areas must be protected. The Council commissioned Atkins to carry out a Green Belt Study Stage 2 in May 2018. Their report investigated the green belt parcel of land including the field to the north of the farm. The conclusion being that this parcel was not right for being released from the green belt as the ‘landscape and visual sensitivity are high.’ And that the overall integrity of the green belt would be considered compromised.

The NPPF (February 2019) reviews the wider issues of such developments and the importance of the **retention of the green belt** and how it should be incorporated within the Local Plans. NPPF para 79 states that ‘policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless that one or more of the following circumstances apply...’ None of these circumstances apply at Langley Bottom Farm. Para 145 states that ‘a local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt.’ The Developer quotes para 145 (g) as the basis for approval saying that the existing buildings are redundant. This is certainly not the case as all the barns are being used and the owner is currently advertising for more tenants.

Epsom and Ewell has a **Local Development Framework** addressing the Green Belt. This is **Policy CS 2** which clearly states: ‘To ensure the Green Belt continues to serve its key functions, its existing general extent will be maintained and, within its boundaries, strict control will continue to be exercised over inappropriate development as defined by Government Policy’. This proposed scheme does not allow the Green Belt to serve its key function of being for leisure and outstanding beauty. During this Coronavirus lockdown, our local Green Belt has served as being one of the few local areas for exercise and well being.

The Borough’s **Development Management Policy Document** (September 2015) within policy DM1 states our approach to developments within the Green Belt. All of the Borough’s open countryside is designated as Green Belt land. Considerations within the DMP include sustainability, community benefit and the delivery of this vision within the Core Strategies. DM1 states that the Green Belt will be maintained along the boundaries and that it will be protected as defined in the Epsom & Ewell borough-wide Local Plan 2000. This planning application does not meet the criteria stated in DM1 and the DMP.

The **Epsom & Ewell Masterplan** (September 2019) also considers the importance of the green belt. It is included within one of the strategic themes of the plan, stating that the Green Belt was first proposed in 1935 and it has helped to retain the green character of the southern part of the borough, including many of the outlying fields.



This masterplan has been compiled with the observations contained within the Future 40 survey requesting that the Epsom residents want a ‘green and vibrant environment’.

One of the key problems of developing a residential site would be the **road access** and junction at Langley Vale Road. The existing farm track is approximately 4m width without any protected pavement or kerbs. It is extensively used by walkers, horse riders and cyclists, as an approach to the rear of the downs and the new Langley Vale woods. A new side track has been prepared for the race horses entering the back gallops. The main road junction is of concern, as there is a mixture of horse traffic, water treatment operations and farm track traffic converging at this junction. We note that SCC has not been able to review the highway requirements on this application due to the current Coronavirus lock down restrictions. It is paramount that any decision for this application request, awaits their review. We cannot see any application proposals for road or junction modifications, on the attached drawings. This development should include for a protected footpath up to the Langley Vale Road junction. This is a key pedestrian access to the local shop, bus stop, amenities and The Vale School.

We also are concerned with regard to the recently approved planning permission for the **Woodland Trust** to access their site construction works via this farm track. This is as described within their Construction methodology statement, as an additional condition within the approved planning application for the new visitors centre, car park and extensive tracks/pathways. When the approved Woodland Trust works and this application are taken in parallel, there will be a major safety issue regarding the use of the farm track.

One of our main concerns is that a **precedent** would be set for the development of the field between the farm and Langley Vale village. Albeit this is in contradiction to the recommendations within the Atkins Green Belt study of 2018.

In conclusion, ECS **strongly objects** to this scheme due to the required release of this valuable Green Belt parcel of land and the precedent it would set for similar Epsom Green Belt locations. This area is a tranquil haven of the borough and should not become the start of an urban sprawl.

Yours Faithfully

RDH

Bob Hollis (on behalf of the Epsom Civic Society)
cc Ward Councillors

