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Affordable housing scheme approved on Leatherhead green belt

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Greenbelt land in north Leatherhead will be built on after a 100 per cent affordable housing estate was granted planning permission.

Mole Valley District Council's development committee approved the proposals despite fears it could open the door to others looking to pick off valued sites. The 47 homes by developer Carmen Corp will be built in Oxshott Road, Leatherhead, next to the Tesco store after officers said the need for affordable housing outweighed damage done to green belt.

The site lies on rundown land near the M25 and its condition raised concerns with those opposed to development who argued it could encourage others to let greenbelt land fall into disuse to ease planning. Those in favour suggested the 47 affordable homes was too good to pass up – particularly as it was surrounded on three sides by development and currently looked like "no-man's land".

The plans were passed by seven votes in favour to four against.

Claire Malcomson (Liberal Democrat: Holmwoods and Beare Green) said: "Just because it's degraded land is not a reason. We welcome affordable houses, we really don't want people to think we don't.

"This piece of land has been used badly for flytipping, and yes it would be wonderful if it hadn't been. But I am concerned about this and I do feel that developers might be sort of almost trying to twist our arms just because it's affordable."

Others argued the site, derelict and surrounded on three sides, was exactly what was meant as grey belt. Its location next to a large Tesco store, as well as the affordable housing offer, meant the majority backed the plans.

The developer told the March 4 meeting the site suffered from historic misuse, flytipping and ecological decline – and highlighted the housing shortage in the borough. He also addressed questions on affordable housing, saying extra houses could only be occupied if they were made available at below market rates – such was the basis of Homes England funding.

Cllr Monica Weller (Liberal Democrats: Bookham West) said: "We need to be honest about what this site actually is now. Is this pristine, untouchable countryside or is it more, I hate to say, a wasteland?

"I felt that I was going into no-man's land. Let's not joke or kid ourselves that this is special, this is rough. And affordable housing is one of the biggest issues facing families."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Plans for Oxshott Road near Leatherhead (image MVDC)

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