

Cllr prays for Priest Hill not to be developed in Ewell

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A controversial proposal to build hundreds of homes on Green Belt land at Priest Hill in Ewell has re-emerged, with developers now progressing a revised scheme for up to 300 homes. The land, adjacent to Ewell East Station, had previously been identified in the draft Local Plan as a major housing allocation but was later removed from the Regulation 19 version due to concerns over deliverability.

From 350 Homes to 300

Under the earlier Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan, the site — known as NON013 — was allocated for at least 350 net zero carbon dwellings, with buildings up to six storeys, ground-floor retail space and the re-provision of playing pitches at Hook Road Arena. However, concerns were raised during consultation. Sutton & Epsom Rugby Football Club (RFC), which leases part of the site until 2079, objected strongly, citing the importance of its pitches to its 2,000 members and warning of potential harm to its long-term viability. Sport England also raised concerns, noting that any loss of playing field land would have to meet strict national policy tests, including equivalent replacement in quality, quantity, location and accessibility. Following these issues, and in the absence of evidence that long leases could be surrendered, the Council removed the site from the Regulation 19 Proposed Submission Local Plan in November 2024.

What Has Changed?

According to the Council's latest position statement dated 22 January 2026, the landowner's agents are now seeking pre-application advice for a revised scheme. The updated proposal would redevelop approximately 4.9 hectares currently under the leasehold control of Old Suttonians for up to 300 homes, while retaining the 3.7 hectares leased to Sutton & Epsom RFC as sports pitches. Old Suttonians confirmed to the Council in December 2025 that their use of the land for sports ceased in 1999, the clubhouse and changing rooms were demolished in 2015, and they have signed an option agreement to return their land to the freeholder for redevelopment. They do not sub-lease or share the land with other parties. In contrast, Sutton & Epsom RFC confirmed in January 2026 that it fully utilises its leased land for three senior pitches and one mini pitch and has no intention of ending its lease early, with 53 years remaining.

Green Belt Concerns

Nonsuch Ward Conservative councillor **Shanice Goldman** has called for urgent clarity over the revived proposals. The site lies within the Green Belt and while the revised scheme indicates that rugby pitches would remain, residential development would still take place on designated Green Belt land. Cllr Goldman said: "The protection of Green Belt and transparency in process are not optional extras. They are fundamental." She added: "This is still Green Belt land. And once Green Belt is gone, it does not come back." Residents, she said, had been left with the impression that large-scale development at Priest Hill was no longer proceeding and were now asking what has changed.

Housing Need Versus Open Land

The landowner's agents have previously argued that the site is well served by public transport and should be reconsidered given the borough's unmet housing need. The current proposal is at pre-application stage, meaning no formal planning application has yet been submitted. However, the renewed activity is likely to reignite debate over housing numbers, Green Belt protection and the future of community sports provision in Ewell. Interested parties include Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, the freeholder Coldunell Limited, Old Suttonians and Sutton & Epsom Rugby Football Club. Further details are expected once a formal planning application is lodged.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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Image: Development area approximately overlaid on Google Map aerial view of Priest Hill.