

Councillor thinks new Ewell homes refusal is batty

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Plans for four new homes in Ewell have been refused over bats potentially living in the two bungalows. Although one survey was done, councillors could not rule out there were definitely no bats in the buildings.

The scheme involved demolishing two semi-detached bungalows on Kirby Close, and erecting four, 3-bedroom homes in a residential Ewell suburb. The two-storey houses would have two car parking spaces per house with associated landscaping, according to the report.

However, the applicant had not carried out a phase 2 survey establishing if there were any bats in the bungalow. Officers “could not be satisfied” the demolition of the building did not pose a risk to protected species and its habitat. Members rejected the application at an Epsom and Ewell Borough Planning Committee meeting on February 13.

Cllr **Julian Freeman** (LibDem College) said: “This smacks of desperation to find some reason for turning down an application for housing that we desperately need in this borough.” An increasingly frustrated Cllr Freeman reminded the committee that the borough has a “housing crisis”.

The Liberal Democrat member argued that you would know if bats are on the site as “you would be sweeping up the mess on a fairly regular basis”. He said: “If [the council] is going to refuse an application because there *might* be bats then, surely you need some evidence of that.”

But Cllr **Steven McCormick**, (RA Woodcote and Langley) chairing the meeting, explained the plans have to be turned down because there is no evidence that bats are *not* in the two bungalows. Councils have a legal requirement for bat surveys to ensure the mammals are not harmed in the demolition or construction of buildings.

The potential harm to protected species is the only reason why the risks would outweigh the benefits of delivering two houses, planning officers told the committee as they recommended the application for refusal.

If the applicant was to appeal the decision, members asked whether the council would be “laughed at” for refusing on the grounds there was no evidence that bats are non-existent on the site. However, officers told the committee that an application on Reigate Road, which was refused for a lack of satisfactory bat survey, was dismissed at appeal by the Planning Inspector.

Councillors questioned whether they could approve the application with the condition of a further bat survey, but officers said National England guidance is it has to be known early on if bats are in the building before approval could go ahead. The bungalows cannot be demolished until the council knows whether or not bats are there.

Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) said he was happy to approve it once the second bat survey is done as he couldn’t see “any significant or demonstrable harm that outweighs the benefit of two additional dwellings”.

A previous similar application for the ‘principle of development’ was rejected in July 2024 on the basis the housing proposal was too dense to match the character of the street. This is currently at appeal.

Image: 9-10 Kirby Close in Ewell, where the proposed development would be built. (Credit: Google Street View)