

# Epsom Council dead set against the dead?

22 September 2024



Tuesday 17th September Epsom and Ewell Borough Council gave one minute of its time before discarding a motion to take steps to recover an Epsom cemetery of 9000 souls from a private property speculator. The matter came before Councillors sitting on the Strategy and Resources Committee.

**Horton Cemetery** Hook Road in Epsom, between 1899 and 1955, received the bodies of patient paupers from the Epsom cluster of five psychiatric hospitals. Sold in mysterious circumstances to Marque Securities in 1983 the five acre site has been neglected ever since. Relatives have travelled from as far as Australia to pay respects but cannot enter the private land that is now hazardous to tread. Surrounded by twisted iron railings, unkempt undergrowth and fallen trees.

In an officer’s report to the Councillors it was argued that a compulsory purchase order (CPO) could not be legally obtained.

The officer’s report acknowledged the status of the site as a Cemetery and the prohibition on its development. However, in the opinion of the report author the fact that the owner could walk about the Cemetery and enjoy it as a wood gives it an “amenity woodland ” value. Comparative valuations were provided to Councillors based on sales of woodlands (not cemeteries) in the South-East.

**Lionel Blackman**, Honorary Secretary to the **Friends of Horton Cemetery** responded to the latest setback to the aims of the Charity. “Some progress has been made. The “amenity woodland” description now sits alongside the Council’s recognition that the land is a cemetery. On the occasion of the Council’s previous refusal to contemplate a CPO “amenity woodland” dominated the thinking. Nevertheless, it is regrettable that Councillors were not advised of previous cases where CPOs have been used to acquire neglected cemeteries, including Arnos Vale in Bristol and West Norwood.”

He added: “It is in large part a question of money. Pure woodland valuations include the element of speculative development value. That cannot apply to a cemetery the report acknowledges cannot be developed. Where there is a will there is a way. One day the Council will find the will to correct this historic outrage.”

Related reports:

[Petition to reclaim Horton Cemetery from property speculator](#)

[Local community gathered at Horton Cemetery](#)

[You are invited to commemorate the 9000 souls in Epsom’s forgotten cemetery](#)

## Council: Horton CPO debate shelved

Image: Horton Cemetery in 1952