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Epsom Council Delivers Spinning Back Kick to Nam Yang Martial Arts Centre

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In a contentious meeting on 12th November, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Strategy and Resources (S&R) Committee rejected a £161,250 funding bid for the **Nam Yang Martial Arts Centre**, reversing an earlier recommendation from the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee (LPPC). The decision has drawn sharp criticism, particularly as it highlights inconsistencies in the Council's handling of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) allocations.

The Debate: A Promised Replacement Deferred

Nam Yang's facility, once a vibrant community hub in **Alexandra Recreation Ground**, was demolished by the Council three years ago after being deemed unsafe. The Council had promised a replacement, yet rising costs and funding delays have left the organisation without a home.

Councillor **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) spoke passionately at the meeting, sharing her personal connection to the project. "My son was a member of Nam Yang and thoroughly enjoyed it," she stated. "It's more than just a martial arts centre. It reduced antisocial behaviour in the park and made the area feel safer for the whole community."

Chinn added, "That building has been down for a long time, leaving a gap in what the park offers. The absence is felt by the community."

A Moral Obligation?

The debate underscored tensions between financial prudence and moral responsibility. Councillor **Phil Neale** (RA Cuddington), who had seconded the motion to support Nam Yang at the LPPC meeting, expressed his continued belief in the project's value. "I felt a moral obligation for us to help," he said. "The existing building was condemned and taken down with the promise that it would be rebuilt. I believed it was the right thing to do to bring it forward for consideration at S&R."

However, Neale ultimately voted against the funding, explaining, "It's a difficult position. While I supported its inclusion for debate, the project didn't score high enough under the CIL spending protocol. I hope it will return for consideration in the next round."

Criticism of the Process

Councillor **Julie Morris**, (LibDem College) who had originally proposed Nam Yang's inclusion at the LPPC, has criticised the Council's approach. "The procedures for bidding for and spending CIL monies are unclear," she said. "The scoring process needs reviewing, as does the information required from applicants."

Morris has highlighted systemic issues, such as the fact that no CIL funding was allocated last year due to a protocol rewrite. "One scoring question asked if applicants had received CIL funding last year. Given none was awarded, the question was pointless."

A Divided Vote

Despite passionate arguments from some councillors, the vote to fund Nam Yang failed by a margin of 4 to 3. Chair **Neil Dallen** (RA Town) emphasised the importance of respecting the CIL Member Working Group's recommendations, stating, "The group spent a long time assessing bids. We should honour their decision."

Community Impact

The rejection leaves Nam Yang's future uncertain, and many in the community feel let down. "This isn't just about martial arts—it's about providing a safe and inclusive space for children, people with special educational needs, and older residents," said a local supporter.

Other strategic and community projects were approved as recommended previously. See Epsom and Ewell Times report below.

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