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# Epsom Green Belt Housing Battle Now in Inspector’s Hands

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A Government-appointed Planning Inspector will now decide whether 110 homes can be built on Green Belt farmland beside Langley Vale, Epsom. The decision follows a six-day public inquiry at Epsom Town Hall, which closed Friday 13th November.

Developer Fairfax Aspire Ltd is appealing against Epsom & Ewell Borough Council’s refusal of outline planning permission for the 5.2-hectare site at Farm View, Langley Bottom Farm. The site is part of the countryside leading up to Epsom Downs. Councillors refused the application in February 2026, against the advice of their own planning officers.

Inspector Joanna Bowyer must weigh the scheme’s benefits, including 55 affordable homes, against objections on Green Belt harm, landscape, ecology, transport and the safety of racehorses.

## From consultation to campaign

Fairfax unveiled its plans in June 2025. Residents saw them as a threat to the rural character of a village closely tied to Epsom Downs and the racing industry. Woodcote (Epsom) Residents’ Society helped villagers set up the Langley Vale Action Group (LVAG), chaired by John Mumford, under the banner of keeping the valley green. By February 2026 a petition had passed 2,000 signatures, and later fundraising paid for professional planning and highways consultants.

## Councillors overrule officers

When the application reached the Planning Committee on 26 February 2026, officers recommended conditional approval. Approval would have depended on a legal agreement securing affordable housing and infrastructure contributions. Officers accepted some harm to the openness of the Green Belt and to landscape character. However, they judged the site to be “grey belt”, a national policy category that can include undeveloped countryside, depending on how much it contributes to Green Belt purposes. In their view the scheme met the national tests for such land. Even if it did not, they considered that its benefits could amount to the “very special circumstances” needed to justify permission.

Councillors disagreed. After hearing from residents and the racing industry, they refused permission on four grounds:

- the site’s unsustainable location and reliance on cars
- harm to the Green Belt
- harm to the landscape
- risks to horses and riders using the routes to Epsom’s training grounds

## The developer’s case

Half of the homes would be affordable. That meets the higher requirement of the Green Belt “golden rules” in national policy and is a significant offer in a Borough under long-standing housing pressure.

Fairfax also proposes:

- biodiversity net gain of more than 10 per cent
- retention of mature trees and hedgerows
- a landscaped buffer next to nearby ancient woodland
- sustainable drainage
- public green space, a children’s play area and improved footpaths

To reduce car use, it offers cycle parking, electric vehicle charging, a car club and funding to extend the Surrey Connect on-demand bus service to Langley Vale. A new vehicle access would come off Langley Vale Road.

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Fairfax argues that the field has limited biodiversity value and that new landscaping would improve it. Opponents reply that new planting cannot make up for the loss of an open field and the habitat it already provides.

The appeal covers only the principle of development and the access arrangements. If it succeeds, layout, appearance and landscaping would be decided through later applications.

## Roads, racehorses and remoteness

LVAG argues that Langley Vale is remote from shops, public transport and services. In its view, 110 more households would add car journeys to narrow roads that are already busy, whatever travel measures are promised.

Those roads also carry racehorses between stables and training grounds. The Jockey Club and local racing interests fear that more traffic will bring conflict with horses and riders. For opponents, the question is not whether a new junction can cope with the traffic, but whether an established and economically important local industry would suffer. Fairfax maintains that access and transport can be made acceptable.

## Residents at the inquiry

LVAG secured “Rule 6 party” status, which allowed it to take part as a main party alongside the appellant and the Council. Its consultants gave evidence, and its representatives cross-examined the appellant’s witnesses.

Beyond transport and the site’s planning status, the group stressed three further points:

- the site lies within the Area of Great Landscape Value
- the development would take an arable field, still farmed by a tenant, from a rural corridor leading towards Epsom Downs
- the field supports wildlife including badgers, nesting skylarks and deer

John Mumford said:

“This was a splendid example of the local resident community coming together with the Jockey Club, a local trainer Pat Phelan and the CPRE to reject this housing proposal which was considered to be the wrong scheme in the wrong place. If this appeal were to be allowed it would undermine public confidence in the Local Plan process which had firmly rejected the release of this site from the Green Belt. Other more sustainable sites have been identified in the emerging Local Plan and these should be given priority in meeting the Borough’s outstanding housing needs.”

## The Local Plan question

LVAG says the site was assessed while the emerging Local Plan was being prepared and was rejected for allocation as less sustainable than other Green Belt options. It argues that allowing the appeal would undermine that plan-led approach.

However, national policy does not require proposals to wait for a new Local Plan. Where a council cannot show enough housing land supply, schemes that help meet unmet need can carry greater weight. The Inspector must take the emerging plan into account without treating it as decisive.

## What the decision could mean

If Fairfax wins, it will show that national housing policy can outweigh both local opposition and a council refusal on Green Belt farmland. If the appeal is dismissed, it will underline the weight given to transport sustainability, landscape and Epsom’s racing industry. Either way, each site is judged on its own merits, though the Inspector’s reasoning may influence later cases.

Campaigners expect a decision within the next few months.

Lionel Blackman

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Image: Langley Vale proposed development layout – Fairfax Homes

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