

# Epsom's Woodcote Stud homes plan approved despite transport and Green Belt concerns

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Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has approved plans to redevelop the former Woodcote Stud site in Wilmerhatch Lane with 14 homes — half of them affordable — and expanded supported-living accommodation.

The Planning Committee backed the scheme by seven votes to one at its meeting on 18 June. The Chair, Cllr **Clive Woodbridge**, (RA Ewell Village) did not vote.

The approved development involves demolition of the redundant former stud-farm buildings, while retaining Woodcote House. A new supported-living building will expand the existing care provision, alongside 14 new homes including seven affordable properties.

The legal agreement attached to the permission will require affordable housing, biodiversity-net-gain measures and public-transport works, including a new bus stop and pedestrian crossing on Wilmerhatch Lane.

The Planning officer told councillors the former stud farm had not been used for its original purpose for several years. He said the development would provide “an expansion to the existing operation on the site” and new housing, while retaining the historic Woodcote House.

Applicant’s agent Philip Dunphy of Causeway Planning said the family-owned stud farm had struggled to attract a replacement operator following the death of its owner in 2021.

He said: “There has been attempts to attract new operators, such as those in the racehorse training industry, but all have proved unsuccessful.”

Mr Dunphy said potential operators had cited distance from Epsom Racecourse, limited access to training gallops and wider accessibility difficulties.

He argued that the proposals would prevent the site falling into further vacancy and dilapidation, while delivering “much needed housing” and supported-living accommodation.

The scheme was considered under national Green Belt policy and the newer concept of “grey belt” land — previously developed land within the Green Belt that may be suitable for development where it makes only a limited contribution to Green Belt purposes.

Cllr Woodbridge said the officer report made the case that the land was previously developed and did not perform a particularly strong Green Belt function.

He added: “This provides useful housing to a council that’s very short of housing, and 50% is affordable housing, which I think this committee must welcome.”

But several councillors raised questions about whether the site was sufficiently sustainable, given its location between Epsom and Ashted and limited public-transport links.

Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) said the route through Woodcote Side could provide a more direct pedestrian and cycling connection to bus services, but questioned whether it would remain reliably available.

“The only thing I still don’t understand is it’s in the application that they can use the Woodcote Side entrance, but for pedestrians and cycles, but now I’ve been told that that could be withdrawn at any time,” she said.

Cllr Chinn added that both the Woodcote Stud area and Langley Vale suffered from “very poor public transport”, suggesting that wider discussions might be needed about improving bus links.

Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative Horton) also expressed concern about the development’s distance from railway stations and the limited frequency of local buses.

He said: “My main concern” was that residents would be likely to depend on cars if sufficient infrastructure was not available. Cllr Persand also questioned the loss of the site’s equestrian use, pointing to Epsom’s racing and horse-related heritage. “I think it’s a highly weighted one in Epsom, because once we lose that, it’s a bit of a domino effect, and the industry itself will suffer from that,” he said.

Officers said no equestrian bodies had submitted objections during the consultation. They said the site had been unused for equestrian purposes for around five years and was poorly connected to the racecourse and training facilities.

The planning officer said the existing access from Wilmerhatch Lane would be widened to enable larger vehicles to enter

and pass safely. Councillors had raised concerns about potholes and the condition of the approach road, particularly during construction.

Cllr **Humphrey Reynolds** (RA West Ewell) praised the quality of the officer report after the decision, telling officers: "It's an excellent report, well done."

Permission remains subject to completion of a Section 106 legal agreement (a developer investment in infrastructure). If that is not completed by 18 September, officers have been authorised to refuse the application. The permission also includes conditions covering construction traffic, drainage, tree protection, accessible homes, electric-vehicle charging, cycle storage and a 30-year habitat-management programme.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Woodcote Stud entrance from Wilmerhatch Lane. EEBC planning documents. Maydencroft