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# Keep our Valley Green say Langley Vale campaigners

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Campaigners in an Epsom village have hit out at proposals to build on “pristine farmland”, warning the plans will destroy a cherished stretch of countryside on the edge of the Surrey Hills. The outline application covers more than five hectares of agricultural farm land at Langley Bottom Farm, adjacent to Langley Vale village. Developer Fairfax Aspire Ltd has envisioned the 5.2 hectare field on Epsom Downs for 110 new homes. Although the exact height, design and layout will be determined later, planning documents suggest the new houses will be predominantly two-storey to eaves.

Dubbed ‘the valley’, locals are baffled that the agricultural field could ever be considered as a grey belt. The land has been classed as ‘low-quality land’ that could be prioritised for development, but residents say the designation is nonsense. “[Grey belt should be] for scrappy old car parks, not pristine farmland,” John Mumford of the Woodcote Epsom Residents Society and Save Langley Vale said. He pointed out the combine harvester in the field and explained it is still being used for agriculture. “We shouldn’t be sacrificing the green belt for land for land-owning interests,” he added. Fairfax Aspire Ltd stated in the application: “The site represents an opportunity for modest, sustainable development on the edge of the settlement boundary.”

The proposed development site sits down the road from Epsom Derby race course and is part of a landscape known for its race horse culture and rich ecology. Matt Dunn, who grew up in Langley Vale, described how buses only visited hourly, and horse riding and jockey training were common pastimes in the close-knit community. He said: “This scheme is tacked on, not integrated into the village.” Planning documents state most of the existing hedgerows and important trees will be retained and enhanced with native planting, with other features including new ecological improvements like wildlife corridors linking to the nearby woodland at The Warren. But campaigners say it is home to deer, badgers, and protected bird species like buzzards and skylarks, and that horse riders, dog walkers and ramblers make frequent use of the fields behind the village.

“It will completely destroy a much loved valley,” Matt said. “Ecology mitigation doesn’t mean anything if it doesn’t change the wrongs and the impact on wildlife.” The dispute comes amid national concerns over habitat loss — in England, the abundance of wildlife species has fallen by around 19 per cent since 1970. Matt accused the developer of trying to “whip up houses which don’t meet local need,” describing the affordable housing element as a “tick-boxing exercise”. The 29-year-old explained that selling houses at 80 per cent of the average Epsom house price (£559k according to RightMove) does not make the homes remotely affordable.

Langley Vale currently has around 400 houses, and campaigners fear the development could swell its size by more than 20 per cent, straining the roads, utilities and services. A new access road would be created on Langley Vale Road to get into the site, but residents warn this could exacerbate traffic issues in their rural community. Campaigners have also launched a petition against the development which has gained more than 1,000 signatures already. Mr Mumford has also set up a fundraiser to help pay for the campaign, gathering £3,700.

Planning documents state: “The opportunity exists for the creation of a high quality landscape and ecology led residential scheme to be provided in this sustainable location. The illustrative material demonstrates how a residential scheme, including new affordable homes, can be delivered without having undue impact on the site’s immediate neighbours, the wider area or key landscape and ecological features. The site is available, sustainable and importantly, deliverable, and will link to Langley Vale and the wider area.” The developer has been approached for further comment.

Related report:

110-Home Scheme at Langley Vale Sparks Green Belt Fears

Campaigners, Matt Dunn (left) and John Mumford (right), in front of the proposed development site. (Credit: Emily Dalton/LDRS)

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