EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

12th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

Up to £1 where sold

ISSN 2753-2771

Little plots of Council land for housing?

15 July 2023



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Strategy and Resources Committee decided Thursday 13th July to submit two Council owned sites for housing. The Draft Local Plan sets out the framework for local development including meeting housing targets. Proposals to release green belt land for development were met with strong local opposition and a brake on the Plan's adoption.

Council officers were tasked with seeking additional brownfield sites suitable for housing, including land owned by the Council itself.

The Council owns 37% of the Longmead and 35% of the Kiln Lane industrial estates. However, the grant of long leases to various businesses means that none of its land can be made available in the Local Plan timescale within 2040.

Consideration was given to the Council owned Cox Lane Community building and car park but a doctor's surgery and nursery need medium term certainty for their future with the surgery's lease expiring just before the plan period ending 2040..

Two small plots of Council owned land were stated to be suitable to be submitted to the Local Planning Authority, (the Council itself) for consideration for inclusion in the Local Plan. They are a small 0.08 ha site (a former Scout's Hut) on Wesley Close / Scotts Farm Road and Richard's Field Car Park accessed off Chessington Road, offering approximately 35 parking spaces of which about 14 are reserved as resident permit spaces.

Cllr Graham Jones MBE (RA Cuddington Ward) noted the Wesley Close site had not been submitted before as it was too small. "What had changed?" An officer explained the proposal was "directly on the back of members request to find more brownfield sites to meet housing targets. The site had been looked at again and it could achieve 5 dwellings which is the threshold for a call for sites".

Cllr Jones asked the same question in relation to the Richards Field car park and Cllr Dallen suggested that there maybe a way of building residences while keeping parking provision.

The meeting agreed to the submission of the two sites for consideration to be included in a revised draft Local Plan.

In a lengthy explanation officers reported that the legal and cost obstacles to pursuing compulsory purchase orders to acquire land for housing development are too high. Thus, exercising such powers was not recommended.

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