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Up to £1 where sold

The Plot in the thick of planning options

16 November 2023

At a meeting of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Strategy and Resources Committee held on 13th July it was decided that various Council owned "brownfield" sites would not be offered up for development for housing in the long-awaited Local Plan. This followed a note from the Licensing, Planning and Policy Committee of 15th June that "Officers have written to the Council in its capacity as landowner to check the availability of additional sites for promotion through the call for sites process". I.e., promotion in the Local Plan for housing development.

Most of the Council portfolio on the Kiln Lane and Longmead industrial, retail and commercial areas are held on long-leases. Plot 8, in the far north-east corner of Kiln Lane was held by Wilsons, the car sale emporium, on a 10 year lease that expired in 2019. This was one plot, bordered by housing to the east, that could potentially ease pressure on other land, including green-belt, to deliver on new housing targets. Presently, it is an open area used for storing motor vehicles.

It is understood that with the lease having expired the Council could regain possession upon a redevelopment being planned. However, at the meeting of the same committee held on 21st September it was decided to authorise the grant of a new lease. Details of the new lease were excluded from public and press view at the meeting to protect the privacy of financial and commercial information of a third party, presumably Wilsons.

The length of the lease has not been disclosed but will in due course be available to public view at HM Land Registry.

Cllr **Alison Kelly** (LibDem Stamford) told Epsom and Ewell Times "I voted in favour of extending the lease, as the business wished to continue and it provides much needed income for the council. The details of the lease are part of a restricted document as is normal in these cases. However it was a well thought out contract that does not stop the local plan work. It maybe several years before both the local plan is complete and a developer comes forward with an alternative plan for plot 8."

Councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) said: "Labour knows that there is a need to build homes, but also to keep people in jobs. What the council needs is a fully thought through local plan that resolves competing requirements for land. Unfortunately the hopelessly divided Residents Association administration hasn't been able to achieve this. It is also important to maintain the council's income when cash for vital services is stretched."

Epsom Civic Society maintains a watchful citizen's eye on planning matters and its Chair, **Margaret Hollins** told Epsom and Ewell Times "Epsom Civic Society supports retention and encouragement of strategic employment sites which are significant drivers of the local economy. No information is publicly available about the terms and duration of the lease so it is difficult to comment further.

"The Society considers that any attempts to cram residential dwellings along with industrial and commercial activities need to be avoided. Mixed residential and employment use could only be achieved through a carefully conceived regeneration strategy which would need to ensure proper separation between any residential areas and noise/disturbance/air pollution issues that can often occur with the type of distribution/warehousing activities prevalent on the existing industrial estates."

A spokesperson for the Council responded: "On 13 July 2023, Strategy & Resources Committee considered the land availability of several Council owned sites including the Longmead and Kiln Lane Industrial Sites. The decision was taken not to include the industrial sites and they remain part of the Council's commercial property portfolio. We are unable to provide any further comment at this time as this relates to confidential commercial matters."

Do you have a view? Feel free to write to Epsom and Ewell Times.

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