

Esher Matters

The Esher Residents Association Newsletter
for Esher and Hersham Riverside Edition No99.



IS OUR ELMBRIDGE GREEN BELT IN REAL DANGER?

The Metropolitan Green Belt was first introduced around London in 1938 and statutorily defined in Surrey in 1958. The Green Belt has grown to cover 13 per cent of England – nearly 5,800 square miles.

In Elmbridge, our Green Belt covers approximately 19.5 square miles which is over half of the area of the borough. No one in Esher lives more than a gentle ten minutes stroll from one of these oases.



Esher Residents demonstrate outside Sandown Park

Green Belt land was intended to be kept **permanently**

open and to prevent urban sprawl. It is protected both by normal planning controls and an additional presumption against “inappropriate development” within its boundaries. These boundaries - which are precise - are laid out in the “Local Plan”.

The Green Belt has been the most successful of all government planning policies. It offers fresh air for generations to come.

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Sandown Park, the Local Plan and the Green Belt

SANDOWN PARK PLANNING APPLICATION

The Jockey Club Racecourses Limited, has submitted an outline planning application for improvements to the racecourse (on Green Belt land), major improvements to the central facilities, a new stabling block, staff housing, a 150 bed hotel and **318 flats** and a nursery on five locations around the park.



Photo: Flickr (diamondgeezer)

Amendments were submitted in July and we understand that this “Master Plan”, which is intended to be implemented over a number of years, will now come before the Planning Committee in October.

The applicant has argued that there exist “very special circumstances” which

justify the construction of the “inappropriate development” of 318 flats in the Green Belt. Namely, that the construction of these flats will fund the development.

The Jockey Club makes much of its Royal Charter, but nonetheless is a commercial business recording very acceptable profits. If the developments and improvements they are proposing are sustainable, there is no need to build flats on the Green Belt and commercial finance will be available to fund the venture.

Rumours persist that the Elmbridge planning officers will recommend approval of this application.

We believe that building flats to fund the development is contrary to government policy and permission, if granted, will drive a coach and horses through our current Local Plan and create huge future pressures for more building on the Green Belt.

Sandown Park, the Local Plan and the Green Belt

THE NEW LOCAL PLAN

Government requires Elmbridge Council to implement a new Local Plan in 2021. A public consultation is being carried out by the Council on five possible options for the plan and residents are encouraged to comment before the end of September.



Our existing Local Plan is based on the Council's ability to identify land in the borough for the construction of 225 dwellings per annum. There are currently, approximately, 280 approved planning applications for new dwellings each year. The Government now requires that the new Local Plan identifies land for the construction of 623 dwellings per annum. (9,345 in the 15 year plan period).

The five options vary in their ability to locate adequate land for dwellings and offer a range of dwelling numbers between 5,300 to 16,300. The higher figures being achieved by the use of Green Belt land.

Elmbridge Council is concerned that, if it is unable to find sufficient building land to meet the new housing target, the new Local Plan will not be approved by government inspectors and in an extreme case, the Council could lose its power as a planning authority with central government imposing inspectors.

Central government has made it very clear that it is opposed to building on the Green Belt unless there are "very special circumstances" and that it is a matter for local councils to decide if Green Belt boundaries are changed to allow building.

The ERA is extremely concerned that meeting the Government's housing targets in full will put unacceptable pressures, not only on Esher's present infrastructure, but also on our Green Belt. **We are totally opposed to any of the proposed new Local Plan options which require the building of dwellings on the Green Belt.**

We are already seeing the effects of the Government's new housing target in Esher and Hersham Riverside. Developers are encouraged to submit dense flatted developments in low density private roads and dense, out-of-character planning applications are appearing on large house plots.

It is extremely important that residents make their views known as the new Local Plan will have a fundamental effect on the area's character over the next 15 years.

Hersham's Promenade Choirs

The Promenade Choirs in Hersham have been providing a superb choral training for young singers from more than ten years and are recognised as one of the top choral ensembles for young singers living in and around Elmbridge.



These non-auditioned choirs are welcoming and fun. Members are challenged to stretch themselves, but this is done in a very supportive way.

Catering for singers from 7 to 21 years old, the Choirs offer top quality musical and technical guidance under the direction of Christopher Goldsack, a distinguished international singer, who moved into education and founded the choirs in 2008.

Their repertoires are extraordinarily varied, ranging from major Classical works, such as Handel's Messiah and Rutter's Feel the Spirit, to contemporary Popular and Music Theatre songs.

Financial support is available, so membership is genuinely open to all ambitious young singers. The Choirs rehearse at Bell Farm School and put on a concert every term and take part in several local festivals each year.

The Junior Choir caters for boys and girls from 7 or 8 years old and rehearses from 6.30 to 7.45pm on Monday evenings. Experienced members of the Youth Choir will mentor and support new members to ensure they feel welcome. The Youth Choir caters for young singers from 11 or 12 years old and above and rehearses from 7.45 to 9pm on Monday evenings.

Many former members have gone on to study music and are working as professional singers.



Christopher Goldsack also runs a Project Choir for experienced adult choral singers interested in singing in a chamber choir.

For more information please visit the choir's website www.promenade.org.uk

Lower Green Litter Pick continues to thrive

The Lower Green Community Centre has gradually been building its activities over the year. Brand new Cubs and Beavers meet on Thursdays, while the parenting puzzle course has a second course starting in September. A pre-school group, pilates, new WeightWatchers group and baby massage are keeping the Centre busy too. If you want to find out more, go to www.lowergreen.org

One of the Centre's most recent additions is a litter picking group - the brainchild of Lower Green resident Paul Hodson, who spotted a Weston Green litter picking group one weekend and decided to get a similar one going in Lower Green.



"I, like many others, have felt for some time that the Lower Green area could do with a bit of TLC"

Cllr. Janet Turner, who runs the Hinchley Wood and Weston Green group, offered all her worldly knowledge on how to set it up.

Litterpickers (the tools used to pick up litter) are provided by Elmbridge Borough Council and collection bags by Amey, the Borough's waste contractor. At the end of each pick, Amey retrieves the rubbish that has been collected.

Paul says "I, like many others, have felt for some time that the Lower Green area could do with a bit of TLC. So, a litter pick seemed a perfect way to do something positive for our environment and our lovely neighbourhood community. We have a lot of young families in the Lower Green area and our monthly community event also serves as a way of getting to know our neighbours whilst helping to teach the next generation of our community how to care for our planet and the place where we live."

If you want to find out when the Lower Green Litter pick is happening, check the ERA website or Facebook page.

The Future of the Claremont Belvedere

The Belvedere, adjacent to Claremont Landscape Gardens, is a generous garden pavilion, built in 1717 to a design by Sir John Vanbrugh. It has three levels, the ground floor was originally an open loggia, the first floor was a Great Room, a place of retreat and entertainment and the top level a viewing platform reached by spiral stairs in one of the four corner towers. The Belvedere is the highest point in the historic landscape and, as such, affords sweeping views of the surroundings.



The Belvedere seen from Claremont Park

The landscape has been shaped by a who's who of influential landscape designers, including Capability Brown, John Vanbrugh and William Kent.

The Claremont estate was gradually sold in lots by the official receiver in the years following Queen Victoria's death in 1901. In 1931 Claremont House and the Belvedere were acquired by a London girls' school which adopted the name 'Claremont'. In 1979, Claremont merged with Fan Court boys' school in Chertsey to become the school now known as 'Claremont Fan Court'.

“This would see the final restoration of the ‘Great Room’ and the repair of the building’s fabric to a high conservation standard”

The school retains ownership of the tower and periodic public access from the former pleasure garden is facilitated by the National Trust.

By 1975 the building was subject to vandalism and to prevent continuing damage glazing was removed and openings blocked up. Although clearly of great historical importance the building has struggled over the last century to find a sustainable use. More recently a range of options has been considered. These include straightforward repairs and restoration, with the continuation of limited access and a destination café with a lifts to the restored first floor Great Room (it should be noted that this and other options would include opening up the ground floor to restore the open loggia). Another alternative would see it used as a high quality holiday let with the necessary work implemented by a charity such as the Landmark Trust or the National Trust.

Whatever the use, it is clear that in the past it has been subject to poor restoration work and is now in need of highly skilled repair and restoration. Although stable, it is considered to be at risk of further deterioration and is on the English Heritage “buildings at risk” register.

The option of Lottery funding has been considered but this would be conditional on measures that might be at odds with the interests of the school and landscape. Restoration and use as holiday accommodation would see the final restoration of the ‘Great Room’ and the repair of the building’s fabric to a high conservation standard. It would still allow a number of visitor days, thereby retaining a form of public access and would allow those fortunate enough to stay in it a unique and uplifting experience.

The history of Claremont is intimately linked to the history of both Esher and the nation and, as such, the Esher Residents Association fully supports efforts to bring the Belvedere back into a sustainable use which would secure the future of this important local building.

While you’re here... The Esher Residents Association receives no funding and is reliant on donations. If you’d like to support us, please do contribute online to the ERA account: Sort code: 20-90-56 Account no: 00232025

Update from Richard Williams, our Elmbridge Councillor

Having been elected on May 2nd as the third councillor representing the Esher Ward, I now sit on the East Area Planning Sub-Committee, the Licensing Committee and Chair the Countryside Consultative Group. I am also a member of Esher and District Citizens Advice Bureau Trustee Board, a Trustee of Lower Green Community Centre and of King George's Hall.

Add to these responsibilities, trying to sort out problems with the Esher Green Controlled Parking Zone and getting verges cut in Lower Green and you'll see life as a councillor is pretty varied.

Many feel that with the pressure to build new housing, we are in danger of losing our sense of place. We absolutely do need to build new homes, but we must also respect our architectural heritage and avoid the Disneyfication of the area.

The new Local Plan, currently under consultation for adoption in 2021 will determine policy on housing in Elmbridge for the next 15 years. It is a giant undertaking and hugely important to everyone who is resident here. Do watch out for updates on our website.

I have been welcomed by Hersham Library to run surgeries for residents who want to meet me. They will run from 10.00 am-midday on the second Saturday of every month. Please check our Facebook page for any changes.

I'm starting work on trying to bring a Farmers Market to Esher. This will need quite a lot of volunteer help - so, if anyone is interested please contact me via helloesher@icloud.com

ERA Annual General Meeting

Our AGM will be held on Thursday 10th October in the Council Chamber at the Civic Centre at 7.30 pm. Our speaker will be Rob Moran, Chief Executive of Elmbridge Borough Council, who will be taking us through the intricacies of the Local Plan. Everyone is welcome to attend.

Published by the Esher Residents Association

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