

LOWER SUNBURY RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

2013 AUTUMN NEWSLETTER



www.losra.org

Spelthorne Council plans huge housing development on Kempton Park Green Belt

We have been made aware of possibly one of the most alarming development plans which Lower Sunbury has faced in the forty years of its existence.

It not only threatens a development that will change the character of our entire local area—it has the potential to help open the floodgates for development on Green Belt across the entire country.

Please be clear—this is not alarmist, nimby-ish scaremongering—it is real, and unless it is headed off at the pass very quickly, there is very little chance of our stopping it.

For the last year or so, Spelthorne Council and The Jockey Club, owners of Kempton Park, which is, of course, almost entirely within the Green Belt, have been discussing a housing development on areas of the site not used for horse-racing. The reason why Spelthorne is so actively interested in the project is that the Council is a long way short of its target for affordable housing, and they want to deal with it with a major development.

It raises the question as to whether the Council has managed its planning strategy over the last decade, if it has allowed such a situation to develop, but maybe that's another story.

The issue is now very much in the public domain - residents' groups such as LOSRA have had meetings with representatives of Spelthorne, Kempton Park and a company called Aspire, who are acting as agents and promoters of the scheme. The Council has set up a steering group to oversee the project, which involves at least one of our local Sunbury councillors, and we know that the Chief Executive, Roberto Tambini, and the

Leader of the Council, Robert Watts, are both very much in favour of the scheme and are actively promoting it.

The central issue is, of course, that the Council is proposing a major housing development on Green Belt. Spelthorne's own Core Strategy document states that "*Spelthorne's Green Belt has a critical strategic role as well as an important role locally in maintaining gaps between settlements and their separation from London. The Green Belt is a key element in securing sustainable development in the wider area around London by containing the outward spread of the capital, preserving open land for the benefit of all and encouraging urban renewal.*

.....Consequently new development will be on previously developed land."

Spelthorne Council is aiming to fly in the face of its own planning strategy, as set out in a statutorily agreed document.

And how does it hope to get round this? They know that development on Green Belt is only allowed in "very special circumstances". They will have to establish that there is some very special justification for such a development. We suspect that they will try to establish that the need for affordable housing and the current economic situation between them represent "very special circumstances".

This is of crucial significance because if they get away with it will set a precedent whereby the same principle could be applied across the entire country. Developers, planning consultants and corporate vested interest will seize

on it, and no planning authority will be prepared to oppose it for fear of incurring costs at public inquiries.

Central Government will be no help - they happily acceded to the lobbying of the construction industry and devised the National Planning Policy Framework, and have promoted the idea of Green Belt being released to help housing development, rather than concentrate on getting the 400,000 outstanding planning permissions on brownfield sites built.

We understand that the number of applications on the Spelthorne social housing register is at least 1,750. The area being talked about is huge - probably three or four times the size of London Irish, so could accommodate a thousand or so smallish dwellings. Traffic consultants are already working on models to see how the extra traffic can be accommodated at Sunbury Cross.

The Jockey Club obviously also stand to make a lot of money from the deal. And where will that money go? There is a covenant on the land which says that if the Jockey Club sells any land, then Spelthorne will get a percentage. But that could be lost if The Jockey Club contribute to local infrastructure through the deal.

The Jockey Club is spending £45m on redeveloping Cheltenham Racecourse and has a £20m shortfall in the funding. Guess where the profit from this development will go - not into Kempton Park or Lower Sunbury, but its flagship course in the Cotswolds would be our guess.

Please let's get one thing clear - LOSRA has absolutely no problem with

the Council finding ways to reach its affordable housing targets, and if suitable sites were available in our area, we would not object to their being developed for affordable housing, as long as housing density was at an acceptable level and the infrastructure could stand it.

However, LOSRA's aims include the following: "*To press for the preservation and extension of Green Belt and public open spaces, and work to protect the local environment*", so inevitably we oppose this proposal without any suggestion of compromise, and we have made this clear to the Chief Executive.

This proposal is completely beyond the pale. The Green Belt round Lower Sunbury performs a classic Green belt function. It separates built-up areas in the most densely populated borough in Surrey, and with the worst air quality in the county, preventing our district from being a seamless suburban sprawl.

If the Kempton Park development were to go ahead, it is hard to see how the Green Belt between Sunbury and Shepperton, all of which is owned by gravel companies or housing developers, could be defended against similar applications—it could all be gone within a decade or less. The same, as we have noted above, would happen everywhere else in Spelthorne and all around the country.

We believe any conjecture and assumptions in this article are well-founded. We invite any Spelthorne officer or councillor to go public and state if they feel that anything we have said in the article is wrong, misleading or irresponsible.

If you find the prospect of a major housing and infrastructure development on Kempton Park as alarming as we do, please make your views known to any or all of the following people:

Roberto Tambini, Spelthorne Chief Executive, at roberto.tambini@spelthorne.gov.uk

Robert Watts, leader of Spelthorne Council, at cllr.watts@spelthorne.gov.uk

Alfred Friday, Sunbury East councillor, at cllr.friday@spelthorne.gov.uk

Ian Harvey, Sunbury East councillor, at cllr.harvey@spelthorne.gov.uk

Suzy Webb, Sunbury East councillor, at cllr.webb@spelthorne.gov.uk

Sandra Dunn, Halliford & Sunbury West councillor, at cllr.dunn@spelthorne.gov.uk

Tim Evans, Halliford & Sunbury West councillor, at cllr.evans@spelthorne.gov.uk

Daxa Patel, Halliford & Sunbury West councillor, at cllr.patel@spelthorne.gov.uk

Or write to them at Spelthorne Council, Knowle Green, Staines, Middx TW18 1XB

Simon Bazalgette, Chief Executive, The Jockey Club, 75 High Holborn, London WC1V 6LS, or by e-mail at info@thejockeyclub.co.uk for Mr. Bazalgette's attention.