

Kempton denies housing link to its free raceday

By Graham Green

KEMPTON'S management has denied Saturday's free raceday is simply a PR exercise designed to assuage local fears that a major housing development is being planned.

All 22,500 tickets have been snapped up for a fixture Jockey Club Racecourses admits is important from a perspective of needing to engage with its large catchment area, but manager Phil White said yesterday the initiative is about showcasing the sport to newcomers, and part of a wider 'free racing' move.

This month Spelthorne Borough Council hosted a public meeting to clarify its position with regard to potential development on green belt land at Kempton, amid concern from campaign group Keep Kempton Green the course is preparing to apply for planning permission for 1,500 homes and commercial units.

KKG chairman Alan Doyle told the Racing Post: "I don't have

suspicious Kempton want planning permission for the eastern side of the racecourse – I've got a pile of Freedom of Information evidence 4ft high in my office.

"They've been talking to our local council for more than two years, and senior councillors and officials have been meeting with Kempton so often they've probably seen more of the racecourse than their spouses."

Doyle continued: "I don't know if Kempton is trying to curry favour with Sunbury residents with the free raceday, but although the community has always got on well with the racecourse, its stock has certainly fallen with locals since it became apparent it wants to build on green belt. It will rise again only if they drop the plans.

"Anybody that goes to Kempton for free on Saturday should look across at the eastern end of the racecourse and they'll see an enormous area that was bulldozed flat last weekend."

White said: "Given Kempton Park's role as a key stakeholder in the local community we meet with the local council on a regular basis. In the last few months there have been discussions about Spelthorne's long-term housing needs and whether spare land at the back of the course presents any kind of opportunity to help to meet these.

"We're not at a stage of conducting a formal consultation process or submitting any planning application for consideration; instead we are continuing with a feasibility study into possible options to consider for the future."

He added: "BetBright Chase Day is free on Saturday as part of a wider initiative that started at Aintree with Becher Chase Day and continues next month at Huntingdon and Market Rasen.

"Free admission is about showcasing our sport to people who may not have been racing before. Ascot did the same last Saturday."