

Council: We'll never build on Kempton Park

By Matt Strudwick

COUNCIL bosses at Spelthorne Borough Council have announced they will never accept a plan to build on green belt land at Kempton Park racecourse.

Speaking at a public meeting at the Hazelwood Centre in Sunbury on Tuesday, head of planning, John Brooks, said Kempton Park is a very important green belt site as it sits on the 'front line' of restraining the growth of London.

Mr Brooks said there were 'serious constraints' on the land, which includes areas of special scientific interest and nature conservation.

"National policy says, in terms of green belt, the essential characteristics are their openness and permanence," he said. "It needs to be sustainable land that properly balances those things. Does housing trump green land? No. Having green belt means we won't be able to meet our planning needs. That's a fact. That's a reality we will face. Green belt is there to restrain development and it's in our green belt

policy to do that." Spelthorne's green belt policy states "The green belt shown on the proposals map will be permanent."

The meeting was organised by the council after the Keep Kempton Park Green (KKPG) campaign group claimed emails between Spelthorne Borough Council and the Jockey Club, owner of Kempton Park, suggested they had been talks about building 1,500 homes at the site.

Chief executive of Spelthorne Borough Council, Roberto Tambini, admitted talks had taken place but were designed to get 'full understanding' of the Jockey Club's plans - which he claims the council still have not seen.

"I totally disagree the council has this up their sleeve and has done a deal, because I haven't seen it, as chief executive," he said. "When you read those exchanges, there is always a danger when someone is forced to look at something out of context. You need to get it out of your head, this obsession."

The documents, obtained

through a Freedom of Information request by chairman of KKPG Alan Doyle, show 14 meetings between the council and the Jockey Club as well as correspondence between local agencies and organisations including Richmond, Elmbridge and Hounslow borough councils, the Highways Agency, Environment Agency and Natural England.

Spelthorne Borough councillor Tim Evans, for the Halliford and Sunbury West ward, said: "I have no desire whatsoever or plan to build on Kempton Park. There is never going to be a plan accepted by this council to build on Kempton Park. If it comes along, a planning application, we'll deal with it."

After the meeting, leader of Spelthorne Borough Council, Cllr Robert Watts, said: "I am pleased we were able to meet so many residents to clear up misunderstandings about Kempton Park. This was a very open, frank and constructive meeting and we hope residents feel reassured."

Spelthorne Borough Council agreed in September to prepare a new local plan,

which could take four years to complete, to outline housing and amenity needs.

Mr Doyle said part of the review would be to reassess green belt boundaries.

"The question is, will Kempton Park, or any of our other open spaces, still have green belt protection after the review?" he said. "We were left at the end of Tuesday's meeting with more unanswered questions than at the beginning. Why is the council stalling on involving communities in the review. The law says it must involve communities]. Strangely, there is no stalling if you are a developer. Does the council really expect us to believe The Jockey Club never showed it any detail at all about its plans for Kempton Park in any of the multitude of meetings about the issue over a period of years? The evidence shows the opposite. Why does the council think we need more open-market dwellings when the crying need is for affordable homes?"

"Why is the council so obsessively secretive? It must realise by now that, in the electronic age, there are no secrets."