



NEWSLETTER

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Monday 14 March 2016 Epping Hall

7:30pm Members meeting

8:00pm Refreshments and an opportunity to discuss your concerns with the new Committee

Membership renewals are due now.

We thank all members who have paid by Standing Order and ask all other readers to complete a membership form and renew or join the Society.

The more support we receive from members the more our voice will be listened to.

If you have received a renewal form with this newsletter it is because your subscription is due.

RSVP – please let us know if you expect to be at the AGM as it will help us with catering. All members will be welcome regardless of this. Communications details bottom page 4.

Our membership changes year by year and so does the Committee. We need fresh blood (of any age) to provide continuity, new ideas and enthusiasm. Following our sad loss last year we need a Treasurer and we want to find helpers with research on the major development and planning policies expected in the coming year, digital communications (Facebook, Website, etc) and help with reviewing planning applications. If you can help please contact us – you do not necessarily have to join the committee to be useful.



Denys Favre is the valued Life President of The Epping Society and we were pleased to present him with a token of thanks for his service to us at our Christmas lunch. We look forward to his continued support as Life President for many years to come.

We were fortunate to learn of his intention to move nearer his daughter in Leeds in time to mark his service to the whole town and to wish him health and happiness. We were glad that a number of other Epping societies were able to be represented there for Denys.

He was 97 in December and we look forward to seeing him when he returns to the district, as he has promised to do, not least to visit Copped Hall Apple Day. Denys was a founder Trustee for Copped Hall and remains devoted to its resurrection.

Epping Society Open Meeting 22 January

Over 200 people attended with some guests standing in the balcony and others had to be turned away at the door.

A full line-up of speakers (in order of speaking) were:

- Richard Knox-Johnston, newly elected Chairman of the London Green Belt Council.
- Eleanor Laing MP
- Alison Blom Cooper of Fortismere Associates on behalf of Epping Forest District Council
- Jon Whitehouse – Essex County Council
- Nigel Avey – Epping Town Council



Richard reminded the meeting of the purposes of the Green Belt which included health, flood prevention and the importance of openness. He stressed the inability of planning authorities to actually deliver additional housing because of the effect of land banking, and the significant number of planning consents for housing already in existence called for a better solution to encourage developers to actually build homes.

Eleanor Laing repeated her support for the Green Belt and described how she explained its significance to other MPs who might not recognise its importance to areas such as Epping Forest. Mrs Laing noted that in the past 50 years only 1 per cent of Green Belt had been developed and suggested that such a small loss might have to be contemplated to meet housing need.

Jon Whitehouse and Nigel Avey gave the perspective of Essex County and Epping Town Councils and each stressed their support for the Green Belt and their concern about threats to its future. No houses would be built which were not needed.



Cllr John Philip (EFDC Development Portfolio Holder) emphasised that no decisions had yet been taken, when challenged on specific land areas near Epping. Cllr Chris Whitbread (Leader of the Council) stated that the last thing the Council wanted was to damage the Green Belt by scheduling it for development.

Questioners were concerned that EFDC should not have to accommodate the growing population of London and noted that, as a pleasant place to live, demand for housing here was almost unlimited. Several questioners wondered how we could cope with infrastructure already bursting, including roads, tube, schools and doctors surgeries being mentioned.



Councillors explained that the number of additional homes in our district was not yet fixed as negotiations were still in hand with neighbouring districts who may choose to take more. Any new builds authorised recently would count towards our total, including the St Johns School site and any homes authorised in time at the St Johns Road development.



We were delighted to welcome representatives from

- CPRE Essex
- Theydon Bois Action Group
- Theydon Bois Rural Preservation Society
- Waltham Abbey Residents Association

Public response since the meeting has been strongly supportive with new members and hundreds of visits to our Facebook and websites.

EPHING NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Our Town Council are currently asking Epping residents what is good about living in this town. They are doing this as they have to engage with the residents before they can put in place their Neighbourhood Plan.



This Neighbourhood Plan is important for Epping as it is our best opportunity to say how we want our town to develop. In particular, the Town Council can state their attitude and stance to planning policies that will affect Epping. This would include policies that will determine planning applications. It will also give the Town Council an input into how and where strategic development takes place in the town.

The Town Council can only do this if they have a good engagement with their residents during the consultation period.

What is good about Epping? What is bad about Epping? What makes a neighbourhood good to live and work in? What pressures affect the area now or may affect it in the future? What needs to change?

Let the Town Council know what you think. There will be information and updates here and on noticeboards around town. Follow Twitter feed @EppingTown. Send an email to slatchford@eppingtowncouncil.gov.uk or give them a call on 01992 579444 or speak to your Town Councillor.

Complete and return this questionnaire to Sue Latchford at Epping Hall, St John's Road.

GREEN BELT - What do you think?

Question 1. The Green Belt ensures there are sufficient gaps between settlements to preserve them from urban sprawl and to maintain their rural character. It also offers a space for wildlife and protects biodiversity. How important is preserving this part of Epping's unique character, to you?

Very important	Quite important	Not important	No opinion
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Question 2. The area of designated Green Belt land in England at 31st March 2011 was estimated at 1,639,540 hectares, about 13 per cent of the land area of England. Do you think this is:

Enough	Not enough	Too much	No opinion
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Question 3. Would you support any kind of development on Green Belt land around Epping?

Yes	No	With provisos/limits	Unsure
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Question 4. What significance, if any, does the Green Belt have for you?

Members may have received a longer questionnaire from Epping Town Council and we strongly encourage you to complete and return these as soon as possible. We heard at our Open Meeting in January that the Green Belt is under threat. Please make sure your support for the Green Belt is made clear to all your Councillors, MP and to anyone else you can. Don't leave it to others to speak up for our open countryside. Please see our report on page 2.

Consultations allow the public to voice their concerns. While The Epping Society makes representations the more who do so the better. At present there are consultations on national planning policy so it is important to ensure accidental or devious changes are not made to damage our communities.

Knolly's Hill Nursery at Pick Hill Waltham Abbey is in the Green Belt. The site is not a part of the local community but a separate place beyond the village envelope. Epping Forest DC policy is to refuse development on the Green Belt and national policy is to refuse development there unless there are "very special circumstances".

Officers at EFDC recommended the application for 79 dwellings should be refused, as we would have expected them to do. The only circumstances put forward as justification for this large scale breach of planning policy was that a day nursery could be re-located there – as if there could be no alternative venue!

There is a procedure whereby the Secretary of State can call in such breaches of policy. Eric Pickles did that several times but the current Minister has refused to do so, saying "He is satisfied that the application should be determined at a local level". We must therefore hold our EFDC Councillors responsible for this large development on Green Belt land and I invite you to tell them what you think of it.

It is not clear how much confidence we can have in the statements on the Green Belt made to us at the Open Meeting.

Your Society will ask for sight of the advice the Minister received from his officials but the best way to counter this creeping development of the Green Belt is to make clear to Councillors that the public do not approve. Residents and voters have various ways of expressing their values and opinions and the legal ones should be considered.

After the seeming unity of support for the Green Belt at our Open Meeting it was a shock to learn that EFDC and the Minister care little about the policy of restricting development in the Green Belt.

What's bothering us at the moment

Remembrance parade

We have written to the District Council to support road closure for this important annual community celebration of the devotion of local people in World Wars and other conflicts since then. Last year Essex police withdrew support quite close to Remembrance Day but local people took it upon themselves to parade regardless.

Green Belt development

EFDC has granted planning consent in the Green Belt at in Waltham Abbey at Knolly's Nursery, Pick Hill (EPF/1162/15). We regard this as unacceptable and Eleanor Laing's help has been sought. We would like the Minister to call in the case and reverse the decision.

This EFDC decision appears to us to be a direct challenge to Government policy on Green Belt.

Research

We have been asked for information and photographs on the former country house named Theydon Bower. This was demolished in the late 1980s and is now apartments also named Theydon Bower and is opposite the railway bridge. If you can help, please get in touch.

Conversion of commercial premises

The Committee is anxious about the long term effects of the current automatic right to convert offices to residential use. We have asked Brandon Lewis MP (Minister of State for Housing & Planning) to consider this carefully.

The Epping Society recognises that land use has to change over time but if there is to be a planning system we need to ensure that town centres do not become unviable through a loss of premises in which commercial activity and jobs can thrive.

National Planning Policy Framework

We have responded to a draft response to the Government's consultation on changes to affordable housing and small starter homes. We have recommended that small developments are generally preferred by residents, rather than large ones of hundreds of homes, especially in smaller communities and market towns.

Local plan

We are greatly concerned about the review of the Green Belt throughout the district and especially around Epping. The selection of sites to grade with a view to possible redesignation as no longer Green Belt seems to us illogical and potentially intended to provide the additional building

land the planning authority appears to need for 13,000 additional homes.

St John's Road

The time it has taken to make this site available for redevelopment is causing us concern. The longer it remains undeveloped the longer a degree of blight hangs over surrounding properties and local businesses.

Cooperation between the three councils involved appears to have been less fulsome than we would expect of them while the commercial details of the sale remain secret and accordingly public accountability gets deferred year after year.

For the record, a public consultation was held in 2012 and clear preferences were given about the future use of land currently owned for us by the councils. Epping Society is worried that intended development will not provide maximum advantage to the town.

This site deserved a high standard of design as it will dominate that quarter of the centre for decades, perhaps centuries to come. There is unlikely ever to be another similarly large single site for redevelopment.

Photographic and document archives

Charlie Geddes has archived large numbers of photographs with a strong local connection and labelling is under way. These will be made available on the website as soon as possible.

Charlie has also received a bundle of commercial documents from the past which feature a number of local businesses and these too will be made available.

Planning applications

Your Committee regularly discuss the more troublesome planning applications which are reviewed for us by Charlie. In many cases it is impossible for the planning authority to resist developments which appear to us to be excessive or just plain ugly.

We recognise the pressure on housing demand in the area and the potential gains owners can make from extending their homes but we feel the system is not working well if it permits the "uglification" of formerly pretty or even just plain streets.

I would cite Bower Hill as an example of changes to a road which have been done with too little attention to design, nevertheless acknowledging that certain of the works there may, in themselves, be inoffensive or even attractive.

Andrew Smith
Chairman

