

# POST-WAR PREFABS

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The Mark V 'Arcon' prefabricated bungalow – one of the preferred designs for Woking UDC – This one is on display at the Old Kiln Rural Life Museum at Tilford

Over the past few months as I have been researching and writing about Woking during the Second World War, one thing has struck me more than anything else – that despite all the disruption of taking in evacuees, building air-raid shelters and coping with bombs, the local authorities (and government) still made time to think about what would happen after the war.

In 1943 London County Council published a report called the 'County of London Plan' that looked at how the city would be rebuilt once hostilities had ended. In 1944 they published another plan looking at 'Greater London', but the LCC were not the only authority with foresight, and in Woking the council were busy looking at where and how it would build new homes 'fit for heroes', just as they had done after the First World War on estates in Old Woking, Horsell and Knaphill.

In May 1944 the council identified three sites that they thought suitable for the first 'post-war' housing – just under half an acre of land in Victoria Road/Herbert Crescent at Knaphill, almost four acres of land at Eden Grove in Byfleet and 1.3 acres of land at 'The Triangle, Royal Oak Road' (the latter of which was eventually to prove too expensive to provide with services and was quietly dropped).

A circular from the Ministry of Health in September 1944 had asked all councils how many 'temporary' prefabricated houses they were prepared to erect after the war. Woking

considered asking for two-hundred, although the vote was lost by fourteen to eight and permission to erect just one-hundred prefabs was asked for in the end. Two sites in Beechwood Road at Lower Knaphill were initially chosen, with a further five acres at The Hermitage at St Johns considered in November that year.

Negotiations for the Hermitage site were

problematic forcing the council to consider compulsory purchase powers, but the Eden Grove site at Byfleet was less of a problem and with Ministry of Housing approval it was hoped to be able to start work on just over half of the one-hundred bungalows on that site the following summer (with forty-six others to be built at the Hermitage, once that site was secured).



Italian Prisoners of War at work on clearing and laying the foundations of the Eden Grove estate at Byfleet.



A dusty old slide of the work at Eden Grove.

There were apparently numerous approved designs of prefabricated houses available, with Woking favouring either the 'Tarran Arcon' (a wooden framed bungalow) or the 'Uniseco' (asbestos and plywood framed) type houses on the 'Arcon Mark V floor plan'.

In March 1945 the Ministry of Housing gave approval for the plans, and Messrs J Cawley of Chertsey was appointed to remove the trees on the Eden Grove 'pumping station' site so that the concrete slabs could be laid. Provision for

electricity at the site was also made and for gas to be laid to the rest of the Eden Grove site and at The Hermitage. Estimates for laying the roads, paths and sewers came to £1,875 for the Hermitage with the Eden Grove Pumping Station site at £469 and the remainder of the Eden Grove site at £2,293. A company called Furbank's from Luton were given the contract, but it soon became clear that with labour shortages they were unable to carry out the work and so the council proposed using Prisoners of War to help clear the ground and lay the foundations.

The Nissan huts at the West Byfleet Golf Course were apparently occupied by German Prisoners of War, although it is thought that mainly Italian's were used at Eden Grove, but whichever nationality carried out the work, the result was that by July 1945 the council were able to report that work at Byfleet could begin and within a matter of months some local families whose houses had been damaged or destroyed in the war could be re-housed.

Others found temporary accommodation in old army huts at Durnford Camp in Woodham, before eventually the new prefabs and permanent council homes could be built.

*By May 1946 the council were able to report that 54 houses had been built at Eden Grove.*

