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Cllr Gulland: Insulate & Generate – two key aspects to include in the Local Plan for Epsom & Ewell

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Joining us for the other side of the coin regarding our articles on heating and insulation, Councillor David Gulland (College Ward – Liberal Democrat) goes over some topics regarding the Local Plan for Epsom & Ewell

Two of the many crises facing our residents are the dramatically increased costs of energy, which disproportionately hits those less well off, and the continued climate emergency. A third, more local, one is the slow evolution of the required Local Plan that sets out the long-term strategy and requirements for new homes in the Borough.

Why is the Local Plan important?

This document forms the basis for assessing building applications and without it, the Council has limited ability to challenge inappropriate development. A Local Plan also sets out how the local authority intends to meet, or why it cannot meet, the centrally set target for new houses. The Local Plan recently published by Mole Valley demonstrates how these centrally set targets can be robustly challenged, with the Plan now out for consultation proposing 353 new homes each year rather than the government's target of 456. Our local Council recently approved a new timetable for producing our Local Plan, which means a full draft will not be ready for public consultation until September 2023 (although some initial consultation is expected to start in October this year). It will be interesting to see whether the ruling RA Party will accept the government's basic target for Epsom & Ewell of 579 homes each year, or will provide a robust explanation of why the target is inappropriate and unachievable.

The win-win of setting high energy efficiency standards.

Well-insulated homes can save £671 a year in heating costs – even before the recent price increases. In the winter of 2018-19, 17,000 lives were lost due to cold housing conditions, the highest since 1976. A greater quantity than the cumulative deaths from breast and brain cancers in the same period. The UK has the second-worst cold weather mortality rate of 30 European countries, and when balanced for wealth, ranks amongst the worst in the world. However current national standards for energy efficiency are not good enough, and the government has recently canned the scheme to help households with the costs of insulation. The Local Plan for Epsom & Ewell should therefore impose higher requirements than the minimum, following the lead of Mole Valley.

Tackling the climate emergency – one home at a time.

Energy usage in our homes accounts for 14% of UK emissions. To tackle the climate emergency, we know that we must urgently reduce our carbon footprint. The phrase 'activism starts at home' could not be truer. It shouldn't cost the earth to live in a healthy, comfortable dwelling. So as well as concentrating on insulation, the expectation should be that our Local Plan should require all new builds to do as much as possible to generate their own source of power and heating, through PV panels and air or ground-source heat pumps. Indeed, could our Borough show some innovative thinking and propose ideas such as solar panel structures over the surface car parks at Upper High Street, and micro-wind turbines on all buildings?

If this topic interested you, please read an Epsom resident's experience with insulation and heating by clicking here.

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