The Battle of Waterloo Road development

The Epsom and Ewell Borough Council Planning Committee has unanimously rejected a controversial proposal for a 12-unit residential development on Waterloo Road. Councillors cited concerns over poor design, excessive height, a lack of affordable housing, and the absence of parking provision.

The meeting, held on 6th March 2025, was chaired by Councillor **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodocte and Langley)/The application sought outline planning permission to demolish an existing two-storey building and replace it with a four-storey block containing seven two-bedroom flats and five one-bedroom flats.

However, councillors raised significant objections, particularly regarding the design and scale of the project. The Planning Officer explained that while an earlier proposal for a smaller nine-unit scheme had been approved on appeal, this new application was substantially different. "The proposal would maximise the number of units on the site to the detriment of the local character of the area," he stated.

Councillor **Bernie Muir** (Conservative Horton) was critical of the lack of parking provision, arguing that the development failed to consider residents with mobility issues. "More and more homes are becoming a complete barrier to people because they need a car to actually exist," she said.

Councillor **Jan Mason** (RA Ruxley) praised the planning officers' report, calling it "one of the best" she had seen in her 20 years as a councillor. She also criticised the design, saying: "You either make something outstanding so people say 'wow', or you ensure it blends in so well that it is unobtrusive. This does neither."

Another major point of contention was the failure to meet the council's affordable housing policy. Under planning regulations, 20% of developments of this scale should be designated as affordable housing, yet the applicant had only proposed 5%. Councillor **Chris Watson** (RA Ewell Court) called this a "cynical application", adding: "Anyone can pick up the policy and read it. There is no excuse for submitting something that so blatantly disregards our requirements."

Concerns were also raised about the impact on neighbouring properties. The proposed development would result in significant overlooking, overshadowing, and loss of privacy for nearby homes. It also failed to meet national space standards for several of the proposed flats.

Following the discussion, Councillor **Neil Dallen** (RA Town) proposed that the application be refused, seconded by Councillor Muir. The committee then voted unanimously in favour of rejection.

Councillor **Humphrey Reynolds** (RA West Ewell) remarked on the pattern of previous applications for the site being refused, noting that even successful appeals had not led to development. "Clearly, the developers know this is not right," he said.

The applicant now has the option to revise the scheme and submit a new proposal or appeal the decision.

Image: EEBC papers showing overlooking of proposed 4 storey building over neighbouring properties

Epsom and Ewell appeal to owners of empty homes

To mark National Empty Property Week, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) is getting in touch with owners of properties that have been empty for more than two years, to try to bring them back into use.

Empty properties are considered a wasted housing resource, can attract anti-social activity, and can even create environmental problems.

There are currently more than 250 families from Epsom & Ewell in temporary accommodation, with a further 1,336 people on the council's housing needs register, and many others looking for a property to rent or buy. Bringing empty properties back into use will help households facing homelessness find accommodation within the borough, closer to their schools, jobs and local support networks.

There are currently 64 properties that have been empty for more than two years in Epsom & Ewell. Homeowners still pay council tax on empty properties council tax on a property that has been empty for more than two years increases to 200%, while those empty for more than five years increases to 300%.

There are several options available for empty homeowners:

- Leasing a property to the council via EEBC's Private Sector Lease (PSL) scheme for a period of 3-5 years. The homeowner receives a guaranteed rental income, and the council manages the property on their behalf. Where the property requires renovation before it can be leased, the council may even be able to assist with the cost of works.
- Letting the property privately.
- Selling the property to provide residential accommodation within the borough. In some instances, the council may even be interested in purchasing the property.

Councillor Clive Woodbridge, Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee, said:

"Across the country, the lack of affordable housing has put massive pressure on local authorities, and Epsom & Ewell is no different. The council's housing team work extremely hard to house people in need but supply continually outstrips demand.

"I would implore anyone with a long-term empty property in the borough to consider getting in touch with the council or letting it out privately. Not only would you be providing much needed accommodation but, by bringing your property back into use, you can avoid an additional council tax burden."

Anyone interested in contacting the council with a property to let can fill in the form on the council's website - Do you have a property to let? | Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council operates a private sector leasing scheme which allows us to assist local families in housing need whilst reducing the risks and hassle of letting for landlords. We offer:

- to manage your property
- guaranteed rent
- a lease of three to five years.

Find out more at Private sector leasing scheme \mid Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

Photo by Jonathan Cooper

Councillor thinks new Ewell homes refusal is batty

Plans for four new homes in Ewell have been refused over bats potentially living in the two bungalows. Although one survey was done, councillors could not rule out there were definitely no bats in the buildings.

The scheme involved demolishing two semi-detached bungalows on Kirby Close, and erecting four, 3-bedroom homes in a residential Ewell suburb. The two-storey houses would have two car parking spaces per house with associated landscaping, according to the report.

However, the applicant had not carried out a phase 2 survey establishing if there were any bats in the bungalow. Officers "could not be satisfied" the demolition of the building did not pose a risk to protected species and its habitat. Members rejected the application at an Epsom and Ewell Borough Planning Committee meeting on February 13.

Cllr **Julian Freeman** (LibDem College) said: "This smacks of desperation to find some reason for turning down an application for housing that we desperately need in this borough." An increasingly frustrated Cllr Freeman reminded the committee that the borough has a "housing crisis".

The Liberal Democrat member argued that you would know if bats are on the site as "you would be sweeping up the mess on a fairly regular basis". He said: "If [the council] is going to refuse an application because there *might* be bats then, surely you need some evidence of that."

But Cllr **Steven McCormick**, (RA Woodcote and Langley) chairing the meeting, explained the plans have to be turned down because there is no evidence that bats are *not* in the two bungalows. Councils have a legal requirement for bat surveys to ensure the mammals are not harmed in the demolition or construction of buildings.

The potential harm to protected species is the only reason why the risks would outweigh the benefits of delivering two houses, planning officers told the committee as they recommended the application for refusal.

If the applicant was to appeal the decision, members asked whether the council would be "laughed at" for refusing on the grounds there was no evidence that bats are non-existent on the site. However, officers told the committee that an application on Reigate Road, which was refused for a lack of satisfactory bat survey, was dismissed at appeal by the Planning Inspector.

Councillors questioned whether they could approve the application with the condition of a further bat survey, but officers said National England guidance is it has to be known early on if bats are in the building before approval could go ahead. The bungalows cannot be demolished until the council knows whether or not bats are there.

Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) said he was happy to approve it once the second bat survey is done as he couldn't see "any significant or demonstrable harm that outweighs the benefit of two additional dwellings".

A previous similar application for the 'principle of development' was rejected in July 2024 on the basis the housing proposal was too dense to match the character of the street. This is currently at appeal.

Image: 9-10 Kirby Close in Ewell, where the proposed development would be built. (Credit: Google Street View)

Mole Valley setting a green belt development trend?

Up to 200 new homes will be built on former green belt land despite fears they could overwhelm the already strained sewage system. Mole Valley District Council's planning committee approved developer Thakeham's vision for the 27-hectare site off Little Bookham Street on Wednesday, February 5. As well as the 200 homes, the plans will feature a community building, Gypsy and Traveller pitches, and public open space that the developers said would also open access to nearby ponds. Forty per cent of the homes would be affordable.

The site has been identified for development by the council's local plan, but the application had drawn more than 300 objections. Residents speaking at the meeting raised concerns about raw sewage, as well as the impact on local children being pushed out of their school's catchment area. Thames Water, however, raised no objections. Christine Milstead said: "Our green belt is definitely not Angela Rayner's gray belt. We think this development will cause harm to the green belt and protected habitats. All residents have objected to surface water flooding, and there are springs all over this site. For years, residents have been pumping water off their patios to prevent their houses from flooding. When you get a lot of rain, water does not drain through permeable surfaces. Will the proposed infrastructure capture water from the rear of new properties, or will it just run down to Little Bookham Street?"

Speaking on behalf of the plans, Tristan Robinson, Thakeham's director of external affairs, said Mole Valley was the fourth least affordable place to live in the country. He highlighted young couples struggling to afford housing and the 680 households on the waiting list. Despite the plans being voted through—by eight in favour, three against, and one abstention—Councillor Joanna Slater (Conservative; Leatherhead South) cautioned against setting a precedent for developing beyond what was laid out in the council's local plan for green belt. Cllr Paul Kennedy (Liberal Democrats: Bookham East and Eastwick Park) also urged the committee to heed residents and environmental groups calling for the protection of the "precious unspoiled countryside."

The new homes will be net carbon zero and feature a mix of one to four-bedroom properties. The developers aim to create 45 acres of open space and a new country park accessible to the wider community. Mr Robinson said: "After undertaking a comprehensive public consultation process for Land North West of Preston Farm, we are pleased to receive backing from Mole Valley District Council. The scheme includes 40 per cent affordable housing—something urgently needed locally—and significant new public open spaces for everyone to enjoy."

Plans for 200 homes in Little Bookham (image Thakeham)

New homes planned for Ashtead

Hundreds of new homes could be built in Ashtead if newly submitted plans to Mole Valley District Council are approved. Wates Developments and its partners, Vistry Group, have submitted outline plans for up to 270 homes, of which about 40 per cent will be affordable.

The proposals, which still need to go through the planning process, also include a community centre that could become a children's nursery. Nearby schools are said to be under-subscribed, with vacancy rates expected to grow in some areas, according

to planning documents submitted to the council. The documents suggest that the new homes could help boost pupil numbers in local schools.

John Tarvit, director of planning for Wates Developments, said: "We have an exciting vision for this site to create a sense of place and community, with landscape-led design that incorporates a variety of green spaces. Our proposals will help encourage social interaction, provide safe and attractive streets, encourage sustainable travel choices, and maximise biodiversity. We're proud that this will be a high-quality, net-zero development that reduces carbon emissions and enhances the resilience of the development to a changing climate. All new homes will be lean, clean, and green."

The land, south of Ermyn Way, has been allocated for residential-led development by the council. The developers state they are "committed to creating a distinctive and responsive new neighbourhood, offering a good range of house sizes and types.

"The proposed development will enhance the existing local community and deliver a range of benefits for people in Ashtead in addition to the much-needed new homes."

In addition to the housing scheme, the developers are proposing a community building with the potential for a children's nursery, 30 acres of open space, and a children's play area. At this stage, the plans are in outline format, but the developers have said that buildings will vary across the site, reaching up to a maximum of three storeys, although the majority will be two storeys.

The developers believe this approach will "create a varied roofscape, define marker buildings and add to the visual richness" of the project. They have also indicated that details such as the sizes of the homes, in terms of bedrooms, and the layout of the development are yet to be finalised.

Wates said the site currently consists of arable agricultural fields just north of the M25 and within walking and cycling distance of both Ashtead and Leatherhead. It is also already well connected to bus services. As part of the pre-planning process, Wates held meetings with nearby schools, including Trinity Primary School.

The planning statement noted: "At the meeting, the applicants were informed that the school is well below pupil capacity and referred to the same position at other local schools. It was explained to the applicants that local schools are accepting pupils who might not otherwise meet their selection criteria." It added: "It was confirmed that Greville School currently has capacity and in the coming years will likely have greater capacity as there are significant spaces available in the reception year."

Homes would be built on the western side of the site to create "a clear distinction between residential development and the eastern section within the retained green belt." The final layout will be determined through discussion with the council.

Wates Development's outline plans for up to 270 homes near the M25 in Ashstead (image Wates Development)

Local Plan lessons from a Surrey borough?

Precious green belt sites could be at risk of speculative developments and Waverley Borough Council could be powerless to stop them after its biggest housing project was judged to be taking too long to build.

All planning authorities must demonstrate they can provide enough land to supply housing for five years.

If they don't they can become vulnerable to speculative applications and can lose control over where new homes are built – and may have to approve applications they would normally refuse.

Waverley Borough Council has been hit by a double whammy of increased housing targets by the Government and the Planning Inspectorate's decision to pull the 2600-home Dunsfold Park from its projections over its "development trajectory".

This has left the council running out of earmarked land for new homes in just two and a half years.

The situation gets even worse when the new Government's increased housing targets are added into the fold, bringing the figure down to just one and a half years.

The figures were published in a Waverley Borough Council position statement last November following the Planning Inspector's Dunsfold Park ruling.

It read: "The site has been discounted from the council's five year housing land supply by Planning Inspectors in recent appeals and for this reason, the council has decided to exclude the site from the five year supply until there is more certainty about the timescales for delivery of housing on the site."

The plan has been to redevelop the aerodrome to form a new garden village on the brownfield site.

Planning permission for the first stage of the project was originally granted by the Secretary of State in March 2018. Its infrastructure is expected to support other developments in the borough.

So far "not one home" has been built.

Councillor Jane Austin, leader of the Conservative opposition group on Waverley Borough Council, criticised the borough for not publicising the change more widely saying residents deserved to know what was happening.

She said: "These housing supply figures are utterly dire and will mean more opportunistic development in inappropriate locations."

"We may as well just hand over the keys to opportunistic developers for any of the borough's green fields without some kind of national planning protection over them. I am extremely concerned about what this means for Alfold and edge of town sites across the borough."

Surrey County Councillor for Waverley Eastern Villages Kevin Deanus added: "Since Dunsfold Park gained planning consent in 2018 not one home has been constructed.

"Meanwhile local villages like Alfold have doubled in size. Major planning permissions in the local area have been granted dependent on infrastructure upgrades delivered via the Dunsfold Park permission.

"We now have raw sewage coming out of the ground in Alfold and huge pressure on local roads and infrastructure. Local people are despairing."

Councillor Liz Townsend, Waverley Borough Council portfolio holder for planning and economic development said they remained fully committed to delivering sustainable housing that meets the needs of the community while challenging unjustified and unrealistic targets imposed by the Government.

Dunsfold Park had originally been included in the 2018 Local Plan when the council was under Conservative control and was one of several sites identified to meet housing needs.

She said: "While the council sets the framework for development, it is important to clarify that we do not have the power to compel developers to build homes once planning permissions are granted. As of now, planning permission has been granted for around 5,000 homes across Waverley.

"However, this is no longer sufficient to meet our five-year housing land supply target, primarily due to significant increases in government-mandated targets.

"Originally set at 590 homes per year, this skyrocketed to 710 homes under the previous government, and now to an extraordinary 1,481 homes per year under current government policies.

"This cumulative target amounts to a staggering 29,000 homes over the next 20 years — effectively requiring the construction of an additional Farnham and Godalming within the borough, which is entirely unfeasible.

"Waverley Borough Council has made robust representations to the Government, including direct appeals to the Deputy Prime Minister, outlining why the housing need calculations are flawed. To date, these concerns have been ignored.

"We are actively working with the promoters of Dunsfold Park and other developers to accelerate delivery.

"However, Government Planning Inspectors have questioned the certainty of delivery on the Dunsfold site within the next five years.

As a result, the council has been forced to remove this site from its short-term housing projections, although this position will be continuously reviewed.

"The council is working urgently to develop a new Local Plan that ensures sustainable housing, job creation, and critical infrastructure.

"This is the only mechanism available to justify a more realistic housing target. Claims that the council is not fulfilling its obligations or has alternative options are factually incorrect.

"We are committed to addressing the national housing crisis while balancing the need to protect our borough's character and environment. However, it is the Government's disproportionate and unrealistic housing targets—not a lack of action by the council—that are placing immense pressure on local authorities across the country.

"Waverley Borough Council will continue to advocate for realistic and sustainable solutions to meet housing needs while standing

firm against policies that jeopardise the future of our communities."

Image: Waverley Borough Council (Chris Caulfield)

Blot on Epsom Down's west horizon to grow?

The "Croydonisation" of Woking will continue after a 26-storey town centre tower block on the former BHS site was approved. The plans for the 272-home 85-metre-tall building are nearly identical to those previously rejected in March 2024 but have been signed off following changes to Woking Borough Council's housing targets and further clarifications from the developers. Donard Real Estate will demolish the former store to create the Crown Gardens project. The build-to-rent project will include 28 affordable homes as well as retail and commercial zones on the ground floor of the Commercial Way site. There would also be public space landscaping to improve the area around Christ Church.

Approving the plans – which were also under a separate appeal – would help the council meet its new, higher housing targets and help take pressure off green belt sites. The meeting was also assured the building would be predominantly made of brick, limiting the potential of weather damaging external cladding. The town centre had to be closed off after cladding fell from the Hilton Hotel building this year due to storms. Speaking on behalf of the developers was Mervyn McFarland. He said, "Crown Gardens will deliver 272 high-quality build-to-rent homes addressing the growing need for housing and helping Woking's residents, particularly young people and families, to stay in Woking and contribute to the town's vitality and growth. It will help alleviate pressure on traditional housing stock while also contributing to meeting housing targets. It will free up homes better suited to families and other demographics, contributing to a more balanced housing market in Woking. Crown Gardens will support Woking's regeneration, bringing up to 700 new residents to the town centre. This is expected to bring in around £10m expenditure annually in local spending, boosting businesses."

The limited parking at the site was no longer considered a valid reason to object to the plans given its proximity to Woking Railway Station and active travel options. The January 7 planning committee also noted that a similar high-rise application at Technology House was allowed on appeal, with the Planning Inspector saying parking options were sufficient. Councillor Rob Leach (Liberal Democrat, St Johns) said: "It's clear that the development will help meet the housing needs that we have and the new government target building levels, to a significant extent, are helped by this. I've always been resistant to skyscrapers in Woking, what I've called the Croydonisation of Woking, in the past, but I think this has to be preferable to incursions on the green belt where that can be avoided."

Related report:

Blot on Epsom Downs horizon to grow no more?

Surrey's affordable homes left unclaimed

Millions of pounds worth of affordable Surrey homes remain unbuilt because nobody is willing to take on the project. It has left Spelthorne Borough Council scrambling around trying to find a housing partner with negotiations set to take place over a potential rent to buy scheme.

It leaves families dangling in limbo on waiting lists with nowhere to go as there are almost 2,500 people are currently on Spelthorne's housing list.

It comes as the developers behind a massive Staines Tower block withdrew all affordable housing from the scheme and instead only offered the council money to put towards low-cost homes elsewhere in the borough.

The Elmsleigh Road scheme was given the green light on appeal in 2022, after Spelthorne Borough Council had refused the application the previous year. The site, at the Old Telephone Exchange, is still under construction by the developer, Fairview New Homes.

Developers, Fairview, asked the council to remove affordable homes from its plans for 206 new units in two towers in Staines, and agreed a £3.85m contribution to go towards off-site affordable housing, instead of the 70 homes that were originally planned.

However, the council opted to delay accepting the money and approached a rent-to-buy provider, Rent Plus, to potentially take the affordable housing off its hands. Cllr Lawrence Nichols (Liberal Democrat/ Halliford and Sunbury West) told a planning committee on January 8: "If we take the [developer's] money, Rent Plus walk away."

Rent Plus buys affordable homes from developers at a discount, and then leases them to low-income families on the waiting list with the long-term plan of buying them.

The council had previously rejected using Rent Plus because the company did not provide housing to "the most needy" in line with the council's legal requirements, the Housing Officer told the committee. Cllr Nichols said Spelthorne council has a meeting with the provider, Rent Plus, scheduled for January 14, next week.

"No interest"

The developer told the committee it had approached numerous registered providers for affordable housing but there was "no interest from any to take the residential units". There were four separate tender processes and during the most recent, 81 parties were approached. Only 21 responses were received and all declined the opportunity to purchase the homes.

Speaking at the meeting, Director of Affordable Housing for Fairview New Homes Jonathan Millership, said: "The responses highlighted several issues that were specific to this development; these include the high rise nature of the building and the inclusion of a single staircase, a lack of appetite for flats in tall buildings outside London and a general lack of appetite for developer-led section 106 schemes."

But councillors were not impressed. Cllr Katherine Rutherford (Independent Spelthorne Group/ Ashford Common) said the company "should have done their research".

Cllr Darren Clarke (Conservative/Laleham and Shepperton Green) said: "Built the wrong thing in the wrong place to the wrong standard, but people don't want them." He added: "We all want affordable housing [and] we've got a real housing crisis."

The council had also considered accepting the £3.8m and putting in its s106 pot for building community infrastructure. Officers explained the council could then use this to buy homes in the borough and then rent them out as affordable housing, generating a profit.

Councillors eventually decided to defer the decision on whether to accept the developer's contribution until the next planning meeting in February 2025.

Image: CGI visualisation from Thames Street or the Elmsleigh Road Scheme. (Credit: Spelthorne Borough Council Planning documents/ Fairview New Homes)

Epsom Green Belt Debate Intensifies

The ongoing debate surrounding Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Proposed Submission Local Plan has escalated as the Epsom and Ewell Times publishes two sharply contrasting letters – one from the Epsom Green Belt Group (EGBG) and the other a formal response from the Council itself. At the heart of the dispute lies the proposed development of Green Belt land, the availability of affordable housing, and the transparency of the consultation process.

Epsom Green Belt Group: A Call for Change

The Epsom Green Belt Group's letter criticises the Council for failing to heed public sentiment and expert advice during the Regulation 18 consultation earlier this year. Despite overwhelming opposition to the proposed release of over 175 hectares (around 12%) of the borough's Green Belt, the Council has pressed ahead with plans that include development on high-performing sites such as Horton Farm and Hook Road Arena.

The EGBG highlights a key inconsistency: while the Council advised neighbouring Sutton Borough in September 2024 that they were under no obligation to review Green Belt boundaries, they have not followed this guidance themselves. Furthermore, the EGBG argues that prioritising brownfield and 'grey belt' land, as outlined in the updated National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) of December 2024, has been neglected.

The group also casts doubt on the Council's promises of 'affordable housing,' pointing out that discounts on market prices still place homes out of reach for many. Flats on brownfield sites, they argue, offer a more viable path to genuinely affordable housing.

A looming concern raised by the EGBG is the likelihood of the Local Plan being deemed unsound by the Planning Inspectorate. They warn that if the plan proceeds in its current form, it could pave the way for further Green Belt loss.

Read the full Epsom Green Belt Group letter here.

Council's Response: Balancing Competing Priorities

In their formal response, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council defends the Proposed Submission Local Plan, arguing that it strikes a necessary balance between meeting housing needs and protecting the borough's environment.

The Council acknowledges the high demand for affordable housing, with over 1,350 households on the housing register. They stress that their policies reflect both national guidelines and financial viability assessments.

Regarding the consultation process, the Council points out that Regulation 19 is a statutory stage primarily focused on assessing the plan's legal compliance and soundness. They also address concerns over the timing of the consultation—spanning the Christmas and New Year period—explaining that it was essential to meet the submission deadline of 12 March 2025 under the current NPPF.

On the contentious Green Belt issue, the Council offers specific figures: 52.6 hectares of greenfield Green Belt land (3.36% of the total) and 85 hectares of previously developed Green Belt land (5.44%) are earmarked for development. They maintain that these changes are necessary to meet housing targets while acknowledging the flexibility offered by the NPPF.

The Council concludes by noting that while changes can still be proposed following the consultation, the Planning Inspectorate ultimately determines their validity.

Read the full Epsom & Ewell Borough Council letter here.

Diverging Priorities, Uncertain Outcomes

Both letters reveal deep divisions not only in policy direction but also in trust between the Council and sections of the local community. While the Council presents its plan as a pragmatic response to national housing targets and local affordability issues, the EGBG sees it as a short-sighted and flawed approach.

Key questions remain unanswered:

- Why hasn't brownfield land been prioritised more explicitly?
- Will the Local Plan survive scrutiny by the Planning Inspectorate?
- Are the proposed 'affordable homes' truly affordable for local residents?

The coming weeks will be crucial as the consultation progresses and residents have their final opportunity to submit their views. One thing is clear: the future of Epsom's Green Belt hangs in the balance, and both sides are prepared to stand their ground.

Residents can participate in the consultation process until 5 February 2025 via the Council's consultation portal.

Related reports:

Can the green light to Epsom's Green Belt housing turn red?

Council minority vote Local Plan to next stage with Green Belt in

Conflict on Epsom's Green Belt plans of another kind?

Epsom and Ewell Green Belt battle lines drawing near

and many more. Search "local plan" in search bar.

Epsom and Ewell's new housing targets in Surrey

perspective

Housing targets in Surrey are set to skyrocket, with some areas expected to deliver double the number of homes under new Government plans. On December 12, the long-awaited update to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published, setting out what councils and developers can and cannot do – leaving boroughs and districts "disappointed" and "deeply concerned." Across Surrey, the number of new homes expected each year has risen by 4,635 to a total of 10,981, with some areas bearing a significantly heavier load than others.

Worst affected is Elmbridge Borough Council, where housing targets have more than doubled, from 653 to 1,562. This increase comes alongside the prospect of having no local plan, giving developers greater freedom over where and what to build. A spokesperson for Elmbridge Borough Council said they were "reviewing the new NPPF and its implications for Elmbridge's Local Plan." The council was told in November that its housing strategy must be withdrawn and restarted or risk being deemed "unsound." A decision on next steps will be made in February 2025.

Other boroughs facing substantial increases include Waverley, where targets have risen from 710 to 1,481, and Reigate and Banstead, which sees an increase from 644 to 1,306. Woking, the only council to see its figure drop, still faces a significant rise from 436 to 794. These adjustments align largely with July consultation targets. However, Woking residents hoping for a break in town-center skyscraper developments and green belt preservation will be disappointed, as the reduction amounted to just one unit from the earlier proposal.

Housing targets for Surrey boroughs under the new NPPF are as follows:

		Old housing target	New NPPF target	% increase
1	Elmbridge	653	1562	139
2	Surrey Heath	320	684	114
3	Waverley	710	1481	109
4	Reigate & Banstead	644	1306	103
5	Woking	436	794	82
6	Mole Valley	460	833	81
7	Guildford	743	1170	57
8	Epsom & Ewell	569	889	56
9	Tandridge	634	843	33
10	Spelthorne	631	793	26
11	Runnymede	546	626	15
	SURREY	6346	10981	73

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council's executive member for planning, Councillor Rich Michalowski, described the Government's decision not to heed their feedback as "disappointing." He said, "The borough's housing target in the new NPPF of 1,306 homes per year is nearly three times higher than our current local plan target of 460 and more than double the previous NPPF target of 644 homes. These changes will have severe implications for Reigate and Banstead's green belt and the character of our towns and villages. The standard methodology for calculating housing is flawed, as it doesn't account for environmental and infrastructure constraints." He emphasized the council's commitment to exploring all urban development options but acknowledged that a Green Belt Review might be unavoidable.

Waverley Borough Council echoed these concerns, particularly regarding the methodology and its impact on green belt. Cllr Liz Townsend, Waverley's portfolio holder for planning, called the more than two-fold increase "unrealistic and uncalled for." She noted that the requirement for 1,481 new homes annually is two and a half times the current target and could increase the borough's population by 50% over 20 years. "There is simply no evidence of this level of demand, nor that building this many homes would make them more affordable," she said. Cllr Townsend highlighted the borough's existing issues, including water supply disruptions, sewage overspills, a crumbling rural road network, overstretched health services, and power shortages

stalling new developments.

All councils must now face the new reality as their starting points for planning new homes. Each borough will need to demonstrate to Independent Planning Inspectors that they have explored all possible avenues for delivering these targets. This challenge will require balancing housing needs with environmental, infrastructure, and community considerations.

Related reports:

Can Epsom and Ewell get more dense?

The Local Plan plot thickens after revised NPPF

Can the green light to Epsom's Green Belt housing turn red?

Campaigners have set up a petition against the new targets:

https://www.change.org/p/excessive-targets-for-new-homes-in-surrey