

# What are the solutions to Epsom's homeless crisis?

4 September 2024



**Epsom & Ewell Borough Council**, like many local authorities across England, is grappling with a growing homelessness crisis, as highlighted in a recent press release. [Click here for full press release]. The council, which is governed by the **Residents Associations** (RA), has laid out the stark realities of the situation, detailing the pressures it faces and the steps it is taking to address the problem. This has sparked responses from various political parties, local campaign groups, and concerned residents, each presenting their own perspective on how best to tackle the issue.

The council's press release reveals alarming statistics, positioning Epsom & Ewell among the top seven boroughs outside of London with the highest number pro rata of homeless households in temporary accommodation. With more than £1.6 million spent on nightly paid accommodation last year, and many families placed outside the borough, the human and financial costs are escalating. Councillor **Hannah Dalton**, (RA Stoneleigh) Chair of the Epsom & Ewell Residents Association, highlighted the "enormous human impact" of this crisis, pointing out the disruption to education and the health challenges faced by those in temporary accommodation.

Councillor **Neil Woodbridge**, (RA Ewell Village) Chair of the Community & Wellbeing Committee, echoed these sentiments, stating, "The vast majority of homeless households are those who cannot afford suitable accommodation," and he pointed to the council's Homelessness Strategy as a key tool in mitigating the crisis. The council's initiatives include a Rent Deposit Scheme, a Private Sector Leasing Scheme, and efforts to bring empty properties back into use. However, both Cllr Dalton and Cllr Woodbridge acknowledge that these measures are only partial solutions, and significant action is needed to achieve a sustainable resolution.

## Opposition Parties Call for Central Government Support

In response to the council's press release, opposition parties have voiced their concerns and offered their own solutions. Liberal Democrat Councillor **Alison Kelly** (College) criticised the council's approach as "sticking plaster solutions," emphasizing the need for central government to provide financial incentives for social housing development, particularly on brownfield sites. She pointed out that increasing local housing allowances would provide immediate relief for those struggling to afford rent, arguing that this would reduce the number of families pushed into temporary accommodation.

Cllr Kelly's comments reflect a broader call for government intervention. "The rental increases and the continuing cost of living crisis mean many can't keep a roof over their head without going into debt," she said, urging the government to address these systemic issues to prevent homelessness in the first place.

## Green Belt Protection vs. Housing Need

A significant debate centres around the use of green belt land for housing. The campaigning group **Epsom Green Belt's** spokesperson **Katherine Alexander** criticised the council for failing to plan adequately for affordable housing, accusing it of prioritising expensive developments over genuinely affordable homes. They advocate for using brownfield sites to provide low-cost housing, arguing that this would meet local needs without sacrificing green spaces.

"Destroying our valuable Green Belt without providing truly affordable housing would be unforgivable," she said, pointing to the council's own evidence that identified the high quality of the green belt land. She called for creative use of identified brownfield sites, such as the Town Hall site and former gas works area, to accommodate affordable housing.

## Conservative Councillors Criticise Council's Approach

Conservative Councillors for Horton, **Bernie Muir** and **Kieran Persand**, also weighed in, accusing the council of systemic failures. Cllr Muir argued that the council's focus on green belt development was a "lazy and short-termist approach," and that the council had not adequately explored the potential of brownfield sites. "I completely accept that we need social and affordable housing," said Muir, "but the council is opting for the easy option rather than the optimal solution."

Cllr Persand highlighted what he saw as a lack of proper investigation into alternative development strategies, including multi-use and multi-purpose sites. He suggested that large-scale developments, common in other towns, could meet housing needs while also providing economic benefits, such as increased footfall for local businesses and opportunities for local graduates.

## Labour Councillor Demands Immediate Action on Social Housing

Labour Councillor **Kate Chinn** (Court) was sharply critical of the Residents Associations' handling of the housing crisis, "As the Residents Association boast they have had control of the council for over 80 years, it is absolutely astonishing that they have put out a press notice highlighting their own failures on housing and homelessness." She added "When it comes to supporting homeless people, sending them to temporary accommodation away from friends, family and schools is highly damaging and the council is boasting about placing families in the private rented housing that it says itself is

“expensive and insecure”.

Cllr Chinn called for the Town Hall site [see Epsom and Ewell Times report [HERE](#) on Town Hall development] to be used for social housing, insisting that the council should ensure 40% of any new homes built there are for social rent. She pointed to the successful development of mixed affordable and social housing in Hollymoor Lane as a model to replicate, advocating for an immediate start on building more council houses.

“The council needs strong leadership and a Community and Wellbeing committee that has a laser focus on housing and homelessness,” she stated, calling for more resources for the housing team to manage the increasing demands placed on them.

#### Public Sentiment Reflects Diverse Concerns

Residents also voiced their opinions, questioning how Epsom & Ewell ended up among the worst boroughs for homelessness. Some suggested that the borough might be seen as a “soft touch” for homelessness registrations, while others pointed out that the affordability criteria used for new housing developments do not realistically address the needs of those facing homelessness. “A 20% discount on a £750k home on Green Belt does not help with homelessness,” said one informant, advocating for lower-cost housing solutions on brownfield land.

#### The Path Forward

The council’s press release and the responses it has provoked highlight the complexity of the housing crisis in Epsom & Ewell. While the council has implemented a range of initiatives, there is a clear consensus that more needs to be done, both locally and at the national level. The debate over green belt versus brownfield development, the call for greater government support, and the need for genuinely affordable housing options are central to finding a sustainable solution.

As Councillor Woodbridge remarked, “This is a situation which requires significant action to bring about a long-term and sustainable solution.” With various stakeholders advocating different approaches, the challenge for Epsom & Ewell Borough Council will be to find a balance that addresses the immediate needs of homeless residents while planning for a future that includes both affordable housing and the preservation of the borough’s natural environment.

#### Related reports:

[Epsom and Ewell Press Release on Homelessness](#)

[Stoneleigh library flats for homeless](#)

[Council Grapples with Rising Cost of Homelessness](#)

[Do good intentions square with homeless savings?](#)

[Council targeting the homeless](#)

[Image - Street View Google and added persons with suitcases at Epsom’s Travelodge \(frequently used by Epsom and Ewell Council for temporary accommodation for the homeless\)](#)

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## Epsom and Ewell Press Release on Homelessness

4 September 2024

### **Media Release: Housing Pressures and Homelessness: How Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is Tackling a National Issue**

Insufficient housing levels, particularly affordable housing, is a national issue affecting individuals and families up and down the country and Epsom & Ewell is no exception.

The Government recently released their 2023 statutory homelessness figures, revealing a 12% increase nationwide in the number of households in temporary accommodation, with the figure now standing at over 112,000. The number of households with children in temporary accommodation rose even more sharply by 15%, now totalling 74,530 households.

As Councillor Hannah Dalton, Chair of the Epsom & Ewell Residents Association (Majority Group) and Housing Spokesperson for the District Councils’ Network, recently said in a letter about the homelessness crisis sent to the Deputy Prime Minister, The Rt Hon Angela Rayner MP:

*“The human impact of this crisis is enormous. Families in temporary accommodation face huge challenges including disrupted education, health issues, and difficulty holding down a job. Homelessness undermines people’s lives and life chances.”*

There are many factors that contribute to this nationwide problem; the lack of affordable housing, high rental rates, the ongoing cost of living crisis; and higher interest rates and mortgage costs to name a few.

### **Epsom & Ewell has proportionately one of the highest numbers of homeless households living in temporary accommodation in England and is in the top seven boroughs outside of London.**

In Epsom & Ewell we face the additional challenge of the South East’s very high housing costs, coupled with a severe shortage of housing. Affordable housing options in the borough are severely limited, partly due to the low level of affordable housing development in recent years. There is also only a small stock of private rented properties available which are in very high demand.

So as a borough, we urgently need more housing of all types including, but not limited to, affordable housing. Every house

fulfils a need that makes other housing available, improves supply and demand, and lowers costs.

### **The rising cost of temporary accommodation**

We don't have enough temporary accommodation in the borough to meet the large rises in demand we've seen over the last few years, so we often need to place people in nightly paid accommodation outside the borough. This can impact the household's wellbeing and is very expensive: Epsom & Ewell Borough Council spent £1,665,493 on nightly paid accommodation in 2023/24<sup>1</sup>.

At present, we have 160 homeless households in temporary accommodation in the borough and more than 90 homeless households in nightly paid accommodation outside of the borough. Many of these families may have to wait more than three years before temporary accommodation in the borough becomes available, and even longer before a permanent housing solution can be found for them.

*Councillor Woodbridge, Chair of the Community & Wellbeing Committee, Epsom & Ewell, said: "The vast majority of homeless households are those who cannot afford suitable accommodation. Perhaps they are sofa surfing or living with family in overcrowded households."*

*43% of homelessness is due to eviction from a private rented tenancy, with a further 24% people experiencing homelessness after living with family or friends who are no longer willing or able to accommodate them. There is also a significant percentage of households fleeing violence."*

Epsom & Ewell's very low supply of social rented housing is in high demand. Fewer than 90 social housing properties become available each year against about 1,300 households who are on the housing register.

The average waiting time for applicants with a high housing need<sup>2</sup> is between 18 months and more than a decade, depending on the size of the property required. Those in lower housing need bandings have little or no prospect of being offered social housing.

The only alternative to social housing is private rented accommodation, which is very expensive - rising to an average of £1,630 in June 2024, an annual increase of 10.7% (the rise in the South East over the year was 8.2%)<sup>3</sup>.

*"The housing team at Epsom & Ewell Borough Council undertake a huge range of actions and activities to mitigate and help solve the many challenges, as set out in the council's Homelessness Strategy. Without the incredible work being done by this team, the situation would be much worse." - Councillor Woodbridge, Chair of the Community & Wellbeing Committee.*

Initiatives that Epsom & Ewell Borough Council undertake to prevent homelessness include:

- Prevention focus - liaising with family and friends of people at risk of homelessness, negotiating with private rent sector landlords on their behalf, and assisting with deposits.
- Private Sector Leasing (PSL) Scheme - the council leases a property for between three and five years from a private landlord for use as temporary accommodation: Epsom & Ewell Borough Council calls on landlords to sign up to their Private Sector Leasing Scheme | Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (epsom-ewell.gov.uk)
- Rent Deposit Scheme: the council is able to support residents with rental deposits that would otherwise be unaffordable, to help secure accommodation.
- The borough's Local Plan, if approved, will bring much-needed development to the borough to help ease the pressure, costs and demand for housing. This includes a policy to increase affordable housing delivery on all eligible sites.
- Working with partners to increase local temporary accommodation options including utilising any Council owned sites and properties.
- Lobbying government in partnership with other local authorities, via the District Council Network (DCN) - recently, this has resulted in the Local Housing Allowance being increased, having not previously seen any increase since 2019.
- Working in partnership with landlords to bring empty properties back into use.
- Downsizing households in social housing to free up larger accommodation.
- Challenging developers to provide much needed affordable housing on eligible development sites.
- Working in partnership with Registered Providers to increase affordable housing.

### **Development of affordable housing**

There are limited sites in the borough to develop affordable housing due to the size of the borough, the existence of the green belt and the cost of redeveloping brownfield sites.

Furthermore, the current National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that smaller sites (fewer than 11 homes) are exempt from providing an affordable housing contribution, and commercial to residential 'permitted development' sites are not required to provide affordable housing either.

*Councillor Woodbridge, Chair of the Community & Wellbeing Committee, said: "As a council, we are working hard to ensure that local people have a suitable home to live in. This is crucial for the wellbeing of our residents - a home is not just a physical space to live safely and comfortably. A home provides roots, identity, a sense of belonging and a place of*

*emotional wellbeing.*

*We also want to be able to reduce the very high expenditure that is currently required to manage the housing crisis in the borough, so that we can continue to invest in, develop and protect the many other services that the council offers its residents. The many actions we are taking will help to ease the crisis for some, but this is a situation which requires significant action to bring about a long-term and sustainable solution."*

**Case Study: Mr K**

Mr K<sup>4</sup>, a self-employed professional and single father of two young children, had been renting privately for a number of years.

His rent was already £295 per calendar month (pcm) over the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate when he learnt that the landlord wanted to increase his rent by a further £200 pcm. Mr K could not afford to pay this increase and the landlord served an 's21 no fault' eviction notice.

The average market rent for a 2-bedroom property in Epsom is £1,720 pcm, however the LHA rate is £1,200 pcm. The LHA rate is the maximum rent that is used to calculate how much Housing Benefit or Universal Credit someone is entitled to. Anything over the LHA will not be considered, and the shortfall will have to be paid by the tenant, in addition to their usual rent liability.

Mr K was unable to find alternative affordable accommodation as letting agents wanted prospective tenants to have either:

- a minimal annual income of at least 30 times the monthly rent
- a guarantor who earns 36 to 40 times the monthly rent,
- or pay 6 month's rent in advance (even harder for Mr K as he was self-employed).

In addition, there were very few properties on the market and a lot of competition for them, with some properties going to sealed bids.

When the s21 notice expired Mr K felt he had no option but to approach the council as homeless. He was not previously known to the council and is an example of the increasing number of residents who are now unable to resolve their own housing problems and are becoming more reliant on the council for emergency homeless assistance.

When Mr K became homeless, the council provided self-contained temporary accommodation in the Croydon area. However, one of Mr K's children has special educational needs, and they were struggling being placed out of borough, with childcare, access to schools, family support and specialised support services. This was the only accommodation available to the council at the time.

After a number of months in temporary accommodation in Croydon, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Move-On Officer was able to find Mr K to find a privately rented 2-bedroom flat in Epsom and helped Mr K secure it by utilising the council's Rent Deposit Scheme.

**Ends**

**Editors Notes**

<sup>1</sup> This was due to a number of factors: the consistently high number of households approaching as homelessness, a 15% increase in rental costs by our accommodation providers and a lack of alternative accommodation options. The average net cost of nightly paid accommodation for a small family is about £23,000 a year, nearly 20% higher than it was in 2022/23. For those families who require three-bedroom or larger accommodation, the cost is £27,900 per year - we currently have 27 of these families in our borough.

<sup>2</sup> High housing need includes issues such as: their current accommodation lacks basic facilities, doesn't have enough bedrooms, they are experiencing homelessness, or they have high medical needs.

<sup>3</sup> Office of National Statistics, 17 July 2024.

<sup>4</sup> In order to protect our resident's anonymity, we have changed some of the details of this case study and amalgamated details from more than one person. The case study remains a fair and accurate representation.

## Time to press the gas on Epsom's Local Plan?

4 September 2024



As reported in the magazine Local Government Lawyer (19/08/24) several local councils in England are accelerating the

development of their local plans in response to proposed amendments to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) that could substantially increase their housing targets and require reviews of green belt boundaries.

The proposed changes, detailed in a recent government consultation, include the reintroduction of mandatory housing targets and the possibility that a council's failure to meet its housing needs could justify revising green belt boundaries. Additionally, the consultation suggests alterations to the standard methodology for calculating housing need, which would likely result in most councils being required to plan for significantly more new homes.

Under the current proposals, local plans submitted for examination before June 2025 will be assessed under the existing NPPF rules. This has prompted councils like Winchester and Uttlesford to expedite their plans to avoid the more stringent requirements that could be imposed by the new NPPF.

In Winchester, the council's planning officer emphasized the urgency of submitting the local plan due to the potential increase in the housing need figure from 676 to 1,099 dwellings per annum. Similarly, Uttlesford District Council, which currently operates under one of the oldest local plans in England, is also moving quickly to submit its plan before the deadline.

Not all councils are in favor of the proposed changes. Wirral Council, for example, is set to hold an extraordinary meeting to express its concerns, particularly regarding the potential impact on its green belt. The council's draft plan focuses on brownfield development, but under the new proposals, it could be required to deliver an additional 14,000 homes, potentially affecting large areas of its green belt.

Councillors in Wirral have expressed strong opposition, with motions being tabled to challenge the proposed standard method for housing calculations, which they argue could undermine local regeneration efforts.

**Epsom and Ewell Times** asked **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council** if it had any plan to accelerate the Draft Local Plan process. Councillor **Peter O'Donovan**, (Residents Association - Ewell Court) Chair of the Licensing & Planning Policy Committee responded: "Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is currently interrogating the documents for the Government's consultation on proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and will prepare a response to the consultation to be submitted within the timeframe. We are dedicated to the development of a Local Plan that meets the needs of current and future residents of Epsom & Ewell. We will continue to consider the implications for the borough following the Government's consultation, when more detail becomes available."

Cllr **Julie Morris** (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group) (College Ward) said "Unfortunately the ruling Residents Association seems to have only one speed, DEAD SLOW, when it comes to the Local Plan which is already around 12 years late. It has never been a priority for them. We can't see any possibility of speeding things up now and recent progress is mostly unknown : there has been no open debate on the matter since last year. There is a meeting on 24th September which might throw some light on what's happening. Even councillors from the ruling group believe that an update on progress and potential changes to the Plan, in the run up to Regulation 19 and (hopefully) final adoption of the document, is long overdue."

A spokesperson for the campaigning group **Epsom Green Belt** commented on the Council position: "The NPPF proposals were published a month or so ago online. Without proposals it would not have been possible to launch the consultation, which runs until 24 Sept. The government's stated plan is to issue the new NPPF in Dec, applicable immediately.

Waiting until the changes are published and applicable would miss the current, and brief, window of opportunity to avoid their impact, which is why other (more enlightened and forward thinking) councils are choosing quickly to act. Epsom and Ewell Borough Council should be acting immediately to capture this opportunity."

The Epsom Green Belt spokesperson added: "The current NPPF, issued in Dec 2023, remains in force until or unless replaced by a new version. The Dec 2023 version does not require the release of Green Belt, specifically providing the option not to review any Green Belt boundaries. The Council therefore can retain the existing Green Belt boundaries and focus all housing on identified brownfield sites which, according to the Regulation 18 draft Local Plan can accommodate 3,700 dwellings. If they fail to take the opportunity to accelerate the Regulation 19 process, the target house building will exceed 14k."

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## Epsom and Ewell Brace for Government Housing

# Targets

4 September 2024



In a significant policy shift, the newly elected Labour government has reintroduced mandatory housing targets, a move that is set to have far-reaching implications for communities across the UK, including Epsom and Ewell. The ambitious plan aims to deliver 1.5 million new homes over the next five years, following the scrapping of such targets by the previous Conservative government. This sweeping reform has sparked debate over its potential impact on local areas, particularly in relation to the use of green belt land.

Among the key changes introduced by the Labour government is the reinstatement of mandatory housing targets for local councils, which must now be met based on a recalculated assessment of local housing needs and affordability. This approach differs from previous national metrics, focusing on areas where housing is less affordable relative to income. Consequently, regions like Epsom and Ewell, where property prices are high, may face increased pressure to deliver more housing.

Another controversial aspect of the policy is the introduction of the so-called “grey belt” land. This term refers to lower-quality land within the green belt that could be considered for development, in an effort to balance the need for new homes with the preservation of high-quality green spaces. Furthermore, the government has mandated that at least 50% of the homes built on grey belt land must be affordable, with a strong focus on social rent, addressing the UK’s chronic shortage of affordable housing.

For Epsom and Ewell, traditionally resistant to large-scale development, particularly within the green belt, these changes could mark a significant shift. The new mandatory targets might require the local council to approve more housing projects than previously anticipated, including the controversial use of grey belt land. This could lead to tensions with residents keen to maintain the area’s character, but it also presents an opportunity to address the local housing shortage, especially in terms of affordable homes.

The exact impact on Epsom and Ewell will depend on the specific targets assigned to the area and the availability and suitability of grey belt land for development. Local planning authorities with existing Local Plans may now be required to revise these plans to align with the new government mandates.

**Tim Murphy** of the local Council for the Protection of Rural England expressed his concerns, stating, “I think the new target is 821 new homes per annum. The figure is unattainable—we don’t have the required skills available in this country to build all the homes the Government wants, and there will be widespread opposition across large swathes of the country to the loss of so much countryside. I calculate that the Borough, with a current population of just over eighty thousand, will need to accommodate a further 32,000 people if this target is to be met over the eighteen-year period of the Local Plan.”

The **Epsom Green Belt Group** also voiced their concerns, highlighting the discrepancy between the current housing build rate and the new targets. A spokesperson for the group stated, “The current annual build rate (based on the 2007 Core Strategy) is 181 dwellings per annum. The current NPPF standard method figure (based on 2014 data) used in the regulation 18 draft Local Plan was 576 dpa. The new government proposals for a revision to the standard method would result in a target of 817 dpa. This is over four times the real need in the borough and almost triple the council’s current proposals.”

Cllr **Bernie Muir**, (Conservative) representing Epsom West Division and Horton Ward, acknowledged the need for more housing but raised concerns about the strategic approach. “I believe that we do need homes as we have a huge homeless issue in Epsom, plus we are desperately short of homes for key workers and those that support our care, retail, and hospitality sectors. However, the Local Plan will almost certainly end up building the wrong homes in the wrong place, primarily on Greenbelt land, with serious negative consequences,” she warned. Cllr Muir advocated for the development of town centre brownfield sites instead, arguing that this would provide the right homes in significant numbers, support the local economy, and improve the socio-economic prospects for the borough.

**Epsom and Ewell Borough Council** has responded to the recent reinstatement of mandatory housing targets by the UK Labour government, highlighting the challenges posed by its outdated Core Strategy. The current Core Strategy, adopted in 2007 and covering the period up to 2022, is now considered out of date, particularly as it predates the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) introduced in 2012.

In its statement, the Council pointed out that its historic housing completions, detailed annually in the Authority Monitoring Report (AMR), show a consistent shortfall when compared to the significantly higher requirements generated by the standard method for calculating housing needs. For the 2022/23 monitoring year, the Council reported a notable deficit against these figures.

The draft Local Plan, which was subject to public consultation earlier this year, proposed a supply-based housing requirement of 5,400 homes over the plan period, equating to 300 dwellings per annum. However, the Council

acknowledged that this figure does not meet the actual housing need calculated using the standard method, which suggests a much higher need—576 dwellings per annum based on 2022 data, with projections potentially rising to 817 dwellings per annum under the government’s proposed revisions.

Councillor **Peter O’Donovan**, (RA Ewell Court Ward) Chair of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee said “The draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) that was subject to consultation in February and March 2023 proposed a housing requirement for the borough of at least 5,400 homes of the plan period (which equates to 300 dwellings per annum). This was a supply-based requirement and is not a reflection of need which is calculated using the standard method (see above).

The Draft Local Plan identified supply exceeding this minimum requirement to provide flexibility for non delivery of sites included in the supply.”

He added: “The government are currently consulting on Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system to which the council will be responding. The consultation is open to all and we would encourage those with an interest in planning to respond to the consultation.

One of the proposals is to amend the standard method for calculating housing needs. As part of the consultation, the government have published the housing need that would be generated using the revised method for all English Local Planning authorities and calculates the housing need for the borough to be 817 dwellings per annum.”

The consultation ends 24th September 2024 and the Council intends to take a report to its scheduled Licensing and Planning Policy Committee on that date which sets out the implications for the Borough and the Council’s suggested response to the consultation.

As the debate continues, residents and local officials in Epsom and Ewell will be closely watching how these new housing targets and policies unfold, weighing the potential benefits of increased housing against the risks to the borough’s character and green spaces.

Image: License details Credit:David Wright

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## Leatherhead town on the way up?

4 September 2024



Artistic impression of the arrival square (SE corner)

Leatherhead could become a “destination town” with an updated shopping arcade and cinema screens, according to regeneration plans. The future project could also see a ‘new neighbourhood’ created with up to 11-storey apartment block and townhouses in Bull Hill.

The Swan Centre has been earmarked to be the “catalyst to revitalise the town” of Leatherhead. A new leisure area is set to be the “heart” of the Surrey town with four new restaurants, bars and cafes.

Plans include 14 retail units, four cinema screens for leisure and a new central market square for events. Retaining stores like Sainsbury’s, Boots, WHSmith and others is also being considered in the development proposals.

Demolishing Leret House, the former offices on Swan Street, is another key part of the proposal. Speaking at a webinar on July 30, project officers said they are looking to reuse as much of the fabric of the building as possible by retaining the concrete frame.

Locals could see apartment buildings up to 11 storeys popping up in the town centre, with houses ranging between three to four stories. Prospective plans for Bull Hill, the second part of the regeneration scheme, include apartment flats and townhouses, as well as parking facilities, offices, and a park. Officers are also looking at plans for a hotel with retail spaces on the ground floor.

Between one, two and three bedroom flats could be available in the new apartments, with the family houses being three to four bedrooms each. MVDC and Keir Property detail a mixture of open market and affordable homes for purchase and

rent could be on the offer.

Councillor Keira Vyvyan-Robinson said: “We appreciate that building heights are a sensitive matter, and this is why the sketches and layouts in the masterplan show illustrative heights only at this stage.” The Cabinet Member for Projects stressed that “nothing has been decided” as the plans were still in the pre-application phase and “are likely to evolve based on [consultation] feedback”.

A Kier Property officer said the project is “looking to get the right balance” of housing heights, so it can “sit comfortably in its environment.” Upgrading the existing park in Bull Hill is also part of the initial proposals. Project officers said they wanted to make the park more accessible to people in Leatherhead by improving the play areas.

Launched on July 8 with five consultation events, people can give feedback to the prospective plans until September 26. Leigh Thomas, Group managing director, Kier Property said the consultation events so far had given him “much food for thought”. He added the team were looking to adapt the plans “according to the needs of the local community”.

MVDC and Keir Property has announced new consultation dates, including:

- Monday 19 August, 5:30pm to 7:30pm at St Mary’s Church Hall, 10A The Ridgeway, Fetcham, Leatherhead KT22 9AZ
- Thursday 5 September, 5:30pm to 7:30pm at Ashtead Peace Memorial Hall (Ralli Room), Woodfield Lane, Ashtead KT21 2BE
- Wednesday 11 September, 5:30pm to 7:30pm at The Old Barn Hall Bookham (Main Hall), 55 Church Road, Great Bookham, Leatherhead KT23 3PQ

Keir Property and MVDC is looking at submitting a planning application in 2025 and, if approved, to start building by spring/summer 2026.

Artistic Impression Of The Arrival Square from North Street, south east corner. (Credit: Mole Valley District Council and Keir Property)

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## Social housing options boxed in

4 September 2024



Hundreds of people desperate for social housing will finally have homes to call their own after a seven storey block was approved - despite concerns it would blight historic views from Box Hill.

There are 640 names on Mole Valley District Council’s housing waiting list and the plans, approved on Wednesday, August 7, will add 126 new affordable homes to the borough’s stock.

Developers Clarion Housing Group will demolish the existing office and residential buildings at the vacant Regent House. The homes will be spread across two blocks ranging from three to seven with shops on the ground floor.

Officers told the meeting the council was behind its housing targets and the huge number of affordable housing on offer meant it was hard not to recommend the proposals.

Of the 640 names on the council’s housing waiting list, 218 households are currently waiting for two bed units and this development will accommodate 42 per cent of those with a further 10 per cent of the 316 households waiting for one-bed homes also set to benefit.

Councillor Monica Weller (Liberal Democrat: Bookham West) said: “I am particularly mindful of the horrendous number of people on the housing list.

“That really is quite shocking, 640 on the housing list. A lot of my time is spent with people who are actually living with a partner and children in their parents houses or homes or flats.

“The situation is actually dire and I think there are a lot of people who don’t actually realise that.

“A lot of people who I have contact with do not have cars, they can’t afford cars, and I think that with this site so close to Dorking, it is walkable.

She added: “I am particularly interested in the National Trust’s case about the view from Box Hill but seeing the proposal from the planning officer and the photographs I think there is a limit to how much we can protect these views weighed against the need for homes

Some spoke out against the plans and warned of a “slippery slope” of allowing too many tall buildings.

Andrew Holden speaking on behalf of a number of residents in Lincoln Road and the surrounding area said a development with fewer floors could still provide a large number of homes while minimising the impact on the area.

He told the meeting: “The view of Dorking from Box Hill and to visitors arriving by train will be of a significant cluster of multi-storey buildings thoroughly out of character with our historic market town.

“To avoid this slippery slope leading to irreversible harm, its important that councillors draw a clear line in the sand of what the scale of development is appropriate n this area..”

The plans were approved unanimously by planning committee members.

Image: New homes set for Dorking (credit Clarion Housing)

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## A lesson in Green Belt development?

4 September 2024



A controversial plan to build 446 homes on Green Belt land near Horley, Surrey, has been approved on appeal, overturning the local council’s initial rejection.

The development, proposed by Rydon Homes, will include up to 446 homes - including 201 affordable homes (45 per cent), and four Traveller pitches on land west of Reigate Road in Hookwood. Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) confirmed there is a significant unmet need for this type of specific housing within the local area.

Despite concerns about its impact on the Green Belt, the planning inspector ruled that the “very substantial public benefits” of the housing outweighed the harm to the protected area. This decision comes amid what the inspector called “an acute need for affordable housing” in the district.

MVDC rejected the outline planning application, claiming it could appear “cramped” and “incongruous” with the surrounding area. MVDC’s initial decision report from November 2023 said the development will have a “detrimental transport impact”.

However since then, the authority changed the site from being a ‘protected area’ in the Local Plan to a ‘potential development site’ - so they could not defence their original decision. The developer launched an appeal.

The scheme was allowed after the developer Rydon Homes attended the inquiry with a team of 16 headed by a KC. At the start of the hearing MVDC & Charlwood Parish Council withdrew their objections to the planning application.

The inspector noted the opportunities for transport, employment and other facilities due to its proximity to Hookwood, Horley and Gatwick Airport. He also found transport options were satisfactory and in agreement with Surrey County Council.

Concerns were raised by locals that the increase of around a thousand new residents would put pressure on GPs and schools. Rough plans put forward by the developer suggests it will create new community facilities like early education, but details are not yet apparent.

Although the inspectorate agreed there was a degree of harm to the character and appearance of the neighbourhood, he concluded there was “very special circumstances” to build on the Green Belt.

Image: View of development land west from Hookwood, Horley. (Credit: Google Street View)

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## Call to landlords to help Council help housing need

4 September 2024



**Epsom & Ewell Borough Council** is looking for landlords of three-, four- and five-bedroom houses to sign up to their Private Sector Leasing Scheme.

The Private Sector Leasing Scheme allows the council to assist local families in housing need, while reducing the risks and hassle of renting for landlords.

The council will lease and manage properties for a period of three to five years. Landlords will be guaranteed rent, with six months being paid in advance. During the tenancy, the council will carry out any minor repairs up to the value of £500 per year and ensure the property is returned to landlords in the same condition as when the agreement started.

Landlords who lease their properties to the council will enjoy the following benefits:

- no inventory or inspection costs
- no letting agent or management fees
- no need to register deposits with a *tenancy deposit* scheme
- a single point of contact within the council
- Right to Rent checks carried out by the council
- an option for routine and major repairs to be dealt with on the landlords' behalf for a fee.

Councillor **Clive Woodbridge**, (RA Ewell Village) Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee, said,

“We are all aware of the housing crisis that is affecting cities and towns across the country, and Epsom & Ewell is no different. It is a priority for the Council that we can provide good quality temporary housing for families in the local area.

“If landlords sign up to our Private Sector Leasing Scheme, it enables us to house local families within the community and minimises the disruption to their home life, work and school at what can be an already stressful time.

“The scheme is also good value for landlords and is relatively low risk when compared with letting the property on the open market.”

Landlord **Lee Wiffen** said, “I cannot praise the Epsom & Ewell Private Sector Leasing Scheme enough. In my six years letting my property through the scheme, the professionalism of the team in the housing department is first class.

“The security of having great tenants and regular on-time rent payments, means I would not look any further, as a landlord, when looking to rent a property than the Epsom & Ewell Private Sector Leasing Scheme”

Full details of the scheme can be found in our **PSL landlord information pack** and **PSL landlord application form**.

Image Albert Bridge licence

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## Average house price in Epsom and Ewell over half-million.

4 September 2024



**Epsom and Ewell** saw the largest increase in new build completions in the **South East** between **2021-2023**, new data has revealed.

The study, conducted by architectural visualisation experts at Modunite, investigated ONS data on the number of new build completions from 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, to find which **local authority has seen the biggest increase in new build completions year-on-year.**

**Key findings:**

- **Epsom and Ewell** saw the largest increase in new build homes, at **133%** - compared to the English average of **21%**
- **Tunbridge Wells** ranks second with an increase of **130%** new build completions
- **West Oxfordshire** had the biggest drop in house prices across England (**13.10%**)
- **Milton Keynes** saw the largest volume of new build homes in 2022-23 (**2,480**) in the South East, and the second-highest in England

For the full study, head to: <https://www.modunite.com/a-review-of-englands-new-build-market/>

**The results:**

Local Authority	Average house price 2022	Average house price 2023	% decrease in house prices	2021-2022	2022-2023	% increase 2022-2023
<b>Epsom and Ewell</b>	<b>£543,670</b>	<b>£533,491</b>	<b>1.90%</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>133%</b>
<b>Tunbridge Wells</b>	<b>£454,657</b>	<b>£446,490</b>	<b>1.80%</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>620</b>	<b>130%</b>
<b>Hastings</b>	<b>£271,727</b>	<b>£270,043</b>	<b>0.60%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Arun</b>	<b>£351,693</b>	<b>£350,191</b>	<b>0.40%</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>930</b>	<b>90%</b>
<b>Eastbourne</b>	<b>£298,348</b>	<b>£296,227</b>	<b>0.70%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>75%</b>
<b>Dartford</b>	<b>£355,378</b>	<b>£353,765</b>	<b>0.50%</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>65%</b>
<b>Canterbury</b>	<b>£361,144</b>	<b>£357,128</b>	<b>1.10%</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>62%</b>
Thanet	£315,384	£310,705	1.50%	290	410	41%
Chichester	£470,413	£452,668	3.90%	590	810	37%
Tonbridge and Malling	£438,694	£431,931	1.60%	270	370	37%

Please find the full dataset [here](#).

Modunite can reveal that **Epsom and Ewell** has seen the largest increase in new build completions in the South East, with a **133% increase** from 2021-2022 compared with 2022-2023. Between 2021 and 2022 **90 new builds** were completed, in comparison to **210 in the following year**. House prices in Epsom and Ewell also dropped by 1.90%, down to **£533,491**.

**Hastings ranks third**

**Hastings** ranks third. From 2021-2022, Hastings completed **10** new build homes, increasing by **100%** by the end of 2023 with a total of **20**. This is largely higher than than the average number of new build completions across all the local authorities in England (**21%**). House prices in Hastings have also fallen by **0.60%** between 2022-2023, to an average of **£270,043**.

**Tunbridge Wells** ranks second, with a **130% increase in new build completions** between 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. A total of **270** new builds were completed in 2021 -2022, in comparison to **620** the following year. House prices in Tunbridge Wells have also decreased by **1.80%**, down to **£446,490** on average.

Image: <https://oaktondevelopments.co.uk/henrietta-place-new-build-homes-epsom-surrey/>

## Surrey Borough fails social housing tenants

4 September 2024



Guildford Borough Council (GBC) has failed to meet new rules on social housing a judgement has rules.

The report published by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) said the social landlord for around 5,200 homes is “failing” on a number of legal health and safety requirements.

Around 1,700 homes have been left without an up-to-date electrical condition report and another 1,000 with unsatisfactory certificates, according to the RSH’s report. GBC told the RSH it does not have evidence of a current electrical condition report for more than 100 communal blocks, and it could not provide evidence it had completed around 1,300 fire safety actions.

Introduced on April 1 this year, the new consumer standards intended to drive landlords to deliver long term improvements for tenants. In the first bunch of regulatory judgements RSH gave Guildford a ‘C3’ grading, which means there are serious failings and it needs to make significant improvements.

Reports by the RSH, published July 9, said: “The information provided by Guildford BC to us during our engagement with it demonstrates that Guildford BC is failing to ensure that it meets a number of legal requirements in relation to health and safety”.

Findings from the report also showed GBC had not collected Tenant Satisfaction Measures from tenants, which all social landlords are required to do. RSH judgement report said: “Guildford BC has been unable to explain the reasons for its failure to collect this data, and as a result, tenants are not supported to effectively scrutinise Guildford BC’s performance in delivering landlord services.”

In December 2023, GBC said it identified some areas of concern within its landlord housing function included potentially unnecessary repairs being carried out to tenants’ homes. Referring itself to the government’s Regulator of Social Housing (RSH), GBC has since identified other concerns relating to its legal landlord health and safety compliance.

Commenting on the Regulator’s report, Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Housing, Cllr Julia McShane responded: “Everyone living in a council property deserves to have a safe and secure home. Since December 2023, we’ve taken urgent action to improve our service. We can evidence progress across all areas of compliance and building safety which includes a real time compliance dashboard, recruitment of expert officers and procurement of building safety contracts.

The leader of the Liberal Democrat-run council said it has reviewed all electrical information data to confirm an accurate position of where it is. GBC has also procured two short term contractors to complete the certification work by July 2025.

McShane said a fire risk validation exercise has confirmed there are no outstanding high-risk actions. She added that a new contractor is now revisiting the low to medium risk properties to validate them, arrange any works required and update the council’s position.

“Our engagement with the Regulator will be ongoing and plays an integral and intensive part of our improvement plan as we work to resolve all of the issues identified and achieve full compliance for our residents,” McShane added.

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## A Surrey council resists green-belt housing

4 September 2024



A contentious plan to build dozens of affordable homes in Surrey was rejected by councillors who prioritized protecting greenbelt land over addressing the area’s housing shortage.

Developers had wanted to build up to 135 homes, of which at least half would have been sold at affordable rates, at Grove End between the A30 and A322, in Bagshot.

The outline planning application was rejected by Surrey Heath Borough Council’s planning committee on Thursday May 23.

Early indications suggested there would have been at least 68 affordable homes, including 17 set aside as affordable first homes and 51 social affordable or intermediate rented properties. The developers said they would be willing to increase those numbers but the application itself had to be determined on those figures.

The committee was advised that permitting the plans would be a departure from its developing local plan and undermine the council’s aim of only developing on brownfield sites in the near future - these are abandoned or underused former industrial land.

Councillor Kevin Thompson (Liberal Democrat, Lightwater) said: “Often we talk about this need for affordable housing and we talk about numbers and we talk about statistics, but I think it’s important that we think about what that actually means.

“We have a situation where the people that teach our kids, who look after us in hospital, can’t afford to live in this borough and they have to commute in, because we don’t have the affordable housing we need. We need to look at this very carefully because [this proposal] does provide us with a significant amount of affordable housing.”

The land, between the A322 dual carriageway linking the M3 with Bracknell and Windlesham Golf Club had been considered for redevelopment as the council looked for sites as part of its local plan. It “discontinued” the idea however as the borough could demonstrate it had enough brownfield land to meet its housing targets.

Developers tried to argue the land, next to the A30, was not the idyllic rolling Surrey countryside that people think of as greenbelt because the main road had an “urbanising” affect on the site. Speaking on behalf of the application, the agent added: “The borough unfortunately has a major and sustained issue with failing to meet affordable housing needs as demonstrated.”

Cllr Shaun MacDonald, said: “We need to be extremely careful before we give up any green belt. I do accept the comments that this is not the most unique piece of green belt we have but it does form a barrier to the other areas adjacent and if we start allowing creep we will soon have all of the Green Belt gobbled up between Bagshot and north Windlesham. If this space was on the other side of the A322 I suspect we would be having a very different conversation about the feasibility and viability.”

Access was another issue raised during the meeting with one Bagshot resident, who had lived in the area for 56 years raising safety issues for any young families who could move there. He said: “This particular site to my mind has a very serious problem attached to it with regards to access.”

He said in recent years there had been a need to build 1,752 affordable homes, and so far it’s delivering just 39 a year. This development, he argued, would provide two years of affordable housing on a single site.

He added that they needed to look at the quality of green belt in the borough as otherwise there would never be any development.

Image: Bagshot planning ( SBC planning portal)

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## Doubtful Henry VIII would have permitted

4 September 2024



The decades-long planning battle to build almost 100 homes and a hotel opposite Hampton Court Palace will soon be decided with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport set to rule on the matter once and for all.

The government department is calling for new information and evidence over proposals from Network Rail Infrastructure and Alexpo to build 97 homes and an 84-bed hotel, together with shops and new access space around Hampton Court station in East Molesey.

The former Jolly Boatman site lies next to the River Thames and overlooks the palace. Elmbridge Borough Council originally rejected the plans but their decision was later overturned on appeal.

The original application received more than 1,800 objections and 131 letters of support and was refused due to “excessive height and bulk” and “harm to numerous heritage assets”.

Hampton Court Rescue Campaign (HCRC) argued it would spoil views across the river of Hampton Court Palace.

It is now in the hands of the Secretary of State because the law states developments within half a mile of the historic home of King Henry must be approved by the senior minister.

A spokesperson for HCRC wrote: “For over 100 years, Hampton Court Palace has benefited from the unique protection of the Act, which has successfully restricted developments over 50 ft in height in the environs of the Palace.

“In the Council’s Development Brief for the site there is a requirement that any scheme must categorically be below 50 feet.”

Permission was granted after the planning inspector ruled it would fit with the surroundings while the hotel, retail units and riverside restaurant would make life better for visitors.

Furthermore, the inspector said the plans would support the rest of the town.

People using the station, the inspector added, would have improved access to the bridge.

They said: "Taken together, these features of the design would result in a place that would be accessible and easy to move around."

On height, the inspector said: "The distinctive treatment of the upper level, together with the depth and width of the podium gardens, would break up the mass of the built form.

"Whilst they would clearly be seen as part of a larger scheme, I do not think that they would be perceived as a single mass, either in views from the park or in longer views from the north bank of the River Thames."

They added: "Some parties sought to criticise the design on the basis that it would not be sufficiently eye-catching or innovative.

"I agree that this is not a design that seeks to make an assertive architectural statement. However, in this case I do not regard that as a negative.

"I consider that the design would result in a calm, well-ordered scheme with sufficient presence to hold its own in the street scene."

The consultation includes an open text box for people's views and space to attach documents and is available via the department's website or by searching Hampton Court consultation.

Image: Jolly Boatman development viewed from across River Thames. Credit Alexpo. Henry VIII clipart cactus cowboy

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## The Bucknill plan stops here....

4 September 2024



A plan to cram 5 three-bedroomed houses on a single bungalow plot in Bucknills Close, Epsom did not meet Councillors' approval.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Planning Committee met 18<sup>th</sup> April and refused an application by Nuro Homes Ltd despite their agent's plea to the meeting to allow it.

Plain speaking Cllr **Jan Mason** (RA Ruxley) gave her reasons for refusal and her own strong sentiments on the application in saying to her committee colleagues: "Right, here we go again. Same old "Back Land". Call it what you like: "Development". And as my grandma would say, trying to put a pint into a half pint pot.... They could have designed it so that they weren't in Outer Hebrides with their bins to try and take to the front. Ridiculous." [A reference to challenges to the Council collection of domestic refuse.]

She added: "I think this is not well thought out, any of this. And I put it down to the fact that you're trying to cram too much in. It makes money. We all know the story. I'm not convinced about the flooding, ....., if there's slight flooding around, this will get it. It's just all too much. So I'm sorry, but as far as I'm concerned, this is ill designed. .... So for my part, I'm not happy."

During the meeting it was argued that children would use the short-cut the development would create. Cllr **Neil Dallen** (RA Town) was for refusal on the grounds of highway safety and the distance that residents would have to take their bins for collection. Commenting on a varied application he said "It's fine moving the bins another few yards towards the road, but there is still a huge distance for those to go. The waste manager has said it's unacceptable."

Cllr. **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) observed: "If we were proposing a refusal on highways grounds, we have to take into account that we're flying solo because Surrey County Council aren't behind us on this, and they are the highway authority."

Cllr. **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) was concerned about routine refusal of new housing developments and said: "It is providing for homes for people in Epsom and Ewell and we know how dire the housing situation is in the borough. I don't think any committee with a response to its residents can continue to refuse every single application that comes in front of it."

The application was refused by five votes to four, the Chair Cllr. **Humphrey Reynolds** (RA West Ewell) not voting.

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# Climate motion sparks energetic debate in Council

4 September 2024



In a lively session at Epsom and Ewell Borough Council Tuesday 16th April, councillors engaged in a debate over a motion proposing a significant environmental mandate for future housing developments.

Councillor **James Lawrence**, (LibDem College) the initiator of the motion, emphasized the urgency of addressing climate change through stringent environmental standards in housing. He argued that aiming for the highest energy efficiency rating, Grade A of the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) for all new house builds, would not only align with climate goals but also save residents money in the long run.

“I believe that this ambitious policy would allow us to more effectively design the housing of the future, both saving residents money and meeting our climate goals and saving energy in the long run,” Councillor Lawrence asserted.

However, concerns were raised regarding the practicality and affordability of such a mandate. Councillor **Alex Coley** (RA Ruxley) queried the feasibility of implementing the requirement and its potential impact on housing affordability.

“How much would these homes cost and to what extent would that mean that less affordable and social housing is built because of the cost of these elite homes?” Councillor Coley questioned.

Councillor **Phil Neale**, (RA Cuddington) drawing from a construction background, echoed similar sentiments, highlighting the challenges developers would face in meeting such stringent standards without significantly increasing housing costs.

“In reality...to provide housing of above A, which is what is being asked in this motion, is impossible,” Councillor Neale argued, stressing the need for practical solutions to address the housing shortage.

Amidst the debate, Councillor **Kim Spickett** (RA Cuddington) urged a nuanced approach, emphasizing the importance of considering the impact on families and advocating for a stable efficiency metric in EPC ratings.

“The focus of an EPC headline metric needs to be on reducing demand through a stable efficiency metric,” Councillor Spickett remarked, urging caution in setting overly ambitious standards.

Despite the spirited discussion, Councillor **Julie Morris** (LibDem College) urged the council to aim high, citing the potential benefits of setting ambitious environmental standards.

“It’s much easier to negotiate downwards than it is to negotiate upwards,” Councillor Morris asserted, advocating for bold action to combat climate change.

However, Councillor **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley and Chair of the responding Licensing Planning and Policy Committee) cautioned against rushing into decisions without considering the economic viability and broader implications of the mandate. He stressed the importance of evidence-based decision-making and cautioned against jeopardizing housing affordability.

Councillor Lawrence concluded by urging the council to consider the motion’s underlying sentiment, even if it failed to pass, highlighting the growing momentum for stringent environmental regulations.

The motion was defeated on a show of hands.

Image: Oakton Developments - new houses in Epsom

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## Floods with silver linings for Guildford’s housing targets?

4 September 2024



Guildford has been given the “biggest opportunity” to transform itself in a century. The Environment Agency is looking into an expanded flood prevention scheme that would save homes and businesses from rising waters - and open up previously unusable town-centre land for new housing. Supporters say the upshot of this is huge.

Councils have to identify land for housing in order to meet Government set targets, but Guildford Borough Council had to recently disregard 50 sites because they were subject to flooding - 30 of which were in the town centre, the Local Democracy Reporting Service was told.

If the expanded flood alleviation scheme goes ahead it would instantly increase the amount of land in the town and in a swoop take pressure off green belt villages.

Former councillor John Rigg said that the town has been waiting affected by floods for almost 100 years and that it would only get worse if nothing was done. He said: “The Environment Agency’s planning period anticipates a 72 per cent increase in rainfall in the Guildford area. Not steady rain, big downpours.”

He said the problem was compounded as towns upstream - for example in Waverley - pressed on with their own developments.

Mr Rigg said: “When the Government said Guildford had to deliver 10,000 homes, they had to all go in the green belt and the villages, because nobody got the flooding scheme underway and released the brownfield sites. When Guildford was looking at land for development as part of its local plan, there were 50 sites that had to be disregarded because they were subject to flooding, 30 of them in the town centre.”

Among those are the Millmead and Millbrook car parks.

He said: “We have got to get the flood alleviation plan adopted. The EA has said there is £7bn allocated to areas that deliver economics and social benefits. This ticks all the boxes. It’s an important town, it’s a county town and it needs homes and businesses. The previous scheme was a minimum, just to stop a couple of streets flooding, but this does it properly, it frees up brownfield sites. It’s the biggest opportunity for Guildford since about 1900. Last week, by the cinema it flooded, it was up to people’s knees, as far as this town is concerned, they need to wake up.”

Guildford has a long history of flooding from the River Wey, and the Environment Agency, working with the borough council and Surrey County Council, are looking to reduce the high level of flood risk to the town centre.

The project is still in its appraisal stage, but the EA has confirmed it is looking to create a larger protection zone than initial plans from 2018. It expects to take up to three years to finalise the scheme as it undertakes assessments, surveys and public engagement - the first of which takes place at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre on Thursday April 18, from 2pm to 7pm.

Jon Mansbridge, Guildford Flood Alleviation Scheme project director at the Environment Agency, said: “The feedback we gather from communities during our engagement is really valuable in helping to inform the preferred option.” He added: “The flood defences will be visually integrated into existing and regenerated areas of the river corridor, reducing flood risk to even more of the town centre.”

Councillor Joss Bigmore, former co-leader of Guildford Borough Council said: “Finally the Environment Agency is supporting the council by backing a flood alleviation scheme. “We’ve been patient, nobody has the money to do these things, and it’s positive that we are at the top of the queue.

“Hopefully we can come up with a comprehensive solution and hopefully we can eradicate the risk of flooding for the centre of Guildford for the next century.” He added: “For existing residents it very important - and if there is a solution it will unlock a lot of regeneration opportunities on former flood risk areas.”

Flooding in Guildford Feb 2020 (image Environment Agency)

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## Stoneleigh library flats for homeless

4 September 2024



Two flats above a library are set to be used as temporary accommodation for homeless people, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council decided yesterday (March 26).

Demand for temporary accommodation is “acute”, according to the council. It is currently predicting an overspend of £200,000 of its £1.5m temporary accommodation budget, according to the Local Democracy Reporting Service.

Two self-contained, two bedroom maisonettes that sit above the Stoneleigh Community Library in Epsom that are accessed through the back of the building are earmarked for use.

Surrey County Council, who commercially lease the empty flats, have reportedly refurbished the maisonettes to a “high standard” and will require “minimal preparation” to be used as temporary accommodation.

Emergency and temporary accommodation is provided to housing register applicants whilst their claim is being investigated. Homeless people currently sit in Band A of the council’s housing allocations.

Around 235 homeless ‘households’ (i.e individuals or families) were accommodated by the council in 2021, with 155 in temporary accommodation and 80 in nightly-paid accommodation, costing up to £140 a night.

Meeting documents state the decision will create a real cost saving of £30,920 pa for the two maisonettes combined to the council.

A budget of £15,000 was agreed to cover the development of the site, with £5,000 covering legal and/or surveyor costs to the council and contributing to SCC for landlord approval costs. An additional £10,000 is set aside for a maisonettes preparation contingency.

Owned by a private landlord, the borough council will under lease from SCC who currently commercially lets the property. SCC and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council lease will co-expire in just under three years. The terms will then be renewed or re-negotiated.

Stoneleigh Community Library (Credit Google Maps)

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## A Green Group that won't belt up

4 September 2024



In a comprehensive critique of **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council**’s handling of the Local Plan, a local environmental advocacy group, known as **Epsom Green Belt**, argues there are shortcomings in the council’s approach.

In a response to the council’s Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) (reported by the Epsom and Ewell Times [HERE](#)) they assert that the council’s failure to provide clear and timely information about changes resulting from public consultation leaves residents in the dark about crucial decisions that will shape the borough’s future.

One of the group’s key contentions centres around the council’s delay in analyzing consultation responses. Despite assurances of ongoing analysis, no outcomes have been made public, leaving residents to speculate about the fate of their feedback. This lack of transparency, the group argues, undermines the democratic process and erodes trust in local governance.

Furthermore, the Group criticizes the council’s handling of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee (LPPC), highlighting concerns about the committee’s apparent exclusion from significant decision-making processes. By sidelining the LPPC, the council risks bypassing important checks and balances, raising questions about the integrity of the Local Plan’s development.

A central focus of the group’s critique is the contentious issue of Green Belt development. They accuse the council of disregarding public opinion and pressing ahead with plans to build on protected Green Belt land without adequately demonstrating the exceptional circumstances required by National Planning Policies. This, they argue, not only threatens valuable green spaces but also reflects a disregard for community sentiment.

In addition to these overarching concerns, the Group points to specific discrepancies in the council's representation of housing needs and affordability. They highlight the council's reliance on inflated housing figures and failure to explore alternative solutions, such as maximizing brownfield sites. This, they argue, calls into question the accuracy and integrity of the data informing the Local Plan.

Epsom Green Belt calls for immediate action from elected councillors to address these concerns and restore public confidence in the Local Plan process. They emphasize the need for transparency, accountability, and evidence-based decision-making to ensure that the interests of residents and the environment are adequately represented.

The full case being argued by Epsom Green Belt can be accessed [HERE](#).

Related reports:

[Here we go again on the Local Plan?](#)

[Minister gets heavy on a Local Plan delay](#)

[Mystery Local Plan critic revealed](#)

[Local Plan costs eat into Council reserves](#)

[Local Plan to move forward after passionate debate](#)

and many many more. Search "local plan".

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## Here we go again on the Local Plan?

4 September 2024



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has launched a dedicated FAQ section on its website to inform residents about the ongoing development of the borough's **Local Plan**. According to the Council this initiative aims to provide transparency and dispel any misinformation circulating regarding the plan's objectives and progress.

The Local Plan holds significant importance in shaping the future of the borough, covering various aspects such as job creation, environmental conservation, leisure facilities, housing sites, and infrastructure enhancements. The Council states that no final decisions have been made regarding policy formulations or site selections. Currently, the council is in the process of reviewing feedback received during the initial public consultation on the draft plan and gathering additional evidence to inform its development.

Councillor **Steven McCormick**, Chair of the Licensing & Planning Policy Committee, (RA Woodcote and Langley) emphasized the complexity and necessity of the Local Plan's development, stating:

"The development of our Local Plan is as complex as it is vital. We want to make sure that all those who live in, work in and visit the borough have access to the latest information about the Local Plan, to ensure that they are informed and to dispel rumours and myths about the Plan. We encourage everyone to take a look at the FAQs, either on our website or by coming in to the Town Hall and asking for a copy at reception."

On the key areas of most interest to residents the Council's position is stated and Epsom and Ewell Times summarises:

### **Local Plan Decisions Still Pending**

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) has yet to finalize decisions regarding policy formulation and site allocations for the upcoming edition of the Local Plan. Despite ongoing efforts to adhere to the government's planning framework and reviewing feedback from the Draft Local Plan consultation, no definitive choices have been made at this juncture. The council is actively engaged in compiling a comprehensive evidence base essential for the development of the Proposed Submission Local Plan, also known as the Regulation 19 Local Plan.

### **Spatial Strategy Uncertain**

Concerns loom over the confirmation of a Spatial Strategy crucial for guiding development across the borough. Originally slated for submission to Surrey County Council for transportation modeling by January 2024, the Spatial Strategy's confirmation has encountered hurdles. Following member briefings earlier this year, the council has been unable to solidify the strategy, prompting a reevaluation of available options.

### **Timeline for Local Plan Decisions**

With the evidence base still under development, decisions regarding the Local Plan's content are slated for later this year. The Licensing and Planning Policy Committee (LPPC) is expected to receive recommendations on the Proposed Submission Local Plan, incorporating site allocations, by November 2024. Subsequently, the LPPC will forward its recommendations to the Full Council for deliberation. Only upon Full Council approval will the plan proceed to another round of public consultation, marking a critical juncture in the decision-making process.

### **Data Informing Local Plan Preparation**

EEBC has relied on a diverse array of data sources to inform the preparation of the Draft Local Plan. Evidence spanning various thematic areas was gathered and published to support the consultation process. Additionally, ongoing efforts are underway to gather further evidence, with updates expected to be made available on the council's website upon completion.

### **Housing Needs and Requirements**

Calculating the housing need for the borough involves employing the Government's 'Standard Method,' which utilizes 2014 Household Growth Projections data. While recent updates to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) have reaffirmed the use of this method, the draft Local Plan aims to address just over half of the calculated housing need. This draft plan will undergo extensive scrutiny during the independent planning inspector's examination.

### **Current Housing Needs and Challenges**

The borough faces challenges in meeting its housing targets, with housing delivery falling short of expectations. Despite efforts to address housing shortages, the Council's Authority Monitoring Report highlights a deficit in housing delivery. Moreover, the increasing number of households on the housing needs register underscores the urgent need for affordable housing solutions.

### **Brownfield Sites and Development**

While brownfield sites play a crucial role in meeting development needs, there are concerns about their sufficiency. Although a range of brownfield sites has been considered for development in the next stage of the Local Plan, it is deemed insufficient to meet the borough's housing and economic requirements.

### **Preservation of Industrial Estates**

Industrial estates such as Longmead and Kiln Lane are integral to the borough's employment landscape and are safeguarded against housing development. Recognizing their importance in providing employment opportunities, the draft Local Plan designates these sites as Strategic Employment Sites, prioritizing their protection for employment-generating uses.

### **Green Belt Protection**

The Green Belt, governed by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), enjoys robust protection against development. However, authorities have the discretion to review and alter Green Belt boundaries under exceptional circumstances, subject to stringent conditions. Despite this flexibility, any proposed changes must demonstrate adherence to outlined criteria, ensuring the enduring preservation of Green Belt land.

The FAQs can be accessed on the council's website at [www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/local-plan-faqs](http://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/local-plan-faqs).

Members of the public can sign up to receive an alert for future consultations by completing the form at <https://epsom-ewell.inconsult.uk/>.

### **Opposition Voices Express Frustration Over Lack of Transparency**

Cllr **Julie Morris**, Liberal Democrat group leader (College), expressed frustration over what she perceived as a lack of transparency and decisive action in the development of the Local Plan. She stated: "Some many months after several public protests about the inclusion of sites within the Green Belt, do we finally have some information about the status of our Local Plan, relatively bland though it is. Weasel words 'no decision has been made on site selection' need to be read alongside answers to a FAQ on the council's website, where it quite clearly says that site options have been given to Surrey County Council (SCC) who are currently completing their transport modelling. These options may not be the final decision, but most councillors in Epsom & Ewell are not even aware of what these options are, so at this point in time SCC probably know more than us. The Liberal Democrat group of councillors remain frustrated and very concerned at the lack of transparency in decision-making from the party in control of the council - the Residents Association group."

Cllr **Kate Chinn**, Labour group leader (Court), acknowledged the council's recent efforts to inform residents about the Local Plan's progress but criticized what she described as a history of secrecy surrounding decision-making processes. She stated: "It is good to see that the Residents Association (RA) councillors are finally starting the process of keeping residents informed on the progress of the local plan. The confidential briefings, which are shrouded in secrecy and leaks of information have fuelled the rumours, myths and conspiracy theories that prevail. With such a huge majority the ruling group should be able to develop a vision to present to residents that enables homes to be built to meet residents' housing needs. Instead the borough continues to face uncertainty with the RA's divisions, dither and delay meaning decisions are not made.. As the webpage notes 'Following member briefings in early 2024, a Spatial Strategy was not able to be confirmed and therefore options are being considered.'

Without a spatial strategy the local plan is in effect paused. The lack of progress is endangering meeting the deadline to present a plan to the planning inspectorate by the 30th June 2025 leaving the council at the continued risk of unplanned, speculative development. The Labour group would happily contribute and work collaboratively to produce a local plan that sensibly addresses the borough's acute housing need."

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