

# New housing around Surrey's cathedral in contention

21 February 2024



A developer is arguing the benefits of 124 new homes next to **Guildford Cathedral** outweigh the potential harms to the heritage and green space.

Vivid Homes is appealing for a public inquiry to consider its planning application which was unanimously rejected by the council in March 2023.

The Cathedral, along with developer Vivid Homes, proposed to demolish the existing staff housing and create 124 homes in a mix of flats and housing - 54 of which would be affordable properties - on undeveloped woodland.

Officers at the Council in March 2023 recommended refusing the plans for a host of reasons including its harm to the heritage setting including the "visual prominence of the apartment blocks", the impact on the "green collar" and the effect on the "silhouette" of the landmark.

Councillors decided it was ultimately not the right location for the development, even if the scheme offered affordable homes. Vivid Homes' appeal contends that any harm identified has been minimised and should be balanced against the benefits.

The main appeals argue the visual prominence of the development will blend with the heritage asset. Apartment blocks and roofscapes will "sit within the landscape". Reducing building heights, landscaping and tree planting were also cited as ways to keep the green collar and "longer-distant views" towards and around the Cathedral.

A council report noted that the submitted design proposals would "harm the landscape character and the visual experience of the site to the east", but would "benefit" the approach to the cathedral from the west.

The council concluded that the proposals would "still result in moderate adverse landscape and visual effects" concerning Surrey Hills as an area of natural beauty.

The proposed development as submitted would "continue to harm 'important views'" in relation to the character and heritage assets of Guildford Town Centre, the council added.

The Guildford Society, a civic group promoting high standards in planning and architecture, said it was "disappointed" at hearing the news that the developers had appeal the decision, in late October 2023.

The urban planning organisation said it had two major concerns: the visual impact of the development on Guildford's iconic skyline and the infrastructure supporting the development.

A spokesperson said: "The classic view of Guildford Cathedral from the south with its grass area is not really replicated in any of the planning documents." - There is "very little information" on how the development will look when viewed from afar.

Starting 5 March, the public inquiry will be conducted by a planning inspectorate and last ten days.

Vivid homes is footing the bill for the appeal, despite the application also made on behalf of Guildford Cathedral.

The acting dean, **Stuart Beake**, said when the appeal was announced: "[The] decision is crucial for us financially - if planning permission is granted it will mean that our reserves will receive some much needed funds as we can recoup all the money we have spent on fees. An endowment will be established which will provide funds for the routine maintenance and upkeep of the cathedral and that in turn means that our annual budget will start to break even or be in surplus."

Guildford Cathedral has been operating with a financial deficit for several years which has exacerbated with the coronavirus pandemic and the refusal of planning developments. The cathedral said it was selling land surrounding its Grade II listed site to create an endowment fund to pay for maintenance costs.

A spokesperson from The Guildford Society said: "Planning applications should be viewed without prejudice of its financial background. Whether the cathedral is making money out of it or making a thundering loss is not a matter for the review."

The application would have raised a £10m endowment for the cathedral, which it said would help fund the future of the cathedral.

However, it was highlighted during a public presentation that cash from this sale would only last five years. When combined with a separate sale, planners said, this would only raise 23 per cent of the budgeted maintenance costs.

According to Vivid Homes documents, the cathedral's deficit at the end of 2022 was £116,000. It was predicted to reduce the deficit slightly to £100,000 in 2023 by looking at ways to increase income and reduce expenditure. Details of repairing costs provided by a Quinquennial Inspection have identified repairs costing a total of £3,585,000.

Guildford Cathedral and Vivid homes were invited to comment.

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Image: Grahame Larter

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## Epsom 3rd in a 2024 "Best Places to Live"

21 February 2024



In the latest edition of national estate agents "Garrington's Best Places to Live" index for 2024, Epsom has clinched the third spot after an assessment of rankings in a range of categories.

Garrington's evaluation of **over 1400 locales** across England and Wales underscores Epsom's strengths in various key aspects, including heritage, wellbeing, educational opportunities, employment prospects, and housing affordability.

With its longstanding association with the prestigious Derby and a rich historical backdrop, Epsom ranks high in heritage, landing at 90th place. Its commitment to community wellbeing, supported by a serene natural environment, earns it a respectable 282nd position in this category.

Moreover, Epsom's strategic location near London, coupled with its excellent schools and robust job market, positions it favorably in terms of employment prospects and connectivity, securing the 99th spot in Garrington's evaluation.

While property prices in Epsom reflect its status, with the average family home costing £810,809, a modest 0.4% increase in the past year underscores its resilience amidst market fluctuations.

According to Garrington: "As the real estate landscape evolves, Epsom maintains its reputation as a stable and desirable locale, offering residents a blend of tradition, convenience, and quality of life."

Jonathan Hopper, CEO of Garrington Property Finders, emphasizes the practical significance of the 2024 ranking, stating, "As the market stabilizes and borrowing costs decrease, buyers are re-evaluating their options. Garrington's guide offers insights to help individuals identify locales that meet their needs and preferences."

"Epsom remains attractive to homebuyers with its solid fundamentals and promising prospects for a fulfilling lifestyle."

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## Red, blue and orange go Green in belt protest

21 February 2024



Epsom High Street Saturday 3rd February witnessed political parties unite against housing development on the Borough's Green Belt. The Labour Party, Conservative Party, Liberal Democrat Party, Gina Miller's True and Fair Party and the Green Party assembled outside the Metro Bank.

Carrying banners and making speeches, the protestors rallied against the Council's apparent rejection of previous demands to remove Green Belt land from the list of potential housing development sites in the draft Local Plan.

Amid controversy surrounding claims of confidential briefings and secret legal opinions influencing Councillors the protestors called for full transparency.



**Gina Miller** leader and Parliamentary candidate for True and Fair Party said: “The plan being progressed by the Council to build on precious greenbelt is not based on truthful data, facts, housing requirements, environmental or full brownfield audits.

Once greenbelt is gone, it’s gone forever. People across all wards that make up the Epsom and Ewell constituency deserve 100% transparency and honesty and to be assured that decision-making that affects their lives, homes and area are not tainted by conflicts of interest, incompetence or shorttermism”

Conservative Parliamentary hopfeul **Mhairi Fraser** said: “I will fight to the end to save Epsom’s Green Belt, just as your Conservative councillors Bernie Muir and Kieran Persand have tirelessly done alongside Chris Grayling MP - and that is in addition to the thousands of residents who have signed petitions, written to their councillors, and protested in public to make their voices heard. Once the Green Belt is gone, it is gone forever; that would be an absolute travesty, given our entire actual housing need can be met by building on brownfield sites. Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is there to serve us, and it is unacceptable that they are ignoring the very clear will of residents, operating in secret, and threatening to irreversibly destroy the place all of us have chosen to make our home.”

**Mark Todd**, Chair of Epsom and Ewell Constituency Labour Party said “Over eighty per cent of local residents responded to the recent Council survey saying that they want Epsom and Ewell’s green belt preserved. I have talked to thousands of residents over the past eight years on the street and on the doorsteps of Epsom and Ewell and I believe that figure is accurate.

I have looked in great detail at Council documents and plans including all the brownfield sites currently available, enough for 3,700 homes. Another 150 can be added by redeveloping West Park Hospital giving us an extra 3,850 homes in the borough. Then there are the Longmead and Kiln Lane industrial estates that can also be redeveloped. These areas could become a mix of residential, retail and office space, generating many more jobs and homes per square foot.

I believe there is a clear path to preserving Epsom and Ewell’s green belt and building lots of social and truly affordable homes for residents and key workers on these brownfield sites. By truly affordable I mean apartments of varying sizes costing £200-£400,000 rather than houses typically costing £600,000 to £1 Million in Epsom and Ewell that never can be truly affordable.”

**Helen Maguire**, Prospective Parliamentary Candidate in Epsom and Ewell for the Liberal Democrats said: “Local Liberal Democrat councillors have consistently argued that old ONS data is being used to determine the number of houses required but this is falling on the deaf ears of this Conservative Government. If up to date data was used, fewer houses would need to be built in Epsom & Ewell. Not only is Epsom & Ewell Borough Council being forced to use old data, but we know that despite Conservative government promises to allow local Councils to decide what is best for their area and to exclude the Greenbelt if they wish, this is simply not the case!

Local authorities are being forced to build on the Greenbelt because of successive and cynical conservative policies. In neighbouring Mole Valley (where Ashted and Leatherhead form part of the new constituency), the Liberal Democrat run council have managed to save 99.3% of the Greenbelt. Last week Mole Valley Liberal Democrat councillors were faced with a stark choice between either continuing with the Local Plan as it is with 0.7% in the Greenbelt or to remove the Greenbelt sites which could put the local plan back another year and expose more Greenbelt sites to planning applications from developers.

Simultaneously the Conservative housing minister Lee Rowley sent them a letter informing them they must not withdraw the plan or delay further. An impossible decision! The Conservatives are deaf to local communities and their housing needs. It's time for them to go!"

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## Minister gets heavy on a Local Plan delay

21 February 2024



A Surrey borough where the house prices are "amongst the highest in England" has been ordered not to delay its home building programme. The Epsom and Ewell neighbour borough of **Mole Valley District Council** was ready to pull the plug on its planning bible - which sets out the development it would allow to meet its housing targets.

The council was to debate informing the planning inspector of its decision to withdraw its draft local plan but a last minute intervention by the Department of Levelling up, Housing and Communities has ruled this out. Instead the council agreed to continue working to set out clear guidelines for developers.

In a letter to the council outlining his decision, **Lee Rowley, Minister of State for Housing**, Planning and Building Safety, said: "I am writing to you over concerns that Mole Valley District Council may withdraw the emerging local plan from examination. The Government is clear that local plans are at the heart of the planning system, and it is essential that up-to-date plans are in place and are kept up to date."

He said: "Each local planning authority must identify the strategic priorities for the development and use of land in the authority's area, and policies to address those priorities must be set out in the local planning authority's development plan documents such as the local plan."

The last time the council had an up-to-date plan was in 2009 and work on its replacement has begun in earnest. Withdrawing now, Mr Rowley said would extend the council's time in limbo. He said: "Withdrawing the plan from examination would be a clear failure by the council."

Since Mole Valley District Council's last masterplan, more than 90 per cent of all English local authority plans have been updated - pulling out now would leave the borough with "one of the oldest adopted local plans in the country". It has left the council operating under out-of-date policies, given the amount of change in the 14 years since it was adopted.

Mr Rowley added: "Housing affordability is a significant problem in Mole Valley and the ratio of average house prices to average wages is amongst the highest in England. I can therefore conclude that there is higher housing pressure. Considering the average time taken to prepare a local plan is seven years and we are approaching the phased introduction of a new planning system, withdrawing the plan at this stage could only lead to significant further delay whilst a new plan is prepared. Intervening would therefore accelerate plan production given the current plan is submitted and at examination."

The order to proceed with the plan will remain in force until formally withdrawn by the secretary of state.

Councillor **Margaret Cooksey**, Cabinet Member for Planning said: "The Minister of State for Housing, Planning and Building Safety has today [January 25] issued Mole Valley District Council with a direction not to withdraw its local plan from the examination-in-public at the Council meeting tonight. Previous to the new direction, three options had been available to MVDC: Withdrawal of the plan; continuation of the plan, as submitted (including Green Belt sites); request that the planning Inspector change the plan to remove all Green Belt sites.

"This new direction takes option A away from us and requires Mole Valley District Council to report monthly to the Minister's officials on the progress of the examination. It will remain in force until the examination concludes with the Inspector's report."

# Councillors belted-up on Green Belt?

21 February 2024



In a recent closed-door meeting held at the Town Hall, local councillors in the Borough of Epsom and Ewell, convened to *apparently* deliberate on potential areas for housing development, with a particular focus on the contentious issue of Green Belt land. The meeting, held on January 10, has stirred controversy and prompted reactions from concerned citizens, leading to a series of letters and press releases. Councillors were greeted at the entrance by a small and polite protest group.

**Yufan Si**, a prominent Green Belt campaigner, has expressed alarm over the secrecy shrouding the meeting. The council's decision to discuss Green Belt development in a closed setting has raised questions about transparency and adherence to government policies.

Ms Si highlights the Council's statistics, indicating that 84% of residents opposed development on Green Belt land during a prior consultation. The campaigner argues that the government's planning policies offer a choice to protect Green Belt areas, questioning the need for a clandestine discussion.

She has raised concerns about the council's sale of Green Belt land to a local business owner three years before the Local Plan's development, potentially leading to significant financial gains. The campaigner emphasizes the availability of brownfield sites capable of accommodating over 3,700 new dwellings, surpassing the projected household growth from 2022 to 2040. In her letter Yufan Si has urged councillors to prioritize environmental preservation and fulfill residents' wishes by excluding Green Belt land from the development plans.

Councillor **Julie Morris** (LibDem College) has stated that she challenged the decision to keep the meeting private. While acknowledging the legal standing of the private meeting, Councillor Morris called for greater transparency and public engagement. She emphasizes the need for progress reports on the Local Plan to address residents' concerns and combat misinformation circulating in the public domain.

She said "The ruling Residents Association party would do well to engage directly with the public on this matter, or at the very least, to explain exactly why these meetings are being held, have to be in private, and why there is no public statement after each meeting to keep local residents informed as to how things are moving forward. Our residents deserve no less than this."

Letters from concerned citizens to Councillors echoed the sentiment against Green Belt development. **Stephen Neward**, a voluntary warden at the Priest Hill nature reserve, expressed hope that the revised National Planning Policy Framework would prevent the inclusion of Green Belt sites in the Local Plan. Another resident, **Lynn Munro**, urged councillors to prioritize brownfield sites over Green Belt, emphasizing the irreversible impact on the borough's open spaces.

**Tim Murphy**, representing the Council for the Protection of Rural England and the Epsom and Ewell Green Belt Group, shared the views of planning consultant Catriona Riddell. Riddell clarified that local authorities, including Epsom and Ewell, are not obligated to alter Green Belt boundaries to meet housing targets, challenging the notion that Green Belt sacrifice is necessary.

As controversy swirls around the closed meeting, residents, campaigners, and opposition councillors continue to press for transparency. The fate of Green Belt land in Epsom and Ewell remains a hot topic.

The meeting was not notified on the Council's calendar of meetings and therefore the press do not know if it was a formal or informal meeting nor whether any order was made about publicity. No part of the meeting, including any section excluding the public, has been uploaded to the Epsom and Ewell Borough Council YouTube channel.

Cllr **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley) Chair of the Licensing, Planning and Policy Committee has responded to Epsom and Ewell Times:

"This was not a secret meeting; it just wasn't a public meeting. I stated publicly at the September LPPC Committee and extraordinary full Council on 24 October 2023 that Member briefings regarding the Local Plan would be taking place during this time period assuming the local plan was unpaused by full council, which it was.

Further clarification was given at the special LPPC meeting held in November when the Local Development Scheme (LDS) was an agenda item. I have given a statement at every council meeting allowing questions from all members. All members have been encouraged to attend each LPPC meeting whether they're a committee member or not. All members have been fully involved and engaged in the development of our local plan.

It is normal and expected practice when a Local Plan is being developed for Members to be able to discuss items of detail outside of the public Committee Meetings. The information briefing for councillors held on 10 January 2024 was not a meeting of the Council or a committee and had no decision-making powers, and there was no right for public access under the Local Government Act 1972 or any other legislation.

There is currently a huge amount of work being done for our Local Plan, including considering the implications of the revised NPPF published in December 2023. Work will continue over the coming months before the next stage of public

consultation (Regulation 19), which is due to commence in January 2025, if supported by LPPC in November 2024 and full council in December 2024.”

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## East Street Development gets Green Light

21 February 2024



At the Epsom and Ewell Planning Committee meeting of 14th December the proposed demolition of 79-81 East Street and the construction of a part 5, part 6 storey building containing 31 residential units faced intense scrutiny and debate.

After a heated discussion, Councillor Neil Dallen (RA Town Ward) proposed to refuse the application, citing concerns about over development, lack of parking provision, and harm to the conservation area. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Jan Mason. However, the committee ultimately voted against his motion (2 For, 6 Against).

Following further consideration, the Acting Chair put forward the Officer’s recommendation for approval, subject to conditions and a legal agreement. The committee resolved (6 For, 2 Against) to grant planning permission with conditions and informatives.

Conditions and Informatives: The approval is subject to a Section 106 Legal Agreement, including provisions for 16 affordable rented units, restrictions on parking permits, and a car-club agreement. Conditions include time limits for development commencement, approval of external materials, construction transport management plan, and various pre-occupation and post-development requirements.

The decision reflects the complex considerations surrounding the East Street Development. The approved conditions aim to address concerns raised during the meeting, particularly regarding parking, sustainable transport, and environmental impact. The development now moves forward, albeit with strict guidelines in place.

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## Ruxley Lane development on casting vote

21 February 2024



Properties on Ruxley Lane in Ewell with sizeable gardens will be demolished and replaced by 14 dwellings in two blocks. A tied vote of Councillors, at the Epsom and Ewell Planning Committee meeting of 14th December, on granting permission was resolved by the casting vote in favour of acting Chair Cllr Steven McCormick (RA Woodcote and Langley).

The committee approved the application, contingent upon the execution of a Section 106 Legal Agreement. This agreement includes a viability review mechanism to be activated if the development fails to reach the first-floor slab level on both buildings within 20 months of the decision date.

A critical provision in the decision is the requirement for the Section 106 Agreement to be completed by March 18, 2024. Failure to meet this deadline empowers the Head of Place Development to refuse the application based on non-compliance with Policy CS9 of the Core Strategy 2007.

Several conditions were imposed, including a three-year time limit for the commencement of development to comply with

the Town and Country Planning Act. The approved plans, covering aspects such as site location, construction details, and landscaping, must be strictly adhered to throughout the development process.

Pre-commencement conditions were also established, such as the submission and approval of a Construction Transport Management Plan, ensuring responsible construction practices and adherence to highway safety regulations.

Post-demolition and pre-above-ground conditions mandate the submission and approval of details related to external materials, access provisions, tracking details, sustainable drainage schemes, and more. These conditions aim to safeguard visual amenities, highway safety, and sustainable development principles.

Pre-occupation conditions cover various aspects, including access closure and remediation, parking and turning layouts, visibility splays, and the installation of electric vehicle charging points. These conditions align with the National Planning Policy Framework's sustainable transport objectives and local development policies.

The committee emphasized sustainability measures, requiring the provision of solar panels, drainage verification reports, and adherence to ecological and sustainable design measures.

During and post-development conditions focus on groundwater remediation strategies, tree protection, ecological considerations, and sustainable design measures. The approved development must comply with strict regulations to control significant harm from land contamination and ensure the preservation of biodiversity.

The decision also outlines specific conditions regarding construction hours, limitations on additional windows or openings, and the installation of facilities such as refuse/recycling stores and cycle storage.

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## Homeless child will have his day in court

21 February 2024



The High Court has granted a judicial review into Surrey County Council's decision not to house a "child in need". In 2019, a 17-year-old who was known to Surrey's social services team was on the verge of being made homeless.

Surrey County Council caseworkers, who the judge praised, said the teen required the highest level of intervention together with a co-ordinated multi-agency approach. These are reserved for cases where children are in serious need. However, when he applied for emergency accommodation, the council's housing team said they were forced into a "snap judgement" - something the judge dismissed.

Mr Justice Calver rejected the county council's claim that their decision was made against the clock and found they had a "duty to provide him with accommodation". The judge said he was "well known to Surrey County Council with his history of children's services involvement", and that the council had already made considerable enquiries about his needs and welfare.

He added it was "clearly the case that... suitable emergency accommodation...was required, whilst his full needs, including his need for continuing accommodation and support, were further assessed."

Following the county council's decision the teenager, now 22, began to "sofa surf" between friends and family until he eventually ended up homeless and living on the streets.

Justice Calver's judgement read: "Despite this, Surrey County Council inexplicably failed to provide (him) with any accommodation and indeed failed to take any steps to assess his case at all until September 18, 2019, being five days later, which is highly regrettable." He wrote: "It is plain in my judgement that as at September, 18, 2019 it was or ought to have been clear to Surrey County Council on the facts as known to them that he could not return home, and did not otherwise have stable, suitable accommodation. Instead it merely recommended a referral to its targeted youth support."

Justice Calver also said that, given the background of the young man's situation, and how well known he was to Surrey County Council it was "extraordinary that on October 28, 2019, Surrey County Council nonetheless closed his case."

The judge said that while there was "no doubt" he had a "caring and diligent social support worker" it was "clear that Surrey County Council as an organisation seriously failed" him. He said: "I do not accept the submission of Surrey County Council that no purpose would be served now in granting the relief sought by this claim," adding "the support he receives from his supported accommodation key worker is being stepped down over time, and is accommodation-based."

"He still requires but cannot access support to return to college, access vocational training, plan his future and manage his social anxiety, all practical challenges which he struggles with owing to the lasting effects of his childhood."

The judgement, handed-down on Friday December 15th granted the man permission to bring his claim forward for review.

A spokesperson for Surrey County Council said it does not comment on active court proceedings.

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# Surrey social landlord downgraded by regulator

21 February 2024



Problems with repairs, service charges, complaints, damp and mould, contributed to one of Surrey's largest social housing landlords being downgraded by regulators for failing its tenants.

The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) found that issues at A2Dominion had "crystallised over a breadth of areas" which "resulted in poor outcomes for its tenants".

The report, published on Wednesday January 3 said A2Dominion had been working to make improvements but had not yet been able to deliver the changes required. This led to poor quality data, poor reporting, and the board not having effective oversight.

Harold Brown, senior assistant director for investigations and enforcement at RSH, said: "We found significant issues with A2Dominion's data and its business planning, risk and control framework, leading to a failure by the provider to manage key risks effectively. A2Dominion is working with us to address these issues and we will continue to monitor the provider as it works to return to compliance."

The group owns and manages more than 38,000 homes across 79 local authority areas in London, the South East and Wiltshire. The majority of its housing stock is for general needs. It also has significant levels of shared ownership housing as well as supported or sheltered accommodation. A2Dominion, as a charitable housing association, must meet certain regulatory standards over how it is run.

Its new board took over in September 2022 and referred itself to RSH following concerns over the quality of some services, as well as its financial position. A2Dominion was then under review for three months while it was investigated for potential non-compliance.

In a letter to stakeholders, CEO Ian Wardle said: "We know that outcomes for some customers have been poor. Earlier this year, we issued an apology to customers who had been adversely affected. While we have made some improvements, work is still underway to fully resolve issues with repairs, service charges, complaints, damp and mould, latent defects and the roles and responsibilities with managing agents. We also know that our services aren't as responsive as they could be. In some of these areas, we aren't always delivering the high standards we set ourselves and customers expect."

The regulator downgraded A2Dominion from G1, which means a provider meets governance requirements, to G3 where there are issues of serious regulatory concern which the provider is working to improve. Its financial position is unchanged. The new grading does not affect services and it will continue to deliver its day-to-day operations as normal.

Mr Wardle said: "Over the past few months, we've been in positive and constructive discussions with the regulator following our self-referrals. We've welcomed the opportunity to identify further steps that we can take to make improvements for our customers and the communities we serve. "The regulator has confirmed that it has assurance that we have an adequately funded business plan in the short term, sufficient security in place, and is forecast to continue to meet its financial covenants.

"Since I joined in September 2022, we've had a new chair of the board appointed, many new board members, and changes to our management team. All our colleagues are passionate about what we do. However, in far too many instances, colleagues haven't had the resources and processes to fully deliver outstanding customer service. It is my job to fix this, and we've made improvements throughout 2023, with more planned in 2024.

"At the same time historic decisions on development schemes, tougher trading conditions and rising costs have affected our finances, but we will weather the storm. We've already made a number of significant improvements in relation to customer complaints and have prioritised our commitment to social housing as the core of our business, including our exit from care services and fine tuning our development strategy so we can focus on getting things right first time for our customers. We also remain financially strong, with an A credit rating from Fitch, £3.6 billion of assets, and over £300 million of undrawn available facilities.

"I look forward to continuing to work closely with the regulator following their decision, and will collaborate on the steps we need to take to return to our previous rating."

Image: A2dominion Home

# Underinvestment hits most vulnerable

21 February 2024



The “most vulnerable” people in Woking will be made to find new homes after their extra care facility failed vital fire safety checks and was “all but condemned”. Brockhill Extra Care Housing, in Clifton Way, has space for 48 apartments over two floors with a waiting list to get in.

In February this year **Surrey Fire and Rescue** conducted a review of the home prompting Woking Borough Council to introduce a Waking Watch - where trained people continually patrol a building and its perimeter to detect fires and raise alarms.

The facility changed its emergency procedures from Stay Put to Evacuate. The council also upgraded its fire detection systems. Many still can't evacuate the building fast enough, leaving the bankrupt council with the decision of spending £5.8 million on a complete refit, or closing the fire trap.

A meeting of its executive committee, on Thursday, December 14, concluded the home open was no longer viable, regardless of the council's finances, and residents, families and other stakeholders would be consulted over the closure of the Brockhill Extra Care Housing scheme. According to papers presented to councillors, the building appears to have had limited investment with only minor works carried - meaning it now requires “major capital works over the next two years and beyond”.

Its' boiler failed a year ago causing “considerable inconvenience and discomfort to residents and staff” and is beyond repair.

Residents currently rely on a temporary heating but the entire system is “aged and in poor condition and requires upgrading and renewing. Since then, no new people have been allowed to move to the home, occupancy has dropped to 68 per cent and, where possible, the council has tried to moved residents to the ground floor to aid evacuation.

The anticipated total capital expenditure required on Brockhill over the next 10 years is forecast to be about £5.8 million, according to the report.

Deputy leader of the council, Cllr Will Forster, said: “The fire risk assessment has all but condemned that building. Particularly with the clients that we have in there. They are just so vulnerable, they have to leave the building so quickly in the event of a fire, because of the type of building it is. And that's just not humanly possible for them.”

Any decision around Brockhill will have implications and put additional cost pressures on adult social care budgets with the council admitting that this will be difficult and upsetting for people living and working Brockhill, as well as the families of residents living there.

Leader of the Council, Cllr Ann-Marie Barker said: “Its obviously heartbreaking for me to see this. “I know what a well loved and valued facility it is.” She added: “But we have had a significant fire risk arising from a fire brigade assessment. We've known some of this work was needed we've been working in the last year we've done work on fire doors fire alarms, having a waking watching place to protect residents but the fire services have now determined that its just not safe for the most vulnerable and it's so urgent that those most vulnerable people do need to move as soon as possible.”

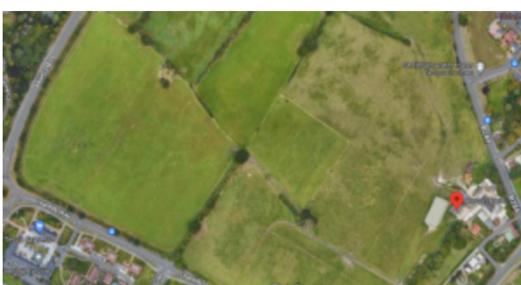
Cllr Ellen Nicholson (LD, Mount Hermon) said: “The residents there are some of the most vulnerable in Woking and I find it incredibly sad that the chronic underprovision and the legacy of mismanagement has led to these fire risks and these safety risks for these incredibly vulnerable people.”

Image Brockhill care home - Google

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# Green Belt off or relaxed a notch?

21 February 2024



Excitement has been stirred by **Michael Gove**'s announcement 19th December that housing targets are advisory not mandatory. This change *may* mean a shift in **Epsom and Ewell**'s Draft Local Plan away from earmarking any Green Belt for housing developments.

The local campaign group **Epsom and Ewell Green Belt** has reacted to the news. In a press release issued today they urge **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council**: "Together with the Surrey Branch of the **Campaign to Protect Rural England** (CPRE), is calling on the Council and its Councillors to instruct the planning officers to republish its Local Plan within the next few weeks, removing all greenbelt sites, reducing the housing target to a rational approximately 3,500 homes for the Plan period, and focusing on developing all available brownfield sites. We have produced a list of the changes that would need to be made to the draft Plan so that it complies with the Government's revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)."

However, accompanying the publication of the revised NPPF Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities Michael Gove said "The new NPPF was not a route to the evasion of responsibilities. Local authorities must provide rigorous evidence justifying their departure from assessed housing needs. They must do everything to identify other lands suitable for development." He added "While the planning inspectorate will respect well-made cases, it will not accept undershooting that is not firmly rooted in environmental or other safeguards. This is about sensitive adjustment in housing targets, not their abandonment."

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## Anchored in reason on local housing need?

21 February 2024



The Draft Local Plan lacks a proper negotiating position on future house building numbers in the Borough of Epsom and Ewell. So said an unnamed member of the public who addressed last week's Licensing, Planning and Policy Committee.

Let Epsom and Ewell Times know your view. Is he right or wrong? Here is his speech in full:

"Good evening, everyone. The first thing they teach you about negotiations at business school is the power of anchoring. Government has deployed this tactic very successfully. Government's standard method results in a target of 10,368 new dwellings over the Local Plan period. Let's be clear: this target is government's negotiation anchor. It is not our borough's actual housing need; it is simply designed to pressure you into setting a high housing target.

You might not realize that you are in a negotiation, but you are. Although the draft Local Plan recognizes that government's target is unachievable, it has still succeeded in anchoring council's thinking throughout the Local Plan. First, you note that your 3,700 from brownfield sites only meet 36% of government's anchor. Then you use that fact to declare exceptional circumstances. Afterward, you set your own housing target at just over half of government's anchor. That is the classic response of an inexperienced negotiator.

What the draft Local Plan did not discuss was our actual need for new dwellings. Strategic plans should always be based on the best available information, and yet the draft Local Plan did not even mention our actual need for new housing. It is very important for the council to prominently and clearly explain within the Local Plan why government's anchor of 10,368 is flawed and why our actual housing need is for just 2,664 new dwellings. By doing this, you will demolish government's anchor and replace it with the council's own anchor. It is absolutely critical to anchor everyone's thinking to the real needs of our borough.

The figure of 2,664 new dwellings is obtained by making just two changes to the standard method: firstly, replacing the outdated 2014 household projections with the more up-to-date 2018 data, and secondly, removing the flawed 40% affordability uplift. The theory behind this uplift is that by flooding the market with new homes, you will drive prices down. This theory is flawed for two reasons: firstly, house builders engage in land banking; they hold back most of their consented land and drip-feed new houses onto the market at a rate that matches demand and maintains prices. Secondly, the affordability uplift assumes that Epsom is a separate market for housing—it is not. If the Competition and Markets

Authority were to look at this, the first thing they would do would be to define the relevant markets. They would note the existence of an unbroken chain of substitution across the whole Greater London Commuter Zone and conclude that Epsom just forms a very small part of a very large market. Flooding with new homes will not reduce house prices in the borough due to any supply-demand imbalance. Any reduction in local house prices will be as a result of the borough becoming a less serene and less attractive place to live.

According to paragraph 1.61 of the draft Local Plan, the balance between protecting our environment and enabling development is at the centre of our spatial strategy. At present, the Local Plan is unbalanced. You are planning to build more than twice the number of new dwellings that we actually need by sacrificing some of our best-performing Greenfield Green Belt sites.”

Related reports:

Epsom Town Centre Masterplan Unveiled

Housing need or desire?

Can Epsom and Ewell get more dense?

Little plots of Council land for housing?

More affordable housing now. Cllr Kate Chinn

MP's housing solution for Epsom and Ewell

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## The Plot in the thick of planning options

21 February 2024



At a meeting of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s Strategy and Resources Committee held on 13th July it was decided that various Council owned “brownfield” sites would not be offered up for development for housing in the long-awaited Local Plan. This followed a note from the Licensing, Planning and Policy Committee of 15th June that “Officers have written to the Council in its capacity as landowner to check the availability of additional sites for promotion through the call for sites process”. I.e., promotion in the Local Plan for housing development.

Most of the Council portfolio on the Kiln Lane and Longmead industrial, retail and commercial areas are held on long-leases. Plot 8, in the far north-east corner of Kiln Lane was held by Wilsons, the car sale emporium, on a 10 year lease that expired in 2019. This was one plot, bordered by housing to the east, that could potentially ease pressure on other land, including green-belt, to deliver on new housing targets. Presently, it is an open area used for storing motor vehicles.

It is understood that with the lease having expired the Council could regain possession upon a redevelopment being planned. However, at the meeting of the same committee held on 21st September it was decided to authorise the grant of a new lease. Details of the new lease were excluded from public and press view at the meeting to protect the privacy of financial and commercial information of a third party, presumably Wilsons.

The length of the lease has not been disclosed but will in due course be available to public view at HM Land Registry.

Cllr **Alison Kelly** (LibDem Stamford) told Epsom and Ewell Times “I voted in favour of extending the lease, as the business wished to continue and it provides much needed income for the council. The details of the lease are part of a restricted document as is normal in these cases. However it was a well thought out contract that does not stop the local plan work. It maybe several years before both the local plan is complete and a developer comes forward with an alternative plan for plot 8.”

Councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) said: “Labour knows that there is a need to build homes, but also to keep people in jobs. What the council needs is a fully thought through local plan that resolves competing requirements for land. Unfortunately the hopelessly divided Residents Association administration hasn’t been able to achieve this. It is also important to maintain the council’s income when cash for vital services is stretched.”

**Epsom Civic Society** maintains a watchful citizen’s eye on planning matters and its Chair, **Margaret Hollins** told Epsom and Ewell Times “Epsom Civic Society supports retention and encouragement of strategic employment sites which are significant drivers of the local economy. No information is publicly available about the terms and duration of the lease so it is difficult to comment further.

“The Society considers that any attempts to cram residential dwellings along with industrial and commercial activities need to be avoided. Mixed residential and employment use could only be achieved through a carefully conceived

regeneration strategy which would need to ensure proper separation between any residential areas and noise/disturbance/air pollution issues that can often occur with the type of distribution/warehousing activities prevalent on the existing industrial estates.”

A spokesperson for the Council responded: “On 13 July 2023, Strategy & Resources Committee considered the land availability of several Council owned sites including the Longmead and Kiln Lane Industrial Sites. The decision was taken not to include the industrial sites and they remain part of the Council’s commercial property portfolio. We are unable to provide any further comment at this time as this relates to confidential commercial matters.”

Do you have a view? Feel free to write to Epsom and Ewell Times.

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## Noble housing intentions?

21 February 2024



Crest Nicholson and the Vistry Group have partnered for a “sustainable development” initiative near Noble Park in Epsom. They plan to submit a comprehensive planning application to **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council** this Autumn. The proposal aims to construct around 90 new homes, with 40% allocated as affordable housing.

The project includes the creation of communal open spaces and green areas, featuring a community orchard and a children’s play area. Noble Park allotments will remain untouched, highlighting a “commitment to preserving community assets”. Additionally, plans include dedicated private parking facilities for allotment holders.

The developers have invited the local community to participate in shaping this initiative by providing input and ideas. Residents can offer feedback or seek more information through the ‘Feedback and Contact’ tab on the following unattributed website. <http://nobleparkconsultation.com/>

The project is located on 5.67 hectares of land to the east of the existing Noble Park development, at the intersection of West Park Road and Horton Lane, with vehicular access from West Park Road. While specific timelines depend on the planning process, construction may begin in 2025, contributing to family housing and affordable homes in the area. This initiative “aims to address housing shortages and bring positive change to the community”.

Epsom and Ewell Times can confirm that Epsom and Ewell Borough Council will meet at 7.30pm on 24th October, to decide whether to “un-pause” progress on the Local Plan. The Plan that will establish the planning policy framework for where and how many houses may be built in the Borough in the future.

Related reports:

Drafting of Epsom and Ewell Local Plan “unpausing”?

Motion to pause Local Plan process

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## Council Grapples with Rising Cost of Homelessness

21 February 2024

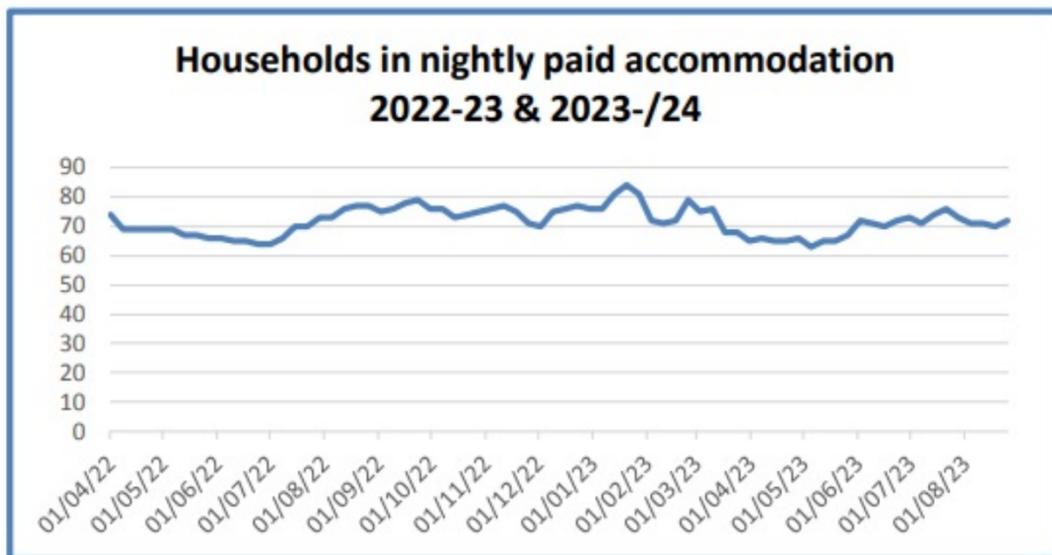


In an ongoing challenge to manage rising homelessness-related costs, **Epsom & Ewell Borough Council** (EEBC) finds itself confronted with an impending financial strain exceeding their 2023/24 budget. This report sheds light on the concerted efforts made to mitigate the budgetary overruns and identifies available funding avenues to cover these increased expenditures.

The Community and Wellbeing Committee 10th October accepted the following recommendations:

1. Acknowledge the measures taken over the past 6-12 months to address homelessness.
2. Approve the utilization of the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) and homelessness grant reserves to meet the projected increase in expenses, thereby ensuring EEBC complies with its obligations under the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
3. Note that a comprehensive update will be presented at the Community & Wellbeing Committee in March 2024.

EEBC is bound by statutory duties outlined in the Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Non-compliance could expose the council to legal challenges.



The Committee were advised of escalating expenditure: EEBC's budget is stretched thin due to mounting expenses for temporary accommodation in fulfilling their homelessness obligations. Costs for 2023/24 are poised to surpass £1.5 million, primarily owing to an increasing number of homelessness cases, a 15% surge in rental rates from accommodation providers, and a shortage of alternative housing options.

Officers have been operating in an increasingly demanding climate, with the cost-of-living crisis amplifying the complexity of issues presented by households in need of assistance.

The cost-of-living crisis, accompanied by rent hikes, has exacerbated housing supply issues, with heightened competition from other local authorities further straining the available housing stock.

The Homelessness Strategy & Action Plan 2022-27 was adopted in November 2022, outlining key objectives and actions. Progress has been made in early intervention and prevention.

Competition and energy cost increases have pushed up the cost of accommodating households in temporary arrangements, despite the team's adaptive procurement approach.

Officers occasionally resort to using Travelodge as accommodation due to a lack of alternatives, incurring a substantial cost of around £140 per night. The average net cost of nightly paid accommodation for small families has surged by over 18% compared to 2022/23, reaching approximately £23,500 annually.

EEBC introduced a Private Sector Leasing (PSL) scheme to lease properties from private landlords for temporary accommodation, offering significant cost savings compared to expensive options like Travelodge.

The challenges faced by the housing services teams are likely to persist in the coming year, and high numbers of households in temporary accommodation are expected to persist.

Economic uncertainties and factors such as reduced housing development and the closure of bridging accommodation for refugees will continue to exert pressure on housing services.

Monthly reporting to the Committee Chair and Vice Chair will provide ongoing updates on the situation, with a commitment to implement actions as per the Homelessness Strategy.

Promotion of the PSL scheme to landlords will be pursued, and collaboration with housing associations and partners to boost the supply of affordable housing will remain a priority.

In sum, EEBC is grappling with the burden of homelessness-related expenses, which, despite diligent efforts, continue to rise. The council faces the critical task of managing these costs to fulfill its legal obligations while seeking innovative solutions to address housing supply challenges in the community. The situation will be closely monitored, with continued engagement with stakeholders to identify viable solutions.

The recommendations were agreed by the committee.

Image: Evelyn Simak cc-by-sa/2.0

# Housing Allocation Policy Undergoes Updates

21 February 2024



In a bid to modernize the housing allocation process and enhance the efficiency of social housing distribution, the Council adopted a series of amendments to the Housing Allocation Policy and Choice Based Letting Scheme. These changes aim to align the policy with recent legislative updates, reinforce penalties for fraudulent activity, and refine financial thresholds for eligibility.

Cllr **Clive Woodbridge**, Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee (RA Ewell Village) introduced the item at its meeting on 10th October: "It's over six years since this was last reviewed significantly, and the changes proposed to the policy are intended to introduce considerable more flexibility so that we can widen the range of people that we can assist through the scheme. So, the committee has been asked to review it and say whether they agree with the various changes that are being made".

During the discussion Cllr Woodbridge asked: "How has the Domestic Abuse Act changed the way we have to implement our policy, and how is that reflected in the document before us tonight?" The Council Officer explained: "Our previous policy was compliant anyway, it just didn't make a particular reference to The Domestic Abuse Act. We have exceptions within the allocation policy which allow us to look at each case on a case-by-case basis. However, the housing needs register is a waiting list and often it can't address people who have an urgent need for rehousing, so often the more appropriate route for people who are at immediate risk of domestic abuse is to go through the housing options process. However, the policy is designed so we don't put barriers up for those that do want to be on our housing needs register, so it doesn't have a requirement to have lived in our borough and is flexible to take those needs into account."

Cllr **Alison Kelly** (LibDem Stamford Ward) expressed her concern about the position of "care leavers" (persons who have been in care between the ages of 16 and 25 who lived in care for at least 13 weeks since their 14th birthday) and asked that each such applicant for housing was considered flexibly and treated on a "case by case" basis. The officer responded that "At a practical level we would always treat each case on a "case by case basis"". She added that the care leaver policy was being looked at on a Surrey wide basis.

In December 2014, a joint Social and Strategy and Resources committee approved fundamental changes to the existing Housing Allocation Policy. The policy governs how housing needs are prioritized, Housing Needs Register applications are assessed, and social housing is allocated. Following extensive consultations with key stakeholders, the revised Housing Allocation Policy was formally endorsed and implemented in June 2015.

While the policy has effectively met its intended goals, certain aspects are now due for review to ensure its continued relevance and responsiveness to current challenges. Consequently, several adjustments to qualifying and non-qualifying criteria, along with administrative procedures, have been proposed to keep the policy up-to-date. The key changes include:

1. **Fraud & False Information:**  
Revisions to the qualifying criteria and penalties for applicants involved in fraudulent applications or false information. These changes will align with the ongoing efforts of Reigate and Banstead's Fraud Investigation team.
2. **Legislative Compliance:**  
Ensuring the Housing Allocation Policy complies with evolving legislation, statutory guidance, and case law.
3. **Alignment with Surrey-Wide Protocols:**  
Adapting the policy to any adjustments in joint protocols implemented across Surrey.
4. **Financial Qualifying Criteria:**  
Reviewing the financial criteria for inclusion on the Housing Needs Register. The current thresholds, set in 2015, restrict single people or couples without dependent children with gross annual earnings of £25,000 or more and couples or single parents with dependent children with gross annual earnings of £50,000 or more.

Proposed Changes:

- **Fraud & False Information:** Strengthened criteria and penalties for applicants making fraudulent applications. Disqualification from the Housing Needs Register for two years for fraudulent applicants and five years for those convicted of fraud or deception.
- **Legislative Compliance:** Updates to reflect changes in legislation and statutory guidance affecting the Housing

Allocation Policy.

- Alignment with Surrey-Wide Protocols: Incorporating changes introduced in the Surrey Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- Financial Qualifying Criteria: Adjusting the income thresholds, increasing the current £25,000 gross annual earnings for single people/couples without dependent children to £40,000, and the £50,000 threshold for couples/single parents with dependent children to £65,000.

These adjustments are backed by a recent benchmarking exercise across Surrey, which highlights the need to ensure a balanced mix of households reliant on welfare benefits and those employed, especially for one-bedroom properties. Additionally, the proposed income thresholds align with the income levels at which applicants would no longer qualify for welfare benefits or universal credit.

Furthermore, the changes aim to address the challenges faced by low-income households in private rental accommodation, who are often limited by the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates, causing a substantial shortfall between LHA rates and median private sector rents.

The proposed adjustments are a comprehensive attempt to modernize the Housing Allocation Policy, making it more equitable, responsive, and reflective of the current housing landscape. The committee unanimously adopted the revised policy.

## Improving housing improvements for the vulnerable

21 February 2024



10th October Epsom and Ewell Council's **Community and Wellbeing Committee** agreed a Revised Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy to Expand Support for Vulnerable Residents.

The item was introduced by committee Chair **Cllr. Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village). In response to updated central government guidelines, the local Council is poised to adopt a more flexible and proactive approach to assist a broader range of households through its revised Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy. The move comes as a result of increased funding for the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) program via the Better Care Fund. This additional funding has enabled the Council to harness the powers under the Regulatory Reform Order 2002 (RRO) to introduce a Discretionary Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy, aiming to provide support for vulnerable residents.

The existing policy has proven effective in the past but is now undergoing revision as the Council finds itself with a significant surplus of DFG funds, providing an opportunity to extend its assistance further. Notably, central government's guidance, released in March 2022, has directed the Council to utilize the discretionary powers within the RRO to meet the needs of disabled and vulnerable individuals in the community more comprehensively. This flexibility includes adaptations to means test requirements and grant caps, while also offering discretionary financial aid for purposes such as home safety and hospital discharge support.

The Council's objective is to ensure equitable and accessible financial support reaches a wide array of residents. To achieve this, a revised policy is being proposed to accommodate an increased number of vulnerable residents.

Background:

- The Council's responsibilities concerning financial assistance for repair and adaptations are regulated by the Housing Grants, Construction, and Regeneration Act 1996 and the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO).
- The Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy was first introduced in 2018.
- The Council annually receives ringfenced central government funding for DFGs, totaling £785,282 in the last three years. Local authorities are encouraged to maximize the use of their discretionary powers under the RRO to respond to local needs, necessitating the formulation of a published policy.
- In the fiscal year 2022/23, the Home Improvement Agency collaborated with various organizations to enhance the promotion of their services and grants, leading to the completion of 43 DFGs worth £616,000 for a wide

range of adaptations, including level access showers, stairlifts, ramps, and wheelchair accessible extensions. The handyman service completed 241 jobs, addressing needs such as grab rails, minor repairs, and garden clearances.

- The integration of services between Housing, Social & Adult Care, and the National Health Service aims to support vulnerable households in remaining in their homes whenever possible.
- Poor housing can be a significant barrier for vulnerable, elderly, and disabled individuals, contributing to immobility, social exclusion, ill health, and depression. Housing assistance policies can mitigate these challenges by enabling people to live independently in secure, well-maintained, and suitable housing.

#### Proposed Policy Changes:

The Council's revised policy includes several notable changes to better support residents:

- Broadened eligibility criteria, including the removal of means test requirements for prevention grants and the inclusion of council tax support as a passporting benefit to streamline access.
- A more flexible application process and forms.
- A new exceptions clause for individualized case handling.
- An increased maximum grant level to account for rising construction costs and complex needs.
- Assistance extended to those with terminal illnesses and dementia.
- Introduction of loans from the Parity Trust for cases requiring additional funds or where grant requirements aren't met.
- Accessible housing grants to meet the growing demand in the housing market for disabled individuals who are either homeless or in need of more suitable properties.
- Addition of a prevention grant to enhance health and safety in homes in alignment with the NHS and Social and Adult Care.

The Council's commitment to expanding its support through this revised policy reflects its dedication to fostering safer, more accessible housing options for vulnerable residents.

The revised policy was unanimously agreed by the committee.

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## Land, plan and a scam mess for Tandridge

21 February 2024



A land scam, £3.5million spent and residents being "ignored" have come to a head as a district council finally looks set to call an end to its 6,000-home local plan.

As well as uneven development between the north and south of Tandridge, councillors raised concerns about the draft plan not looking enough at necessary infrastructure.

After a drawn-out process including hearings in public, the abandoned garden village planned for Godstone and terse public exchanges with the government's planning inspector, the council's leader declared the plan "dead".

A meeting of the district council's planning policy committee on Thursday (September 21) decided to ask the inspector for a final report, despite an additional bill of around £12,000, rather than withdrawing the plan.

Of the options in front of members, the council's leader said: "In either case, the plan is dead."

The inspector told the council in July he did not "see a route to soundness for the local plan", but at a meeting after that the council put forward options to find a way forward.

The local plan, which set out where and when homes will be built across the district until 2033, was submitted to government for examination in January 2019.

There was a change of administration in May 2021, when a minority administration of residents' associations took control of the council.

The current leader, Councillor Catherine Sayer (Residents' Alliance, Oxted North and Tandridge), said she thought the local plan system was "totally unfit for purpose".

With a government funding bid for works to improve junction 6 of the M25 failing, central to the plans for a new garden village, she said there was "a big question mark over why the planning inspector did not end the process at that point".

Cllr Sayer told the meeting: "In an attempt to avoid ending up with no plan at all and the threat that would mean to the green belt together with a huge waste of taxpayers' money, we tried to salvage something.

"We proposed amendments and deleted the garden community and attempted to do whatever else the planning inspector had indicated might make the plan acceptable."

The leader also told the meeting it was "common knowledge" that some of the green belt land planned for the garden community had been part of a land scam where more than 350 small plots were sold on an investment basis.

She said: "Most of the owners are believed to reside in India and Pakistan. To enable the garden community to go ahead, it would have been likely that the council would have needed to use its compulsory purchase powers to assemble the land."

She said asking for a report from the inspector could "bring some kind of useful closure to what is such an unhappy and costly chapter for Tandridge District".

Councillor Jeremy Pursehouse (Independent, Warlingham East Chelsham & Farleigh) said he was "very sad to see the demise of the garden community" which he said balanced out planned development across the north and the south of district. He said: "We can't put everything in Warlingham and Caterham, it just doesn't work like that. It will just make people who are living in suburban areas further away from the green of the countryside, we have to share these things around."

He said the north of the district did not have the infrastructure for the kinds of development being looked at in the plan.

Councillor Mick Gillman (Residents' Alliance, Burstow, Horne & Outwood) said he lived in the south of the district, which did not have the railways of the north, and described the A22 as "a car park much of the time". He added: "It's driven by infrastructure, and you've got to put a lot of money into the infrastructure in the south to get it up to speed."

But he also highlighted his reasons he thought it was important to get a report from the inspector.

Cllr Gillman said the council owed it to residents to justify why more than £3.5m had been spent on "something that has failed". He added: "What's even more concerning to me is many of the reasons that the inspector flagged up were those that were flagged up by residents in the consultation process and they were ignored. And I think residents need to know that they did not get it wrong, and it was the organisation within the council that got it wrong."

The meeting unanimously agreed to ask the inspector for a report, rather than withdrawing the plan, and will recommend this to council. Full council will debate the next steps for the plan, its next scheduled meeting is on Thursday, October 19.

Photo: Catherine Sayer Tandridge District Council leader. Image credit Darren Pepe/Surrey Live.