

Epsom’s homelessness crisis



Finding temporary accommodation for families at risk of homelessness is the “biggest financial pressure” facing Epsom and Ewell.

Following Epsom and Ewell Times report 13th October 2023 on Epsom and Ewell Council’s 10th October 2023 meeting of the Community and Well-being Committee: “Council Grapples with Rising Cost of Homelessness”, Emily Dalton probes further after this year’s meeting 8th October 2024.

Our local Council (EEBC) provides around temporary units to 250 households, according to data from July 2024. Of those, 90 are nightly accommodations.

The council spent £1,665,493 on nightly emergency accommodation in 12 months to April – an overspend of £395,000. EEBC had originally budgeted for 70 families in nightly paid accommodation but throughout the first five months of 2024, the Council was regularly supporting in excess of 90.

“The situation remains significantly serious and will be for some time to come,” said Councillor Clive Woodbridge, speaking at a Community and Wellbeing meeting on October 8. Despite hard-working officers behind the scenes, council documents stated that it is unlikely the number of homeless families will decrease over the next 12 months.

EEBC is absorbing the costs through its original budget, a homelessness grant reserve and the council’s general fund balance and contingency. Nearly £650k has been awarded to EEBC as part of a Homelessness Prevention Grant for this financial year 2024/25. But, officers warned that if demand remains exceptionally high, the local authority may have to dip into its reserves.

Homelessness “affects all households of all sizes”, a EEBC officer told the committee. He added: “But particularly for us, the higher expenditure is around family-sized households.” Overcrowded and multi-generation families, rather than rough sleeping was presented as the most prominent issue coming before the council, the officer said.

Due to demand for accommodation, officers are on occasion having to use economy hotel rooms when no other accommodation is available. The total cost for this can be around £140 per night.

Officers explained the council has a legal “duty” to help people at risk of homelessness and so will continue to foot the bill for temporary accommodation despite the budget pressures.

Landlords were encouraged to take on more council tenants at a landlord forum run by EEBC on September 26. The council is looking for landlords of three, four and five-bedroom houses to sign up to its private sector leasing scheme, so it can reduce the amount it spends on the nightly units. EEBC also highlighted the ‘Rent Deposit Scheme’ as a preventative homeless measures where councils support tenants with deposits and guarantees.

Looking for new ways to solve the problem, EEBC has asked landlords to help provide emergency housing for families and individuals at risk of homelessness. Although the event was reportedly “well attended”, council officers said it may be “slow burn” for landlords to come forward for the scheme. Officers said there were a couple of approaches but “nothing concrete yet”.

Related reports:

Epsom and Ewell Press Release on Homelessness

Council Grapples with Rising Cost of Homelessness

Image: Evelyn Simak cc-by-sa/2.0

Some Surrey boroughs get brownfield funding



Surrey councils will get nearly £2m to release disused brownfield sites to unlock desperately needed land for house building including cash to clear asbestos and transform the “heart of Camberley”.

Boroughs and districts are bracing themselves for tough new Government housing targets that could see the demands to deliver new homes skyrocket.

In an effort to alleviate some of the pressures the Government has announced £68m of funding is to go directly to 54 local authorities to turn what it describes as neglected land into housing.

Two of those councils are in Surrey; Surrey Heath Borough Council is set to receive £1,480,300, with Tandridge District Council in line for £250,159.

The funding is to be used clearing empty buildings, former car parks or industrial land in order to make way for homes.

Historically it is expensive to get such sites ready for housebuilding and can sit as empty eyesores for years.

Surrey Heath Borough Council has said in a statement the funding will support its new housing development in London Road site, “near the A30 in the heart of Camberley”.

It added: “The grant will be used to demolish derelict buildings on the site and safely remove asbestos from the former Allders building, clearing the way for future development. “

The money is part of a three-year £180 million Brownfield Land Release Fund 2 launched in July 2022 to allow local authorities in England to build on blocked brownfield land.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer said: “From the outset we promised to get this country building again to deliver 1.5 million homes over this parliament and help tackle the housing crisis we have inherited. That is the essence of fixing the foundations and driving growth.

“I said this government is on the side of the builders, not the blockers. And I meant it. This funding for councils will see disused sites and industrial wastelands transformed into thousands of new homes in places that people want to live and work. Our brownfield-first approach will not only ramp up housebuilding but also

create more jobs, deliver much-needed infrastructure, and boost economic growth across the country.

“This government is rolling up its sleeves and delivering the change the British people deserve.”

Housing and planning minister Matthew Pennycook said: “The government is committed to a brownfield-first approach to housebuilding, and we have already taken steps to prioritise and fast-track building on previously used urban land through our proposals for a ‘brownfield passport’.

“The funding announced today will support the delivery of thousands of new homes and boost economic growth by unlocking development on scores of abandoned, disused and neglected urban sites across the country.”

Releasing brownfield land is one step in meeting the needs for housing but some councils are calling on the government to do more.

Waverley Borough Council has written to the deputy prime minister Angela Rayner over the government’s wider planning reforms, which currently would require the council to deliver 1,379 homes a year – a figure that borough leader Councillor Paul Follows called “unrealistic” and “unachievable”.

He added: “The proposed standard method is fundamentally detached from the realities of local constraints, including national designations such as the Surrey Hills National Landscape. It risks undermining both the environment and community cohesion, and we urgently need a more credible, locally tailored approach.”

Further concerns were raised over the role of developers in housing delivery.

Planning authorities such as Waverley have no control over the rate of housing completions.

The Allders building in Camberley will have asbestos cleared to make it suitable for housing (image Google)

Surrey Tories bouncing back already?



The Conservative election turnaround in Surrey shows no sign of slowing after the party beat the Liberal Democrats, Labour and independents to take two more seats at the October 2024 by-elections.

Voters in Elmbridge backed the Tories in both seats contested on Thursday, October 10 – holding on to Weybridge and winning Hersham Village.

The polls were called following the death of former Conservative councillor and “community champion” Charu Sood, who died after a cancer battle in August, and the resignation of Chester Chandler.

The two victories build on other Tory wins in Surrey with the party winning in Waverley Borough Council following a huge 19 per cent swing and victory in Runnymede where they doubled Labour’s vote share.

The wins have left the Conservative group leader on Elmbridge Borough Council in buoyant mood and talking up the possibility of going into coalition with the residents groups to offer “a better approach”.

Councillor John Cop said: “We’re back, after a couple of difficult years it’s amazing to see the council group grow again.

“I think it was a combination of two factors.

“Firstly there was a very clear rejection on the door of what the Liberal Democrat council has done.

“The Hersham community has been treated really poorly.

“There’s been the closure of the community centres, still not fully reopen and there was a lot of concern around high rise buildings going up on the town centre – and the council not getting a local plan in place leaving us open to development.

“Secondly. there was a real anger at the new Labour government, winter fuel coming in, and talking down the economy, I think that was why we saw such a dramatic turnaround.”

Elections in Elmbridge take place every year, with the fourth year left free for the county council ballot.

The Conservatives had not won in Hersham since 2021. Cllr Cope put the reversal in fortune down to the popularity of their candidate whom he dubbed “Mr Hersham” ‘

In Weybridge, the party held on to narrowly hold the seat, in what was their first victory there since 2022.

The new council now comprises 21 Liberal Democrats, easily the largest party, 13 Residents Associations Group members, 11 Conservatives, two Hinchley Wood RAG and one independent.

It leaves the door open for a change of control at the top should the residents associations go into coalition with the Conservatives, something Cllr Cope said he would look to do.

Cllr Cope said: “We would welcome going into coalition with the residents associations and change the council for the better.

“I would be more than happy to talk to the residents’ associations to see if they would prefer a different approach.”

Weybridge St Georges Hill results in full

- Colin McFarlane: Conservative Party 608 votes, 46.0 per cent (Elected)
- Andrew Kelly: Weybridge and St George’s Independents 598 votes, 45.2 per cent
- Brittany Johansson, Green Party, 116 votes 8.8 per cent

Turnout 19.7 per cent

Hersham Village

- John O’Reilly. Conservative Party 1029 votes 55.4 per cent (Elected)
- Vasha Khodiyar, Liberal Democrats 736 votes 39.6 per cent
- Francis Eldergill. Labour Party 94 votes 5.1 per cent

Turnout 27.1 per cent

Newly elected Elmbridge Borough Councillor Colin McFarlane and John O’Reilly (image John Cope)

Surrey County Council finances under the spotlight



A recent Local Government Information Unit report presents a worrying picture of local government finances across the UK, with a particular focus on the impact of budget cuts on services for children, young people, disabled people, and broader council operations. This report gives context to Conservative Party run **Surrey County Council**'s current financial struggles.

The Local Government information Unit (LGIU) is a local government membership body, thinktank and registered charity.

Key Findings from the LGIU Report:

- Service Cuts Affecting Vulnerable Groups:** The report highlights that local councils are cutting essential services to balance budgets. Vulnerable groups, including children, young people, and disabled individuals, are bearing the brunt of these cuts, leading to long-term negative consequences. This is especially evident in cuts to children's social services, school transport, and support for disabled people.
- Savings Targets and Financial Shortfalls:** Local councils have collectively approved over £3 billion in savings for the current financial year but still face a predicted funding shortfall of more than £5.7 billion by 2026-27. **Surrey County Council** stands out as having the fifth highest savings target for 2024-2025, but also has the second highest predicted financial shortfall for 2026-2027, highlighting significant concerns about its sustainability.
- Surrey-Specific Context: Surrey County Council** is under immense pressure to meet high savings targets while facing a projected budget shortfall that indicates financial vulnerability in the longer term. Given the nationwide picture, Surrey's situation is part of a broader struggle that local governments face, attempting to maintain statutory services while cutting others. Surrey has a history of difficulties with funding, particularly in delivering adult social care and children's services, which have increasingly become the focus of cost-saving efforts.
- Impact on Services:** Specific areas of concern include reductions in spend on children's social care, safeguarding, youth services, support for care leavers, and independent living for disabled individuals. The report notes that many councils, likely including Surrey, are adopting measures such as reducing staff in children's social care and pushing for more "independence" among care leavers, which may ultimately reduce the quality of care available.
- Reserves and Exceptional Financial Support:** Councils, including Surrey, have been drawing on reserves to balance their budgets, but these reserves are not limitless. Nationally, 19 councils were granted Exceptional Financial Support (EFS), highlighting that more councils are approaching financial failure, a risk acknowledged by Surrey as it plans for the coming years.
- Broader Implications for Children's Wellbeing:** The Children's Commissioner and experts like Lynn Perry from Barnardo's have warned that cuts to preventative services for children could lead to a "lifetime cost" for the current generation. With Surrey's budget pressures, similar outcomes could be expected locally, particularly as youth services and early intervention programmes may face further cuts.
- Miscellaneous Cuts:** The report details examples of "almost comical sounding" cuts being made to balance budgets—such as changes to coffee suppliers, reduced support for coastal lifeguards, and reduced asbestos collections from households. These reflect the desperate measures councils are taking to preserve statutory services amidst financial constraints.

Councillor Responses:

Cllr **Bernie Muir**, Conservative Party, Surrey County Councillor – Epsom West Division and Epsom & Ewell Borough Councillor – Horton Ward, responded to the LGIU report:

"Our transformation over the last few years has given us a solid base and is helping us weather the storms encircling local government and indeed the global economy.

"That means that while the county council has a solid and robust budget thanks to many years of hard work and bold thinking, we face pressures like everywhere else.

"66% of our budget is spent on supporting young people, families and adults. This includes spend of £1.2m per day on Adult Social Care, £0.5m per day on Children's Social Care, and about £6m per month on Home to School Transport Assistance.

"Whilst the council's finances are stable, demand on our services continues to increase at a faster rate than our funding, and so our funding position is anticipated to remain challenging for the foreseeable future. We are working innovatively and reviewing the way we deliver some programmes of work to ensure we are fit for the future, continue to deliver the best outcomes for our residents and that no one in Surrey is left behind."

On behalf of four opposition Residents Association County Councillors, Cllr **Eber Kington** said:

"Epsom and Ewell Residents' Association County Councillors recognise that Surrey County Council continues to be penalised by Governments in terms of central Government grant funding despite the huge contribution that the Surrey economy makes to the national economy. There is also the assumption by Westminster that all Surrey residents are wealthy, which ignores both the pockets of deprivation in Surrey, but also the fact that Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Adult Social Care costs are not just related to poverty but are common across all communities.

"That said, SCC has not spent or borrowed money wisely and ignored our calls to adopt a different financial approach, including the funding of more early intervention and preventive measures to reduce future costs. In fact, SCC's inflated capital spending on infrastructure, not all of it high priority, has resulted in cuts to the planned SEND school building provision which is clearly a wrong option choice when you consider that SEND provision is one of the services that has the most pressing need.

"SCC also continues its spending on highly paid staff with 61 Directors now in the salary bracket of over £100k, including 11 of the highest paid Directors heading the Communications and Engagement Directorate. It has also been revealed that SCC has funded over 6,000 mobile phones for staff. A recent £17 million project to replace SCC's financial IT system was late and ran over budget, with the final cost acknowledged as £27m (although money is still being spent), an overspend of £10m and the equivalent of 1% on the overall SCC council tax bill.

"Currently, SCC is using a Government Bus Service Improvement Plan grant to fund a new Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT) scheme that allows residents to book a convenient bus journey when they need it, focusing on rural areas without scheduled buses. However, the take-up is currently quite low and some journeys cost SCC anything from £12 to £104 per person. That is not sustainable when the Government grant runs out and SCC finds itself having to fund the DDRT system.

"Removing some of these high-cost items may not improve the budget gap very much given the overall SCC annual budget, but a clear change of policy to the funding of early intervention and prevention schemes, a capital programme that focuses on the essential services, better project management of high costing schemes and IT projects, and a leaner management structure will make a difference and are policies that Residents' Association and Independent County

Councillors will continue to advocate in the coming months.”

Conclusions:

The financial pressures on Surrey County Council are reflective of a broader, systemic problem affecting local authorities across the UK. Surrey’s high savings targets and predicted budget shortfall for 2026-2027 illustrate a challenging future where further cuts to crucial services seem inevitable. This raises concerns for local residents, especially the most vulnerable, and suggests the need for urgent government intervention to ensure sustainable funding for local services.

A call from the Local Government Association (LGA) for financial stability and multi-year funding settlements is particularly relevant for Surrey, as it struggles to maintain a balance between mandated services and community needs.

Fly-tippers force closure of Surrey recycling centre



A Surrey recycling site will permanently close due to persistent fly-tipping at the site.

The Mound car park in Tattenham Corner has been repeatedly hit by high levels of dumped rubbish, despite CCTV cameras being installed at the site. Reigate and Banstead Borough Council has said.

The centre’s final day will be October 17.

Councillor Hannah Avery, executive member for neighbourhood services said: “When fly-tipping at one of our recycling sites blights the local area and prevents us from recycling all the waste that we can, it is doing more harm than good.

“It reduces the environmental benefits, increases the financial costs of waste disposal and takes our Cleansing team away from other work to keep the borough clean.

“I want to thank the majority of residents who are recycling their waste responsibly and especially those that are going the extra mile to arrange local clean ups.

“I want it to be easy for Reigate and Banstead residents to recycle as much of their household waste as possible, but I also want them to be confident that their recycling gets recycled properly and has a positive environmental impact.”

All collection bins with the exception of the clothes banks will be removed with the vacant space turned over for car parking.

According to the council, its recycling sites can be magnets for large amounts of non-recyclable fly-tipped rubbish – a quarter of all reported tips last year were at the Tattenham Corner site.

Overall the council says it clears 300 van-loads of dumped waste from The Mound each year.

A spokesperson for the council said that in an effort to stem the flow they used mobile CCTV and issued 16 fixed penalties for fly-tipping and a further 12 for littering at the site so far this year since, while in March new signs informed visitors that ongoing misuse could lead to the facility being closed without further notice.

It did not reduce the number of fly-tips – including from both commercial and trade waste.

The spokesperson added: “The council estimates around 70 per cent of the dumped waste is made up of items that cannot be recycled, which contaminates the recyclable waste that people are disposing of responsibly.

“As a result, the Tattenham Corner recycling site, which is on Royal Drive, will close permanently on Thursday. October 17.

“The Mound car park will close for one day on October 21 to allow for the creation of additional car parking spaces.”

Image: Royal Drive Tattenham Corner Fly-tipping (RBBC)

Surrey sorry for SEND shortcomings



The leader of Surrey County Council (SCC) has apologised to families who have been ‘failed’ over the provision of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services.

Parents have previously told the local democracy reporting service (LDRS) that they feel SCC is “blocking the process at every single stage” to get EHCPs and SEND provision. Families say that communication has often been confusing and panic-inducing, including adding new dates for parents to select school places.

Council Leader Tim Oliver said he does not, and will not, “defend the indefensible”, before quickly adding an independent review found good, but inconsistent progress in Surrey’s SEND provision. He also added that the Department of Education (DoE) and Ofsted endorsed the council’s improvement plan.

The Council leader said the local authority should recognise that “other partners need to step up” to deliver an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Cllr Oliver said he “recognises that not all parents agree with the assessments”, but the council cannot get away from the fact that qualified professionals decide the most appropriate support for children.

In a full council meeting on October 8, Cllr Oliver said Surrey was investing £240m in SEND, creating 6,000 specialist school places across the county in mainstream schools and in building new special schools. He said 260 places in specialist schools have also been added for the start of the 2024 new academic year.

“This is far from the first time we have heard things along these lines,” said Cllr George Potter, one of the many council members who responded to the leader’s statement with anecdotes of poor SEND provision in their ward.

Cllr Fiona Davidson, who chairs the council’s children, families, lifelong learning and culture select committee, agreed with the leader that the council is making progress, but “extraordinarily slow progress”. She said this meant the local authority is not addressing quickly enough the needs of parents and carers of children with additional needs and disabilities.

SCC currently has around 15,000 children with EHCPs compared to about 10,000 in 2017, according to the council leader. Although Mr Oliver said the “huge rise in demand” has made it difficult for the council to manage SEND provision, he accepted there are some “local Surrey issues” such as communication problems.

Cllr Davidson said she “cannot believe” the SCC is still having communication issues with parents that it had two years ago. She added there has been “little improvement in the quality of communication” with parents, impacting the trust and relationship families have with the council.

Recommendations looking at ways SCC could improve its communication with parents found the workforce needs to be bigger to cope with the demand, more personable to parents and easier to access as well as making the EHCP process less complicated. Cllr Jonathan Essex amongst other members appealed for Cllr Oliver to implement the recommendations immediately, with Cllr Oliver responding not all of the suggestions would be pragmatic to do so.

Cllr Oliver appealed to members of the council to “not politicise” the issue of SEND provision. He argued that it is the responsibility of all members, officers, MPs and the government to help the council “deliver the best service” possible.

Image: Council Leader Tim Oliver speaking at full council meeting October 8. (Credit: Surrey County Council live stream)

Related reports:

Give back OBE for SEND failures parents demand

King’s Gongs for Surrey leaders

Council pays £3,900 to mother of SEND child

Surrey County failed SEND boy

Epsom and Ewell Council answers parking complaint immediately



Charles Moseley of Hurstpierpoint complained in a letter dated 8th October to the Epsom and Ewell Times about the running out of Epsom Playhouse beer and the Ashley Centre Car Park during his visit to the Counterfeit Stones performance. Just five hours later (by coincidence) Epsom and Ewell Borough Council wrote to us with a new plan to improve the parking experience. They could not be expected to fix an unexpected peak in the demand for beer at the Borough’s showpiece theatre venue. Here are the communications in full.

8th October 2024 10:28 hrs

Dear Sirs,

I am writing to say how much we enjoyed a gig by The Counterfeit Stones, who were really good. However we arrived fairly early and decided to have a drink in the theatre bar and were served by a very nice bar lady who proceeded to pour two pints of London Pride. But she only managed one and a half before running out! She was very apologetic in saying that she had no more bitter of any description, only lager, cider and spirits. Apparently this was due to the audience of the previous night’s show supping all the bitter. What are about 400 mainly middle or above aged Rolling Stones fans supposed to do with no beer? We had to plunge the depths of Epsom’s society pubs and eventually found, at the third attempt, something resembling beer in Wetherspoons. As for the car park, well that was something else with two queues out and at least one in each line that had not paid or lost their little yellow disc! It was chaos! And £5.00 for the privilege! So it’s full marks for the band and bar lady, as for Epsom Council? Give me strength!

Charles Moseley

Hurstpierpoint

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council are installing a new Auto Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) parking system at the Ashley Centre car park in Epsom town centre this month. Work will begin from 14 October and is expected to take three weeks to complete.

The ANPR system will mean that car users can drive up to the barrier and enter the car park with their registration being used for identification and payment upon exit.

The new system will remove the need for tokens and the associated charges that are incurred when they are lost. Cash and card payment options will be available on all floors, as well as the ability to pay remotely.

Councillor Liz Frost, Chair of the Environment Committee, said:

“The works taking place at the Ashley Centre car park are a welcome upgrade to a more modern and convenient system. We know the tokens have been a cause of frustration to many drivers as they are small, difficult to find and easily lost (leading to penalties being issued).

“We appreciate that the necessary work may cause some inconvenience for drivers during the installation of the new ANPR System, and we apologise for this. However, we feel the upgrades will be a great improvement and make it easier and quicker for people visiting Epsom Town Centre to park.

“With Christmas just around the corner, we believe the upgrades to the car park support the ongoing work we are undertaking to boost the local economy by making Epsom Town centre a more hassle-free and therefore more attractive place to visit.”

Epsom and Ewell Brough Council 8th October 2024 16:00hrs

Surrey schools greenest in England



Surrey County Council is proud to announce that it continues to lead in England in environmental education, boasting the largest number of Eco-Schools Green Flag awards for the second consecutive year. There are over 170 schools working on the Eco-Schools programme, with 98 schools across the county having earned this internationally recognised accolade, Surrey is at the forefront of fostering a sustainable future through education.

The Eco-Schools programme, the largest education programme globally, provides a structured framework for embedding sustainability into schools.

Surrey’s achievement represents the active participation of over 52,000 pupils who are part of a Green Flag school. Approximately 2,200 of these students have played a direct role in their schools’ journey to achieving the Green Flag status.

Activities that have taken place include:

- Running switch off campaigns to save energy.
- Growing fruit and vegetables on their school grounds.
- Building new ponds to increase biodiversity.

- Planting trees to encourage more wildlife and improve air quality.
- Making signs for bins to make sure people use the correct bins, to help increase recycling.
- Installing water butts to collect rainwater.
- Monitoring energy use, water use and sustainable transport practices to see where they can improve.
- Following national campaigns such as Walk to School Week and Recycle Week.

The projects have engaged over 52,000 pupils and are already reaping benefits which include:

- Saving a total of 1,196,638 kwh of electricity
- Diverting 90,645 tonnes of waste from landfill
- Creating 12,584 (m2) of natural habitat
- 7,400 pupils participating in walking and cycling initiatives
- Over £10,000 has been raised for environmental projects in schools
- Over 30,000 pupils have taken part in a curriculum based environmental lesson

Marisa Heath, Cabinet Member for Environment at Surrey County Council, said: *“We are very proud to have the most schools with Eco-Schools Green Flags in England, and this is a testament to the hard work of those schools. It is vital to ensure the next generation understands how we can look after our environment and is prepared to make informed, environmentally aware choices. Many young people are passionate about the environment from recycling to air quality, and Eco-Schools provides them with a proven platform to make a real difference in their school and local community.”*

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning adds: *“The Eco-Schools programme empowers students to take the lead in environmental action, encouraging them to become champions of positive change both now and in the future. It’s fantastic to see this acknowledgement of their efforts from a globally recognised awards programme.”*

More information about Eco-Schools in Surrey, including how to sign up can be found **Surrey County Council’s website**.

Image: St Peters CofE Primary in Farnham were recently awarded Green Flag status with support from Surrey County Council

Hampton’s Jolly Boatman has more to be jolly about



Hampton Court and its historic views will be forever changed after the secretary of state approved controversial Jolly Boatman plans to build 97 homes together with an 84 bed hotel and restaurant on the banks of the River Thames.

The landmark ruling on the long-running saga was confirmed this week when Lisa Nandy, Secretary of State for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport published her formal decision on Friday, September 27.

The decision comes as welcome for developers who have been battling to regenerate the area around Hampton Court station but is a slap in the face to the campaigners who have fought for decades to stop it.

It comes at the end of a nine week consultation that ran between April and June this year in call for new evidence.

The majority of responses focused on the impact the huge development would have on Hampton Court Palace and surrounding area given its cultural status.

However, much of the evidence presented had already been considered during an earlier planning appeal when inspectors overturned Elmbridge Borough Council decision 2022 and green lit the development, Mrs Nandy said.

Instead the focus on the government’s decision related to changes in planning law and the listed statuses of Cigarette Island Park and the Coal Office – as well as arguments over maximum heights of buildings on railway land.

Issuing her decision, the Secretary of State for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport said she gave “consent to build the residential-led mixed use scheme on land around Hampton Court Station, specifically the former Jolly Boatman and land adjoining Hampton Court Station, Hampton Court Way, the Western part of Cigarette Island, east of Jolly Boatman and Hampton Court Station site.”

She said that since the apeal, Elmbridge Borough Council’s supply of deliverable housing had declined, and failure to proceed with the site would be make the problem worse

The government also considered the council’s local heritage listing of the land opposite the palace was not a sufficient reason to not approve the development and plans.

The former Jolly Boatman site is next to the River Thames and overlooks the palace.

Elmbridge Borough Council rejected the original application which received more than 1,800 objections due to “excessive height and bulk” and “harm to numerous heritage assets”.

However, its decision was challenged and overturned after the planning inspector ruled it fit with surroundings while the hotel, retail units and riverside restaurant would improve the experience for those using the station to visit the palace.

The inspector added that the plans would also support the rest of the town.

Related reports:

Doubtful Henry VIII would have permitted

Will Epsom get an even higher housing target if it misses the early boat?



The UK Government is preparing to release a new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) that could impose mandatory targets for housebuilding, including on Green Belt land, sparking concern among local councils. The revised framework, expected in December 2024, may dramatically increase housing targets for local planning authorities.

A recent consultation on the proposed changes, led by **Angela Rayner** MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, closed on 24 September 2024. One of the most significant changes being considered is a new “Standard Method” for calculating housing targets. For boroughs like **Epsom & Ewell**, this could have major implications.

Currently, Epsom & Ewell builds around 189 new homes per year. Under the borough’s developing Local Plan, this would increase to about 300 homes annually, which would result in the loss of around 57 hectares of Green Belt land. However, the new NPPF could demand the construction of 817 homes per year. Any local authority whose housing target falls more than 200 homes per year below this number would be forced to revise its plans. Epsom & Ewell’s current proposal falls short of this target.

Transitional arrangements proposed in the draft NPPF state that the new rules will not apply to Local Plans submitted before one month after the framework’s publication, likely 20 January 2025. Therefore, Epsom & Ewell has a narrow window to submit its Local Plan and avoid being subject to the new higher housing targets.

However, the borough faces time constraints. The Local Plan consultation process takes about two months, and the council will need additional time to compile and respond to feedback. With meetings scheduled for late November and early December, there is concern that the borough may miss the deadline to avoid the higher targets, which would result in the loss of an estimated 21 hectares of Green Belt per year.

Other councils are moving quickly to avoid being caught by these new regulations. St Albans, for example, has begun a public consultation on its Local Plan even before receiving full council approval, to ensure it stays ahead of the anticipated NPPF changes.

If many Councils beat the deadline and enjoy lower targets, will their Government preferred share then be redistributed to those Councils tardy in submitting their plans?

Response from Epsom & Ewell Borough Council

Cllr **Peter O’Donovan**, (RA Ewell Court) Chair of the Licensing, Planning and Policy Committee (LPPC), issued the following statement:

“The Council is preparing its Local Plan in accordance with the timetable set out within its approved Local Development Scheme, this is to ensure that the Regulation 19 Local Plan document is supported by the necessary evidence when it is considered by the Licensing and Planning Committee (LPPC) in November.

The LPPC will debate the Local Plan and make a recommendation to full Council, who will make the final decision on how it wishes to proceed with the Local Plan. This process is required by our constitution.

The Council has submitted a response to the recent ‘proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system,’ which was recently approved by the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee (24 September 2024). We understand that a significant number of responses have been submitted to this consultation and that there may be delays in the revised NPPF being published by the government.

It will only be once the revised NPPF is published that we will know what the details are and what the implications are for the borough and our emerging Local Plan. This includes the transitional arrangements that will apply for Local Plans.

Subject to approval by Council, we intend to commence consultation on our Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) Local Plan in mid-January 2025.”

Katherine Alexander of **Epsom Green Belt** raised serious concerns about the future of the borough, highlighting the delays in renewing the Local Plan, which dates back to 2007. In a statement, she said:

“Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has one of the 10 oldest, and most out-of-date local plans in the country. If Angela Rayner’s proposals are rolled out, the borough’s housing targets will more than quadruple to 817 dwellings per annum. This would fundamentally change Epsom, leading to increased traffic, strained infrastructure, and the loss of over 20 hectares of Green Belt land each year, equivalent to more than 50 football pitches.

Councillors have recognised that the proposed housing target is much too high, writing to Angela Rayner on 13 September 2024 stating ‘these new numbers are immense and could destroy our historic district and market town.’

There is a solution, or at least a stay of execution, if the council accelerates the public consultation and submits the Local Plan to the planning inspector by early January 2025. Otherwise, none of the Green Belt would be safe, and the cost of the Local Plan could rise significantly as the council works to meet these targets.”

Alexander also pointed to other councils, like Winchester and St Albans, that have expedited their processes in order to avoid being caught by the incoming planning reforms.

Related reports:

[Epsom Local Plan controversy heats up](#)

[Challenges to Epsom and Ewell Council’s Handling of Local Plan](#)

[Time to press the gas on Epsom’s Local Plan?](#)

[Epsom and Ewell Brace for Government Housing Targets](#)

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

[and many more.](#) Search “Local Plan.”