

Local Plan battle heating up?



A draft **Local Plan**, that will delineate **Epsom and Ewell Borough's** planning framework for decisions on planning applications and development for the years ahead, has been published on the Council's website. Out of 5,400 new homes proposed in the Draft Local Plan (2023-20240), some 2,175 homes (almost 41%) are earmarked to be built on the borough's Green Belt land. EEBC councillors are due to take a final Section 18 publication decision on 30 January,

Of nine "Preferred Option" development sites proposed, five are Green Belt - with Downs Farm, where 650 homes were proposed, only narrowly missing the cut after a campaign by residents. Over 55 hectares - or some 137 acres - of Green Belt land could be sacrificed. The plans include one gigantic estate of some 1,500 homes on land around Horton Farm, which will have its Green Belt status stripped away.

The "Preferred Options" for Green Belt development are:

- 150 homes around West Park Hospital
- 1,500 homes around Horton Farm
- 25 homes next to Chantilly Way
- 350 homes on the sports fields by Ewell East Station
- 150 homes on sports pitches at Hook Road Arena (land owned by the Council)

A spokesperson for a local campaign group seeking to protect green belt land has responded: *"Given the Government's "brownfield first" brief, it looks like the planners did not get the memo. They certainly did not get the new memo from Government saying that it is not necessary to review Green Belt for housing. And they appear not to have taken the hint from neighbouring Elmbridge, who creatively avoided any Green Belt destruction, and Mole Valley, whose councillors this month voted unanimously to remove all Green Belt sites from its Local Plan."*

"Only on its own land can the Council specify 100% affordable homes - the rest will be about 40% , as developers have many canny ways to get round this stipulation and build more profitable higher end housing. The Plan is offering just around 1,000 homes in Epsom Town Centre until year 2040, with a similar number only on other brownfield spaces, plus also around 1,000 for planning permissions in the Borough already in the pipeline "

Appendix 4 of the draft Local Plan reveal other Green Belt sites that have been offered up by developers in a " Call for Sites."

Yufan Si, campaign leader for **Keep Epsom & Ewell's Green Belt** stated: *"So where is the real challenge taken up, to redevelop Epsom Town surroundings, which most commentators agree could do with some rejuvenation? The Kiln Lane and Longmead industrial areas are said to be off limits, according to consultants for EEBC, because of the 1,800 jobs there. So not a single new brownfield affordable home is put forward here, with no imaginative plan to mix housing with job creation and revitalise an area close to the station, shops and entertainment facilities that many people prefer."*

"We are left with the conclusion that the planners - and by extension our ruling Councillors - are in a "Call for Sites" trap. This has inhibited visionary thinking and pro-active engagement with urban developers on how much-needed affordable housing might be built in tandem with an exciting redevelopment programme that Epsom's brownfield areas so desperately need. All they seem able to do about it is to bulldozer yet another field of our Green Belt heritage" said Ms Si.

If Councillors vote at the special meeting of the Licensing, Planning and Policy Committee on January 30 for the Draft Local Plan (Section 18) to proceed, then it will be formally published by EEBC on February 1, followed by a six-week Public Consultation stage.

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[Lessons for Epsom in Mole Valley's "shouty" Local Plan struggle?](#)

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Going potty about pot-holes?



Who knew that 15th January was **National Pothole Day**? Earlier this month I drove around a bend in Woodcote Green Road in **Epsom** at night to be faced with a traffic cone placed a few feet into the road. Was that dangerous or was I lucky? The cone was placed in a large pothole and if the car had hit the pothole it might have been damaged. The Autocar website recently reported that a single pothole in Surrey had caused wheel and tyre damage to at least twelve cars on the evening of the 17th January. Whilst both the pothole that caused the damage to the 12 cars and the pothole in Woodcote Green Road were repaired by Surrey County Council, the surface on Woodcote Green Road leaves a lot to be desired and has done so for a number of years.

This incident reminded me of a report made to the Council via their pothole reporting web page in October of last year. It reported potholes and commented on the general poor state of the road surface of Woodcote Green Road that runs behind Epsom Hospital and is a route used by many cyclists. A reply was received. "We have visited the site and on closer inspection the problem does not need immediate work. We will continue to monitor and consider it when planning future works."



Cable exposed by pothole

Although Surrey County Council sends teams out to repair potholes they consider dangerous, the general surface of the road continues to deteriorate. On a stretch of Woodcote Green Road between Sunnybank and Pine Hill, about 450 metres long, more than 60 defects in the road surface are apparent. Some of these are no more

than 2 cm wide and 10 cm long. One varied in width from a few centimetres to about 15cms, was 17 meters long and entirely in a cycle lane. Another was about a square meter in area and had cable exposed arising from and disappearing back into the road surface. Reporting a pothole shallower than 3cms or other road surface issues

results in the message: “This issue is likely to be assessed as a low priority when inspected. We will probably wait to repair it as part of future improvement works.”

Walking along the road it’s noticeable that a number of defects are immediately adjacent to previous repairs, others are repairs that are beginning to break up and some are surfaces that have been reinstated after work by utilities and are sinking. Are the quality of repairs or reinstatements monitored and who is responsible for any substandard work?

It is also noticeable that when a team is sent out to repair a pothole, that is exactly what they do. There may be defects very close to the pothole being repaired but these are ignored. In wet and cold weather, even small holes in the road surface will fill with water, the water freezes and expands and the hole gets bigger. Would it not make sense, and maybe save money if once a team was on site they fixed not only the hole they were sent to fix but also other defects nearby?

The link to a map of planned improvements mentioned above indicates that no resurfacing work is planned for Woodcote Green Road. The map indicates that very little road resurfacing is planned for Epsom with only a little more in Ewell and Stoneleigh.

The wait goes on for better quality road surfaces in Epsom.

An Epsom and Ewell Times Special Correspondent.

Is your road potted with potholes? Are you going potty about these potholes? Send us photos of your potted street. Epsom and Ewell Times admin@epsomandewelltimes.com

Interim Council CEO’s permanency tipped.



Jackie King is set to become the new Chief Executive of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, subject to ratification by Full Council on Tuesday 14 February. Jackie has been recommended for the position following a robust and competitive recruitment process.

Jackie joined Epsom & Ewell Council (EEBC) in September 2021 as Director of Corporate Resources and has been in the position of interim Chief Executive since July 2022. Jackie has had an extensive career across the public and private sector and prior to joining EEBC was Acting Chief Executive at Tandridge District Council. She also spent eight years at Surrey Police in various People, Change and Transformation roles as well as roles relating to performance and risk in global financial institutions.

Cllr **Hannah Dalton**, Chair of the Residents’ Association Majority Group, said: “We are very pleased to be recommending the appointment of Jackie King as the new Chief Executive of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council. Through the rigorous recruitment process undertaken, Jackie demonstrated that she is a strong and effective leader with the drive and vision to take EEBC forward. Jackie has the support of Councillors, staff and partners in leading the delivery of our agreed priorities and in helping our communities to face the significant challenges that lie ahead in these tough times.”

“Jackie has been with the Council as our Director of Corporate Services for 18 months and I have every confidence that, with her at the helm as our Chief Executive, we will make strong progress in the years ahead and deliver the change that Councillors are looking for and that our residents expect.”

Jackie King said: “I am delighted to be recommended for this position as EEBC’s next Chief Executive. As a long-term resident of the borough I am so proud of what we have to offer here, and am looking forward to working with colleagues, Councillors, partners and residents to support the borough to grow and thrive. The last few years have been challenging for us all in many ways and from my time here at the Council I know how committed and ambitious everyone is to really make a difference and deliver the best services we can for our communities, businesses, and visitors.”

Press release EEBC.

Want to join the Surrey Fire Service?



Surrey Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) welcomed 37 new firefighters to the service this month. The group of wholetime firefighters took part in three different 15-week training courses, starting in April, July and August.

This is the latest group of recruits to join the service, and they will be posted to fire stations across Surrey of which there are a total of 25.

SFRS’s Chief Fire Officer, **Dan Quin**, said: “It is such a pleasure to be able to welcome our 37 new firefighters into the service. They have all worked so hard to get to this point. The training they have undertaken is not easy, it takes hard work, determination and teamwork and that is what every single one of these new firefighters have shown. Welcome to Team Surrey, I look forward to working with you.

“Having trained as a firefighter myself and attended a pass out parade, I know what a special occasion these events are for our new colleagues and their families. I look forward to seeing our new firefighters out at fire stations soon.”

The firefighters will be posted to locations across Surrey including Camberley, Dorking, Egham, Esher, Farnham, Guildford, Haslemere, Painshill, Walton and Woking Fire Stations.

Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety, which includes SFRS, **Denise Turner Stewart**, (Conservative, Staines South and Ashford West) said: “A huge congratulations to the new firefighters joining the service today. I have had the pleasure of attending a number of Pass Out Ceremonies in recent years, and it is always such a wonderful occasion to meet the new members of the service who have committed to keeping the communities of Surrey safe.

“Today is also an opportunity for us to celebrate with their family and friends, who will be by their side every step of the way in their new career. We hope it is a special day for them too.

“I’d also like to take this opportunity to thank our superb training team for their knowledge and expertise, and everyone else behind the scenes who has helped towards enabling this course. The service offers exceptional career aspects, so I look forward to seeing the future achievements and development from our new firefighters.”

SFRS currently has opportunities for firefighters on on-call contracts, these are skilled people from all walks of life who offer daytime, evening and/or weekend cover at on-call fire stations in addition to their normal, day-to-day commitments. Just like their wholetime counterparts. SFRS are recruiting for on-call firefighters at all of their on-call stations. If you, or someone you know is interested on being on-call please take a look at the website.

Surrey County Council news service

Green-belters seeing red on Local Plan?



A determined group of Epsom & Ewell residents, representing over 1,700 petitioners , took to the podium at last night’s meeting of the Council’s Licensing, Planning and Policy Committee (January 19th). They asked Councillors eleven questions about the threat of Green Belt sites being included as “Preferred Options” in the imminent Draft Local Plan.

[Official Council record: The Chair (Cllr **Steven McCormick** – RA Woodcote Ward)provided an oral response to each question. Eight supplementary oral questions were asked. The Chair, the Interim Director of Environment, Housing and Regeneration, and the Planning Policy Manager provided oral responses to seven of the supplementary questions. The Chair confirmed a written reply would be provided for one of the supplementary questions.]

Otherwise the business of the meeting was confined to approving increases between 6 and 10 % for 2023/2024 on a range of Council charges relating to Planning matters, private hire vehicle licensing, animals and scrap metal.

Given every indication that the Government no longer thinks Green Belt reviews are necessary with housing targets advisory only, and fresh from Mole Valley District Coucil’s unanimous vote to remove Green Belt sites from its Local Plan, residents challenged the councillors and planners to seize the opportunity to save the Green Belt now and focus on brownfield sites for new affordable homes.

In answer to one question about whether planners had consulted HM Inspectors about Green Belt removal, council officers confirmed that, as EEBC was at an initial stage of decision taking , they had no need to consult the Inspectorate at this time, unlike Mole Valley are now required to do.

Given this difference, residents believe that it will now be entirely the responsibility of Councillors – the majority of whom are Residents Association, if Green Belt land ends up being developed. According to the Council for the Protection of Rural England, over 99% of sites earmarked for development by local authorities eventually get built upon, so the campaigners say it is both crucial and necessary to ensure no Green Belt sites are included at the outset.

The group intend to return to make more representations at the final decision-taking meeting on January 30 before the EEBC Draft Plan is published on February 1.

Further details of this residents’ campaign petition can be seen on epsomgreenbelt.org

Chris Grayling MP for Epsom and Ewell has written to constituents: “There have been two new developments on the Local Plans which shape the future of housing development in our area – in Epsom and Ewell and Mole Valley.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is due to publish its draft plan in the next few days (sic), and this will show the degree to which it has decided to push for development on local green belt land. I very much hope they have chosen to focus on brown field sites and particularly on the potential for the Kiln Lane and Longmead areas.

Meanwhile in Mole Valley, the Council has asked the Planning Inspector to delay consideration of their plans, following the Government’s revision of its national planning policies. It is too early to know if this may affect the plans for Ashtead, but I will keep you posted.”

Related reports:

Lessons for Epsom in Mole Valley’s “shouty” Local Plan struggle?

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MP's housing solution for Epsom and Ewell

Surrey County Council Stands Against Scams



Surrey County Council has been officially accredited as a “Friends Against Scams” (FAS) organisation. FAS is an initiative run by the **National Trading Standards** (NTS) Scams Team that aims to protect and prevent people from becoming victims of scams by empowering people to ‘Take a Stand Against Scams’.

The accreditation follows on from some impressive work by Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards, which has seen them:

- Train 22,269 Friends Against Scams
- Train 161 SCAMchampions
- Train 152 Scam Marshals
- Instal 562 call blockers
- Instal 38 doorbell cameras

The impact of this work can be seen in the financial impact of their interventions which between April 2019 and December 2022 generated savings of £66million.

In addition to the accreditation, Surrey County Council Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety **Denise Turner-Stewart** officially joined the initiative as a “SCAMBassador”.

SCAMBassador’s protect the public from scams and the damage they cause by working with members of both their community and at national level to educate and support those who may be vulnerable to scams.

Scams affect millions of people across the UK and cost consumers an estimated £5-10 billion of detriment of each year. The people who are targeted are often in the most vulnerable circumstances and the impact on their lives is devastating – from large financial losses to severe emotional damage which leaves victims feeling intimidated, scared and afraid to be in their home.

Denise Turner-Stewart, Surrey County Council Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety said: *“I’m delighted to become an official SCAMBassador and to help Friends Against Scams continue their vital work in protecting the public against exploitative and deceitful fraudsters.*

“Anyone can become a victim of scams but they often target the most vulnerable in society and these criminals and fraudulent practices must be stopped.

“I would urge residents and business alike to attend one of the online FAS training webinars delivered monthly by Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Service and if you are plagued by nuisance and scam telephone calls email trading.standards@surreycc.gov.uk to see if you are eligible for a free call blocker.

“Scams damage lives, affecting people both financially and emotionally, but together with the Friends Against Scams Team, the Chartered Trading Standards Institute and our very own Trading Standards Team, we will do all we can to keep residents safe.”

Louise Baxter, Head of the National Trading Standards Scams Team said: *“The tactics used by criminals leave victims socially isolated and ashamed of telling their friends and families what’s really going on behind closed doors. “It is fantastic to have such an influential figure in the community to help us tackle this problem on a local, regional and national level and I would encourage all those that are interested in showing their support to join the campaign and be part of our growing SCAMBassador network.”*

Surrey County Council News Service

Private Public Parking Penalisers



Surrey County Council have agreed a new seven year parking and traffic enforcement contract with **Marston Holdings Ltd**. The contract will mean that parking and traffic enforcement will be operated in partnership between the council and Marston, helping to achieve the council’s transport objectives.

Cabinet Member for Highways and Community Resilience, **Kevin Deanus** (Conservative member, Waverley Eastern Villages) said: “The new contract will mean that Surrey County Council can more directly and consistently manage on street parking enforcement across the county, helping to tackle inconsiderate parking and make parking restrictions more effective. In addition the contract will allow the installation of traffic enforcement cameras on Surrey’s roads that can be used to help reduce congestion and improve road safety.

“Through the procurement process, Marstons demonstrated an excellent understanding of our requirements and what is needed to operate a successful and cost effective enforcement service to benefit Surrey residents.”

Marstons made a £19.8 million profit on a turnover of £255 million in year end 31st May 2021. Next accounts due to be filed 23rd February. It lists its principal activities as: Consulting and technology; Back office processing; DVLA services; Civil parking services; Road traffic debt recovery; Smart meter installations; and Motor vehicle recoveries. It also provides other debt recovery and enforcement services, including: Criminal fine enforcement; council tax recovery; Civil enforcement; and Utility sector debt recovery.

Epsom and Ewell Times has obtained the following responses from local politicians:

Mark Todd Chair of Epsom and Ewell Labour Party commented: *“”This is just more outsourcing likely to lead to poorer services with poorly paid staff exploited by private contractors on behalf of Conservative Surrey County Council. Surrey’s long term outsourcing of road maintenance has been a disaster with its roads regularly rated as the worst, most pot-holed in the UK. Every time we speak to Epsom & Ewell residents, the sorry state of the roads is their top concern. Labour is committed to investing in public services so taxpayers get good value for money from a well-trained, fairly-paid council workforce – we are strongly opposed to*

Council Tax being siphoned off to profits for private contractors who consistently fail to deliver.”

Gina Miller of the True and Fair Party said: “The finer details of this contract need to be carefully examined. What we must avoid is a private sector company being incentivised to issue tickets, inflating their profits at the expense of honest drivers. There must also be a fair appeals process and no adoption of unsavoury debt collection processes. Without doubt we need to see proper oversight of the contract to make sure no one is penalised unfairly.”

Helen Maguire PPC for the Liberal Democrats said “The moves by SCC to privatise and centralise parking enforcement is just another example of the SCC’s Tory party’s attempt to concentrate power at the centre and away from working with local communities. The moves to put revenues into private companies, divorced from the communities that the like of EEBC serve are an affront to local democracy. Last year, the same centralising tendencies within SCC broke up the working groups that the County Council had with its local community councils – such as Epsom & Ewell and Mole Valley – preferring instead to silence the voice of local residents, so enabling them to get on with running the County as they see fit – that is, with less opposition or scrutiny. Currently, Epsom & Ewell BC successfully manage parking issues through their Contact Centre directly with the Parking Manager and his team of wardens. This self funded, not-for-profit-regime has worked well for many years because it is operated by local people who know the area intimately and have kept our residents and other road users safe. Now we see emerging a centralised enforcement regime, put out to private contractors, who in our view, will put more emphasis on enforcement to increase revenues to pay shareholders, rather than a strong but fair local system, that works directly for local interests.”

Do you have a view? **Write to Epsom and Ewell Times.**

Lessons for Epsom in Mole Valley’s “shouty” Local Plan struggle?



Mole Valley councillors have been warned developers could have “a field day” if government inspectors reject plans to release green belt sites from the authority’s plan for homes.

[Ed: Epsom and Ewell Times is following this story as there maybe some parallels for the progress of our Local Plan expected to be published shortly for Council consideration. (For “release” read “remove”).]

At a specially-called meeting of the district council on Monday (January 16), members unanimously voted to write to the government inspector looking at the local plan to get an opinion on the proposals. The updates to the local plan, which outlines the authority’s plan for new homes in the district up to 2037, are being proposed because of changes to planning at central government level.

The changes include a consultation running until March on updating the National Planning Policy Framework.

Changes at central government level could mean lower housing targets for councils as they look at their local plans, meaning councils may not need to release green belt sites for homes. But the move would also mean a loss in the number of affordable homes built across the district, with officers saying around 625 affordable homes could be lost over the duration of the plan.

A warning was also issued in the meeting of what might happen if the inspector said no to the proposed changes to the plan, which went through an examination in public from January to October last year. Cllr David Hawksworth (Independent, Ashted Common) said in principle he welcomed the “brave move” but raised concerns on what might happen if the inspector did not accept any changes as a “major modification” and the plan needed to be started again. He said: “[There could be] a long period in which there would be a field day for developers that would be coming in and trying to get some of the green belt sites because they’d be operating under our existing local plan.”

The green belt sites which could be released from the plan, and therefore protected from future development unless there are very special circumstances, including land behind the Six Bells pub in Newdigate, Sondes Place Farm in Dorking and the former sewage works in Brockham. But the sites at Tanners Meadow in Bookham and Headley Court would remain part of the local plan because they already have planning permission granted on all or part of them.

The prospect of reopening the entire local plan again was rejected by the cabinet member for planning, Cllr Margaret Cooksey (Lib Dem, Dorking South), who described it as a “dangerous proposition”. She rejected a call from one Conservative councillor to resign from her post, towards the end of a meeting that was heavy with party politics but nonetheless in which there was agreement on the final outcome.

Councillors also raised concerns about their own areas and the impact developments could have in different parts of Mole Valley. Charlwood Councillor Lisa Scott (Green) claimed a lot of people had already moved away from the area because of changes that were coming in the local plan, with villages such as Hookwood destined to see four green belt sites developed under the current draft plan.

Conservative Councillor Joanna Slater (Leatherhead South) said taking the green belt sites out of the local plan would mean half of all development would take place in the town, compared to 30 per cent under the plan currently under consideration. She added that the impact would be “huge” and affect school places, traffic and healthcare. She added: “You might as well rename the local plan ‘building tower blocks in Leatherhead and other projects’.

Despite a meeting in which the chair said he would have to adjourn if members did not stop “all this shouting out”, writing to the inspector was unanimously voted through by members, who will now await her reply.

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No laughing matter for Council



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has brought in a **Public Space Protection Order** following a consultation with residents about psychoactive substance abuse in the Borough's open spaces.

Image Philafrenzy CC

The Order covers psychoactive substances not otherwise fully controlled by national legislation. The most significant example of this is currently nitrous oxide, **known as laughing gas**, which is typically used in the catering industry and supplied in small metallic cannisters or larger pressurised tanks.

A Public Space Protection Order makes it an offence to use or be in possession of these types of substances on public land. It will be in place two years initially and signs are being placed in hotspots around the Borough, including all parks, over the coming month.

Any person who fails to comply with this order without a reasonable excuse will have their material confiscated and risk a Fixed Penalty Notice of £100 or a fine in court of £1,000. This will be enforced by both the police and the Council's enforcement teams.

Councillor **John Beckett**, Chair of the Environment and Safe Communities Committee, said, "We have seen a considerable increase in the use of nitrous oxide cannisters in the Borough. There are real concerns from residents about the risks of this drug and the gateway effect to other dangerous substances. We want to alleviate the impacts of this drug by highlighting the adverse effects and provide a safe community for all residents in Epsom & Ewell. This public space protection order will provide powers to the police and our enforcement teams to issue fixed penalty notices in the event of a breach. We know our residents feel strongly about this issue and we thank them for their responses to our consultation."

If residents are concerned about the presence of psychoactive substances in the Borough, they may report them via https://epsom-ewell.gov.uk/residents/online-forms?field_form_category_value=Report.

This Public Space Protection Order has been made under 59 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014.

The Council has already located and seized substances from persons present in the stairwell of one of its car parks and carried out follow up work with them and their parents.

Crucial month for local Local Plans?



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Licensing, Policy and Planning Committee meets Friday 19th January but the **Local Plan** does not feature on its agenda. Local **Liberal Democrats** are asking for the Local Plan timetable to be delayed following central Government indications of a relaxation of new build housing targets.

Liberal Democrat councillors are asking Epsom & Ewell Borough Council to delay the publication of the "regulation 18" part of its Local Plan from the current date of early February, so as to incorporate potential changes to the housing targets set by national government. It is expected that **Michael Gove**, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, will make changes to how local councils need to interpret housing targets, and the treatment of Green Belt land, and the implications of those changes are currently unclear. It is hoped to hear more from central government in the next few weeks.

"The original timetable for the draft Local Plan to go out to public consultation from early in February could well stand if there's an announcement quickly" says Cllr **Julie Morris**, [LibDem College Ward] member of the borough council's Licensing & Planning Policy Committee.

Liberal Democrats have previously been critical of Epsom & Ewell council's slow progress towards the production of a Local Plan. They now say that circumstances in which the Conservative Government, primed by a statement from PM **Rishi Sunak**, could change the rules around housing targets and Green Belt development could warrant a short delay so as to make the draft Local Plan more robust.

"We have often been critical of the delays in bringing this draft Local Plan forward for consultation but going 'live' in early February could rule out being able to swiftly incorporate government changes to housing targets or implement new guidance on Green Belt development. We hope a delay won't be necessary but pausing for a few weeks could potentially save months and months of extra work in 2023 and a much longer delay in achieving the objective, which is to have local policies in place to guide development and protect our borough " says Cllr Morris.

A special meeting of Epsom and Ewell's Licensing, Policy and Planning Committee will be held on 30th January. The agenda has not yet been published. One authoritative inside source has told the **Epsom and Ewell Times** that the Local Plan will proceed along the existing timetable and be published in February.

Our partner at the BBC reports below on the latest position from neighbouring Mole Valley.

Changes to **Mole Valley's** plan for development in the district could lead to the loss of hundreds of affordable homes. The district council has paused its local plan, which sets out where 6,000 homes will be built up to 2037, while the government consults on possible changes to planning policy.

A specially-called meeting of **Mole Valley District Council** on Monday (January 16) will discuss asking the government inspector overseeing the plan about the removal of green belt sites included in the plan. The sites include land behind the Six Bells pub in Newdigate, Tapwood Workshops in Buckland, land at Chalkpit Lane in Bookham, Sondes Place Farm, Dorking and the former sewage works in Brockham and sites in Hookwood and Capel among others.

The removal of the green belt sites, if it goes ahead, would be as a result of a lower housing targets from central government, meaning the district council could aim to build fewer homes over the period of the local plan. But this also means a reduction in the number of affordable homes that would be built, with the council's policy at 40 per cent of new developments being affordable homes. Documents for the meeting said officers estimated the changes would mean the non-

delivery of approximately 625 new affordable homes.

They went on to say the affordable housing policy itself would not be affected. Council documents show that one of the priority outcomes for the local plan is to: “Encourage the creation of affordable housing to meet local needs and explore innovative methods of delivery.”

Surrey Community Action works with local communities to increase the amount of affordable housing in rural villages and small towns in the county. In Mole Valley the organisation has supported **The Poland Trust** on the development of 12 affordable homes to rent at social rent levels and five affordable self-build homes for people living in Brockham and Betchworth.

A Surrey Community Action spokesperson said: “Affordable housing continues to be a critical issue in Surrey. In rural areas of Surrey, the shortage of housing is particularly acute and this has been exacerbated by the increase in the number of people seeking properties with more outdoor space following the pandemic, causing house prices and rents to reach their highest levels of unaffordability for people on average salaries.”

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The Local Plan to plan The Local Plan

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