## **Epsom Town Centre Masterplan Unveiled**

Wednesday 22nd November the Licensing, Planning and Policy Committee of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council approved a new iteration of a draft master plan for Epsom's town centre to go out for public consultation. The consultation will open tomorrow and end on 22nd December.

Cllr Clive Woodbridge (RA Ewell Village) wanted to know what questions would be posed in the online consultation. This was not answered. Nevertheless, the decision of the committee to approve a consultation was unanimous. As County Cllr Eber Kington told Epsom and Ewell Times, local government crafted online questionnaires may themselves benefit from a degree of prior consultation. See his opinion piece on the Surrey budget HERE

The Chair of the LPPC Cllr. **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley) clarified that committee members will be sent the questions for comment before the consultation goes live.

A fuller report on the meeting will be published in the coming days.

A public consultation on the draft Epsom Town Centre Masterplan is a significant move toward shaping the future of Epsom. The document will be evidence that informs the development of the Borough wide Epsom and Ewell Local Plan.

#### Background

Commissioned in May 2022, the Epsom Town Centre Masterplan, written by David Lock Associates (DLA), serves a dual purpose: contributing to the local plan and guiding the assessment of pertinent planning applications. A hybrid public consultation in Summer 2022 garnered nearly 2,000 responses.

#### Addressing Inconsistencies

Responses highlighted both the interests and inconsistencies in residents' views on the town centre. The Masterplan seeks to address these disparities to create an ambitious yet practical framework for managing change in the Local Plan period.

### Informing Local Plan

The Masterplan's early work influenced the town centre draft site allocations in the Draft Epsom and Ewell Local Plan (2022-2040), which underwent consultation in early 2023. Further engagement with councillors, landowners, and leaseholders occurred in Summer 2023, providing additional insights.

#### Key Objectives and Principles

The Draft Town Centre Masterplan lays out comprehensive guiding principles, focusing on key sites like the Ashley Centre/Global House and others including Hook Road car park and Dullshot House. It addresses placemaking objectives, environmental enhancements, travel improvements, and principles for the retention, enhancement, or repair of non-development areas.

#### Masterplan Sections

The document is divided into six sections, covering the Introduction and Vision, Masterplan Evolution, Character Areas Frameworks, Public Realm and Sustainable Transport, Opportunity Sites, and Appendices. Each section provides a detailed view of the town's envisioned evolution.

#### **Public Input Crucial**

The public is urged to review the options for each opportunity site and the wider Masterplan document, expressing their thoughts before the finalization. The Masterplan, while not a statutory planning document, will be a key consideration in decision-making processes for the Local Plan and the Epsom and Ewell Local Cycling Walking Investment Plan.

Respondents can view the draft Masterplan and give their views via an online questionnaire at https://epsom-ewell.inconsult.uk/ETCMP/. Paper copies of the draft Masterplan are also available on request by emailing localplan@epsom-ewell.gov.uk, or viewable in the borough's libraries for the duration of the consultation. Feedback can also be sent in by email to localplan@epsom-ewell.gov.uk, or by post to Epsom Town Centre Masterplan, Planning Policy, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom, KT18 5BY.

#### **Future Steps**

Following public consultation, feedback will be considered by DLA and council officers, contributing to the finalization of the Masterplan. Once adopted, the document will form an integral part of the evidence base for the Local Plan, carrying substantial weight in decision-making for Epsom Town Centre planning applications.

Related reports:
Mind the Epsom Town Centre Masterplan!
The cost of planning
£225,000 to plan the unplanned

### The Plot in the thick of planning options

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.

### Flooding concerns defer Church St care home plan

9th November Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Planning Committee considered once more the plan to build a care home on the sites of the Church Street police and ambulance stations.

Concerns raised by neighbouring land owners about increased risks posed by the development to ground-water flooding to their properties triggered a deferral of the application.

Cllr Neil Dallen (RA Town) proposed the deferment for the applicants to provide a more detailed assessment of flood risk from a "recognized authority".

Concerns were also expressed about the safety of refuse and re-cycling vehicles entrance and exit from the development.

There was discussion about whether the application could be approved with the imposition of conditions to address these concerns but ultimately no final decision was reached.

Related reports:

Epsom care home plans

Two Epsom brownfield developments?

## Care home plan lacked the "wow" factor

9th November Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Planning Committee debated the proposal for a care home on the site of the now demolished Organ and Dragon pub on the junction of London Road and the Ewell-By-Pass. A site that has been a sore-sight for many years.

Cllr **Jan Mason** (RA Ruxley) described the design as "bad" and the car parking provision as "ridiculous". She said "Coming into Epsom or out of Epsom, it really should be something people should go by and think "Wow that's lovely."".

The officer's report was quoted in the meeting: "While the Applicant is an organisation with no history of operating car homes itself, there is no reference to a care provider working in partnership with the organisation in (the previous) application. There is therefore very little indication of what type of care will be delivered on Site, whether the care home would operate with or without nursing care provision, and no description of exactly how the particular development would benefit local residents or the joint health and social care system."

Councillors stated more information was needed as to the exact type of care the applicant intended to provide. Then the committee could determine whether the car parking provision in the application was adequate. Presently, it was assumed that 25 spaces would not be sufficient given the site's proximity to one of the busiest junctions in the Borough with little to no street parking available.

After a lengthy debate and an initial refusal being voted the matter was deferred to a later meeting.

Related reports:

Epsom care home plans

"Blot on the landscape" - Ewell care home inked in

Image - The former Organ Inn alongside the care home design

# **Epsom care home plans**

Plans for a care home on the site of a former police station could finally be decided next week.

An application for an 86-bed care home for people with dementia in Church Street should have been decided at a cancelled planning meeting in April.

Now Epsom and Ewell's planning committee is set to make a decision on Thursday, November 9.

Councillors will also decide whether or not to approve an application for another care home, on a site where Lidl failed in their bid to build a new store.

The Church Street plans, with the Church Street Conservation Area wrapping around the south and west ends of the site, have been scaled back from the previously submitted 96-bed application.

An officers' report shows the building height has been reduced by one storey, after concerns were raised by planners about the impact it could have on the conservation area, designated heritage assets and trees on the site.

The conservation area includes contains 20 listed buildings including the grade II\* St Martin's Church, The Cedars and Ebbisham House.

With 31 car parking spaces in total, the application would not meet Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's parking requirements.

But officers described the site as being in a "highly sustainable location" close to public transport and with the possibility of parking in nearby public car parks.

They have recommended councillors approve the application.

The applicant's design and access statement said the developments objective, among others, were to: "Create a facility of excellence in the care and support of local people living with residential, nursing, dementia and respite care needs."

The future of the site of the former Organ and Dragon pub, in London Road, Ewell, will also be debated at the meeting.

The now-empty site has two approved planning applications on it, one for a development of 45 flats and one, approved in October 2022 for a 70-bed care home.

Also recommended for approval, the latest application is for a larger 81-bed care home, with an additional storey having been added to the plans, making it five storeys at its highest.

Plans also include car and cycle parking, an ambulance and deliveries bay, a widened pavement and a new pedestrian crossing at the busy junction of London Road and Ewell Road.

The layout of the site is "virtually the same" as the previously approved applications, according to an officers' report.

The report said that since the previous scheme was approved, other providers had come forward expressing interest in additional beds which removed previous limitations under plans for a single care home provider.

When the previous application was approved, councillors raised concerns that the applicant did not have experience running care homes, though this is not a requirement when considering a planning application.

Image: Plans for the former Epsom police station and ambulance station site in Church Street, from Design and Access statement. Credit: Hunters

Related Reports:

Two Epsom brownfield developments?

From custody to caring – new plans for Epsom's old nick.

# Famous 16th Century Surrey pub saved, for now?

A 16th century pub in the heart of the **Surrey Hills** has been saved from developers after plans to convert one of the last remaining Abinger watering holes into houses, holiday-let pods, and a new bar area were thrown out.

**Mole Valley Borough Council**'s planning committee met on Wednesday, November 1 to hear proposals from developers, **JPW Osprey**, to turn the Volunteer pub in Sutton Abinger, near Dorking into self-catered holiday lets.

The plans were voted down eight to six as councillors sided with resident groups, formed to save the pub, as well as **Abinger Parish Council** which had lodged formal objections.

Addressing the meeting was **Paul Clever** who was part of a community group that had raised £600,000 in a failed bid to purchase the pub and save it. He said: "The aim of this application is to close the Volunteer, replace it with an unviable alternative which gets through planning. The new entity will last as long as needed to prove that it is not viable and the developer will then sell the asset for multiples of what it cost."

He added: "The Volunteer is being closed and the new layout and proposed service will ensure the new venture in the new area will fail. The planning application and the planning report refer to the pub being unviable and that is simply not true. The Volunteer Community Group has proof of this for the year preceding the sale, during the worst trading conditions ever for publicans.

"The Volunteer is viable and very precious to its community, known far beyond the boundaries of Surrey. It should not be allowed to go the way of so many other pubs near and far, especially when there are so many people willing and able to make it work as a public house and community facility."

The pub sits on the western side of Water Lane within the hamlet of Sutton Abinger, close to the boundary with Guildford. The land is designated Metropolitan Green Belt, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Area of Great Landscape Value.

The surroundings, the officer report said, "lend the pub an engaging verdant setting and areas of the garden afford views over rolling wooded countryside to the south taking in attractive historic properties, some of which are listed."

The Volunteer had been owned and operated by the Dorset-based brewery, Hall and Woodhouse, until 2022 when it closed and sold to the applicant.

In Novermber 2022 the pub was listed as an Asset of Community Value having been nominated by the Abinger Community Pub Group as a building that furthers the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community.

Speaking on behalf of the the application was **Simon Best** who told the meeting it was the best way of bringing the pub back in use. He said: "Change is not always a bad thing and it is clear from previous failures that diversification is needed to ensure the Volunteer can run as a viable entity. Holiday lets will support and enable the pub to continue."

Councillor **Margaret Cooksey**, who moved that the plans be rejected said: "If they kept the public house building as is and used what is going to be the extension as accommodation that would have made much more sense. They have got it the wrong way round. It would have been better a different way round and hope they take note of that and come back with a better proposal next time round."

She added: "They've got it horribly wrong".

Image: The Volunteer Pub ( Mark Davison)

### Local Plan to move forward after passionate debate

Epsom and Ewell Borough Councillors voted to "un-pause" work on a new Local Plan for the district at an extraordinary meeting held in the Town Hall chamber on Tuesday  $24^{th}$  October.

Introducing the motion to un-pause **Cllr Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley) said "what is brought before you this evening is a recommendation from Licensing Planning Policy Committee members to unpause the local plan immediately to restart work on the spatial strategy, site selection, and policy development. If this recommendation is supported tonight, workshop sessions will be set up with all members to discuss the results from the call for sites that finished at the end of July. Updates on what sites have come forward and, more importantly, what sites did not come forward will be shared. Discussion and debate based on up-to-date data and evidence with all members, not just those on the LPPC, on which sites would or could be included in our next version of the local plan."

Cllr Christine Howells (RA Nonsuch) proposed a lengthy amendment that opened with the following wording:

"The Council is asked to note the work that has been undertaken in line with the decision by the full Council on the 22nd March 2023 to pause the local plan, to note that while the current version of the national planning policy framework (NPPF) requires the council to start with the standard method housing number, the NPPF also allows for a lower number to be used if that starting point is unachievable in light of local Green Belt, flooding, or other specific constraints.

To note that the current draft local plan has already set a precedent by using a much lower target. However, this target was only achieved under proposals to build on high-scoring Green Belt land and sites subject to flooding. The available evidence base clearly demonstrates constraint-trying factors and provides strong reasons for excluding these sites from housing development."

In summary the amendment focused on resuming the local planning process with a set of guiding principles that emphasize sustainable development, housing affordability, and the efficient use of available land resources.

Cllr Howells said "Mr. Mayor, I have brought the motion before you today as I am passionate in my belief of the need to protect

and preserve this Borough's Green Belt land for the benefit and enjoyment of our current population and to secure a heritage for future generations. But most importantly, I believe I'm speaking on behalf of so many of our residents who are equally passionate to preserve our unique Borough and who have made their voices heard in so many ways."

"Seven months ago, councillors voted with an overwhelming majority to pause the draft local plan following the huge public outcry at the proposed use of green belt land identified for development. Nothing has changed in the interim period to make it any more acceptable now than it was then. However, we can't afford to wait for the government to change direction. We must unpause and set our own conditions. But it remains vital that we continue to safeguard our green belt."

Cllr Bernie Muir (Conservative Horton) spoke on the amendment "The housing target should be .... achievable solely through the use of brownfield and previously developed Green Belt land with a determined focus on the art of the possible. Brownfield sites and previously developed sites are the answer, and this includes maximizing council-owned land. I have been calling on this council for years to get advice from large-scale developers as to what can be done to address the alleged barriers put forward by the council to using brownfield sites and, in particular, council-owned land, and as yet, they have resolutely refused to do so. They must do so as a matter of urgency."

Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) called out the amendment: "I must put on record this is not a cross-party motion, although it appears to have some merit. Labour councillors cannot support it as it's so disingenuously drafted as to constitute a NIMBY charter. I've attended the same briefings as other councillors, seen the same lobbying from those behind this motion, and I know its main purpose is to minimize the number of homes built in the borough by citing excuse after excuse for not building to tie officers' hands while purporting not to do so. It's not a cunning plan; it's actually very transparent. Labour is in favour of using brownfield sites, not in favor of uncontrolled and unnecessary building on the borough's Green Belt, but we are strongly in favor of building the homes that residents need. This motion is designed to prevent that."

"Councillor **Persand** (Con. Horton) is a strong supporter of the motion, writing in the **Epsom and Ewell Times**. He correctly pointed out that what are called housing targets are, in fact, "guidelines which provide a starting point for considering local needs." He then wrote, "If Worthing Council can gain approval from the government's planning inspector when they met only 25% of their target, why can't Epsom and Ewell achieve a similar result?"

"The motion puts forward a list of so-called local constraints, exceptionalism, providing a list of reasons not to build homes for our residents. Then there's just sloppy language dressed up as wishful thinking.."

"Finally, does anyone think that promising significant levels of proposed housing should be truly affordable to local workers has any meaning? They're just adjectives that mean different things to different people, which will melt away at the first sign of opposition from developers."

Cllr **Persand** spoke in favour of the motion: "This amendment is an opportunity, an opportunity for us to finally do the right thing for residents. We, as councillors, need to be strong in supporting this amendment. Point 2.1 of the officer report says officers seek confirmation for members as to what to do next. It is our role to guide policy, so let's do that. It is important that we don't go full circle again with this local plan and that we do learn from our mistakes. These guiding principles will ensure that we are back on the right path, delivering for residents and our community. We need a local plan that is aspirational but deliverable. This amendment lets us do that."

Cllr **Alison Kelly** (LibDem Stamford) said "It is clear that if we do not unpause a local plan, there are two serious consequences: developers will run with their plans on appeal, and we'll miss the 2025 deadline and have to start from scratch, wasting money and effort. This would leave us with no control over location, density, nor social housing provision in Epsom. We are spending £1.5 million on temporary housing, and we cannot afford to let this continue. We had good feedback from residents during the consultation, and we must take their views into account, specifically with the use of the brownfield sites and the retention of the green belt."

Cllr **Robert Leach** (RA Nonsuch) weighed in: "I think I have to start by rebutting what Labour colleagues have said. The reason that we have problems in accommodating people is because of Labour policy, not current policy. No, you may laugh; it was the Rent Act of 1977 under Harold Wilson....All over the country, lodgers were evicted. One of them was one of my uncles;... It was absolutely a dreadful piece of legislation. Perhaps our Labour friends haven't actually listened to what was said at the Labour conference, which was only about a week or two ago, where Keir Starmer actually said, and I commend him for his honesty, that they don't intend taking any notice of local authorities."

Clir Clive Woodbridge (RA Ewell Village) "I think if we adopted this amendment, I cannot see a path that gets us to a sound local plan. What was before us tonight is the decision whether we want to unpause this local plan to allow LPPC and officers to digest the results of the consultation and take the necessary measures from that."

Cllr Liz Frost (RA Woodcote and Langley) also spoke against the amendment: ".. if it were to be approved, .... we are likely to tie

the officers up in knots."

#### The amendment was defeated by 14 votes to 12 with 3 abstentions.

The Council then proceeded to debate the main motion to un-pause the work on the Local Plan (as reported in Tuesday's Epsom and Ewell Times). The motion was approved by 21 votes for the motion and eight abstentions from the motion. There were no votes against the motion.

Related reports:

Local Plan (2022-2040) Un-Pause Recommended

Cllr Persand intervenes ahead of Local Plan debate

Drafting of Epsom and Ewell Local Plan "unpausing"?

Motion to pause Local Plan process

## Local Plan (2022-2040) Un-Pause Recommended

Ahead of tonight's Extraordinary Council Meeting to be held at The Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom at 7.30pm the Epsom and Ewell Times summarises the Report submitted to Councillors by the Head of the Council's Development Department.

In an effort to ensure the future development and planning of their locality aligns with contemporary standards and requirements, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council initiated a public consultation on the Draft Local Plan (2022-2040) from February 1, 2023, to March 19, 2023. This process aimed to gather input from the community, enabling the council to make informed decisions regarding their local development strategy.

Following the conclusion of the consultation, the council convened an extraordinary meeting on March 22, 2023. During this meeting, the council opted to halt the Local Plan temporarily to undertake specific tasks.

Fast forward to September 24, 2023, and the Licencing and Planning Policy Committee has recommended to the Full Council that it is time to revive the Local Plan. The suggestion to un-pause the Local Plan underscores the importance of keeping the plan up to date and conforming to national planning policy.

An officer's report to Epsom and Ewell Borough Council puts forward the following recommendations:

- 1. Un-pause the Local Plan immediately.
- 2. Acknowledge the work done since the pause decision in March 2023.

The rationale behind this proposal is multifaceted. The primary reason is a legal obligation to review the Local Plan every five years. The current development plan in Epsom and Ewell includes documents that date back more than five years, such as the Epsom and Ewell Core Strategy (2007) and Plan E (2011). These documents predate significant national policy changes in the form of the National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Practice Guidance. The absence of an updated Local Plan poses risks to the council, including the potential loss of a 5-year housing land supply and implications related to the Housing Delivery Test and sustainable development.

Delays to the Local Plan timetable could also jeopardize the transitional arrangements that may be introduced through a revised National Planning Policy Framework. Furthermore, the government has reiterated the need for Local Plans prepared under the current system to be submitted for examination by June 30, 2025, and adopted by December 31, 2026. The actualization of these dates hinges on the Royal Assent of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, as well as parliamentary approval of related regulations. Thus, it is prudent to continue Local Plan development to meet these timeframes.

The existing Epsom and Ewell Development Plan consists of three documents that were locally produced. Two of these documents were adopted before the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance, which have been subject to revisions since their inception. Local Plans must adhere to national planning policy, necessitating an update to bring them into conformity.

The council initiated a consultation on the Draft Epsom and Ewell Local Plan (2022-2040) between February 1 and March 19,

2023. This Draft Local Plan outlined a growth strategy for the borough, intending to provide a minimum of 5,400 homes over the plan period. The strategy had to balance housing provision with environmental and policy constraints such as land designated for special purposes, nature reserves, and the Green Belt.

During this consultation, the council received feedback from 1,736 individuals and organizations, including residents, statutory consultees, and other stakeholders. It's essential to note that all responses have been made available for public viewing, with any inappropriate comments appropriately redacted.

A Consultation Statement will be released alongside the next version of the Proposed Submission Local Plan (Regulation 19) to summarize the main issues raised and how they've been considered.

The Council Motion, passed on March 22, 2023, mandated the Local Plan's pause for specific tasks, including further work on brownfield sites, consideration of alternatives that exclude green belt sites, analysis of future housing needs based on 2018 data, and a clearer understanding of the government's intentions regarding green belt protections and housing targets.

The selected workstreams under the Council Motion have been completed, including the call for sites process and the publication of responses to the Draft Local Plan. Thirteen new sites were submitted during this process. However, the decision to un-pause the Local Plan is crucial for further progress, such as revising the Local Plan timetable and site selection, taking into account the latest information.

The Council Motion imposed restrictions on what work could be undertaken in preparing the Local Plan, making it necessary to formally un-pause the plan for further progression. Un-pausing the Local Plan will lead to the production of a revised timetable and the advancement of other critical pieces of evidence. Work on site selection will also commence, considering the latest information on land availability.

"It's important to understand that un-pausing the Local Plan doesn't mean the Proposed Submission version of the plan will remain unchanged. Additional sites have been proposed through the call for sites process, and the Proposed Submission Local Plan will undergo public consultation."

However, it has also been reported to Councillors that there are limited actively promoted sites for development within the Longmead and Kiln Lane areas. The existing employment sites are well-occupied and support various businesses, indicating a need for additional land to accommodate more employment space, including uses suitable for an industrial estate. The council has already invested significant resources in exploring opportunities for industrial estate redevelopment.

Further investigation is deemed reasonable only if a substantial portion of land becomes available through the call for sites process. It is suggested that the council be formally approached to consider making its land available for redevelopment. Obtaining a formal response through the call for sites process would provide essential evidence to inform future decisions regarding the location of development in the Local Plan.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill is in progress, and if implemented, it will significantly alter how Local Plans are produced. This shift may lead to more streamlined Local Plans and a focus on spatial aspects over detailed development management policies. Transitional arrangements will apply, and the government has set a deadline of June 30, 2025, for the submission of Local Plans prepared under the current system.

In conclusion, this report recommends un-pausing the Local Plan to ensure it aligns with national planning policy and complies with legal requirements. Reviving the Local Plan is essential to the future development and planning of Epsom and Ewell Borough.

Drafting of Epsom and Ewell Local Plan "unpausing"?

Motion to pause Local Plan process

Cllr McCormick's own answers on Local Plan

Public meeting on Local Plan dominated by greenbelters.

Housing need or desire?

Can Epsom and Ewell get more dense?

### Cllr Persand intervenes ahead of Local Plan debate

Opinion from Councillor Kieran Persand (Conservative Horton Ward) on the Local Plan business.

Tonight, at 7:30pm, your Epsom & Ewell Borough Councillors will be meeting to decide on whether or not to unpause the Local Plan

However, this meeting holds greater significance than just the unpausing. It is about the future of our community, and whether we want to protect what makes our borough unique, both for us now and for future generations.

Being born and raised in Epsom and Ewell, I have cherished memories in every corner of the borough. Whether that is playing football at Gibraltar Recreation Ground in Ewell on a cold Sunday morning; walking our dog on a sunny Wednesday afternoon on Hook Road Arena; or my parents buying me an ice cream as a treat on the Downs. Our green spaces and their protection are vital for our community.

And so, it saddens me that since the meeting to pause on 22 nd March, there has been no change, nor even a commitment to change from the Council on the direction of the Local Plan. As it stands, there is still an inclusion of over 50 hectares of greenfield, Greenbelt land.

We are probably in a worse position than we were seven months ago as fewer sites have come forward than anticipated in the call for sites process.

It is clear what residents want and need. You made your voices heard. Over 11,000 of you signed a petition demanding for the removal of Greenbelt land from the Local Plan. It is a shame that you haven't been properly listened to. Since being elected in May, I've been determined to change that and build on the work of Cllr Bernie Muir and Chris Grayling MP.

You may have heard people say that it is because of the Government that the Council must build on Greenbelt land, and that there isn't a choice. This is untrue. There is no mandatory housing target, there are only guidelines which provide a starting point for considering local needs. It's clearly stated in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) that it is not a requirement to build on Greenbelt land in order to meet specific housing levels.

It is a misguided and hopefully short-lived choice, that Epsom & Ewell Borough Council have taken to propose building on Greenbelt land. If Worthing Council can gain approval from the government's Planning Inspector when they met only 25% of their target, why can't Epsom and Ewell achieve a similar result? We already have ample evidence to support us in planning for a realistic and achievable target of 3,800 homes, including truly affordable homes for those in greatest needs, which can be achieved solely using brownfield land. This is the direction we should take.

The current NPPF guidance gives us the ability to remove Greenbelt land. This is stated in Para. 11. We don't have to wait for any changes to the Framework, we can be proactive now.

There is a need for housing in Epsom and Ewell but nothing in the current Local Plan addresses that need. What is needed is truly affordable housing for key workers and young people, and the possibility of housing stock for local Housing Associations to provide for those who cannot otherwise reach the first rung of the housing ladder. 'Affordable homes' are not £500,000 -£1m properties, as these will never be affordable for the average worker.

We need a plan that maximises our current urban brownfield space, not a plan that wants to build in fields and woodland, in critical drainage areas, or areas in which there is insufficient infrastructure. We need a plan that is creative and forward-thinking.

At the Full Council meeting on 25th July, I submitted a motion, seconded by Cllr Muir, for the removal of Greenbelt land from the Local Plan and the protection of Greenbelt boundaries. However, this was rejected by the Council, with no adequate reasoning provided, and so didn't go in front of Councillors to debate.

After that, I quickly realised that for real change to happen with the Local Plan, we all needed to work together. And so, myself and a group of like-minded Councillors from across the political spectrum have been working collaboratively together with the intent to set the Local Plan on the right course. It's been incredible and reaffirms what local politics should be about – doing the best for residents.

We have now submitted an amendment for the meeting today, calling for the removal of Greenbelt land; protect the existing Greenbelt boundaries; and for there to be commitments to have truly affordable housing.

I want residents to remember - if Councillors do vote this amendment down. They are effectively voting against the protection of

our greenbelt land; they are voting against having truly affordable homes for people who need them; they are voting against protecting the character of our unique area; and they are voting against the people they serve.

If the Local Plan is to be unpaused, there needs to be guiding principles that provide clear direction for the Local Plan over the coming months, we cannot be in a position where nothing has changed. This would be a waste of resources and taxpayer money.

So, I urge all my colleagues in the Council chamber tonight, whether Residents' Association, Liberal Democrats, or Labour, to work proactively and collaboratively together to realign the Local Plan to address the needs and concerns of residents and provide the strong direction you deserve by voting for the proposed amendment.

### **Noble housing intentions?**

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