

Red rag at Bull Hill as residents rage over high-rise plans

31 January 2026



Huge high rises including hundreds of homes near a small Leatherhead park will kill the town and plunge precious playspace into shadow, say campaigners fighting the plans.

Mole Valley District Council has formed a partnership with Kier Property to “transform Leatherhead” by delivering new housing and upgrading the dated 1980s Swan Centre shopping precinct.

The original plan split housing between Bull Hill open space next to the railway station and the Swan Centre. However, engineers later advised that the shopping centre could not support housing, prompting a late change that would place all 480 homes, offices and a multi-storey car park on the Bull Hill site.

Campaigners say the height of the buildings would cast much of the remaining open space and children’s playground into shade and turn a designated safe walking route for school pupils into an access road for construction workers. They say the proposals would dwarf the existing three-storey blocks near the park.

Residents say they are not opposed to housing and understand the need for town-centre development to protect the wider green belt, but argue that the scale and intensity of the proposals are too much for Leatherhead to absorb. Speaking to the Local Democracy Reporting Service, they said the project alone would increase the town’s population by almost 10 per cent and permanently alter its character.

The council argues the homes will help meet housing targets, fund the regeneration of the Swan Centre and protect valued green space outside urban areas. It also says the project would create jobs, increase footfall for shops and include a new three-screen cinema as part of a £12m refurbishment of the centre — a figure residents compare with the £14m agreed to refurbish Dorking Halls without building on open space.

Campaigners’ concerns

Steve Preston, Susan Hood and Bev Emms have led opposition to the proposals, organising resident meetings and encouraging people to submit views to the council, whether in support or against, to ensure Bull Hill is developed in the best possible way.

They say the scheme is far too intense for one of the last open spaces in the town centre and that instead of a welcoming park for people arriving by train, residents would be met by tiers of car parking, office blocks and towers up to 12 storeys high.

They said the plans would “absolutely kill Leatherhead”, adding that Bull Hill is a vital green space and that “it’s now or never”. While not opposing development in principle, they said any scheme must be right for the town. They pointed out that currently people leave the station and walk straight into a park, whereas under the proposals they would be confronted by an eight-storey car park with “Leatherhead” written on the side and a 12-storey tower in the corner. They questioned what would be more attractive — a park or a concrete car park.

Campaigners said the original proposals were for 150 homes at the Swan Centre and 300 at Bull Hill, but when the Swan Centre proved unworkable all housing was moved to the park to fund shopping centre upgrades. They argued the original Bull Hill buildings were much lower and warned that towers of up to 12 storeys would overshadow the playground and green space, leaving it in shade for much of the year.

Flooding is also a concern, with residents pointing to visible signs of sewage overflow near storm drains. Although the formal consultation deadline has passed, the council has said it will consider submissions received ahead of its final decision. Campaigners have urged residents to make their views known, whether in favour or opposed.

Car parking is another issue, with 300 spaces proposed for around 480 homes housing roughly 1,000 people. With the town’s population at around 11,000, residents fear overstretched services, gridlocked roads and irreversible change.

They said Bull Hill currently feels like an oasis and warned that if the scheme is approved Leatherhead would be changed forever, with no opportunity to reverse the decision.

Council and developer response

The council’s plan includes 81 affordable homes across two blocks and describes the application as a key milestone in its Transform Leatherhead regeneration. It also expects around £9m in developer contributions.

The Leret Partnership is a joint venture between Mole Valley District Council and Kier Property, combining public land

ownership with private investment to regenerate the Swan Centre and Bull Hill. The council owns the land, while Kier Property is funding most planning and development costs and the majority of build costs. If planning permission is granted, some land will transfer to the partnership, while some will remain in council ownership. The council will also retain ownership and control of the Swan Centre.

Leigh Thomas, group managing director of Kier Property, said the project would boost the town and reverse recent declines in shops and footfall. He said Bull Hill was Leatherhead’s most sustainable brownfield site, next to the station, buses and the High Street, and that building homes there would reduce car commuting while supporting the town centre.

He said the scheme would generate around 870 construction jobs and around 1,300 permanent jobs, alongside approximately £9m in contributions over the lifetime of the development. He added that height had been carefully tested, with taller buildings placed next to the railway and lower buildings stepping down towards existing neighbourhoods, arguing that reducing height would also reduce affordable housing, public space and funding for the Swan Centre.

Mr Thomas said early designs had been significantly reworked following community feedback, with buildings moved, heights reduced in sensitive areas and the layout changed. He said residents could continue submitting comments via the council’s planning portal.

Councillor Keira Vyvyan-Robinson, Mole Valley District Council’s cabinet member for commercial assets and property, said the partnership’s gross development value ran into hundreds of millions of pounds, far exceeding the £12m planned for the Swan Centre upgrade. She said the investment would bring long-term regeneration benefits, increased footfall, support for local businesses, new jobs and much-needed housing.

She said the £14m allocated to Dorking Halls related to essential safety and maintenance works to keep the historic venue operational and that without the investment the building would face significant risks to its future.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Related reports:

Blockbuster cinema and 480 homes plan for Leatherhead town centre

Leatherhead to get new cinema and bowling alley?

River Mole to attract visitors to Leatherhead?

Plans for Bull Hill Leatherhead (image Leret Group)

- .
- .
- .
- .
- .
- .

Epsom & Ewell’s Council responds to Local Plan concerns

31 January 2026



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has responded to questions raised about the handling of its Local Plan examination, following criticism from a local resident that key issues were not discussed at the January meeting of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee (LPPC).

The concerns, raised by Alex Duval and subsequently put to the council by Epsom & Ewell Times, centred on the absence of any Local Plan item on the LPPC agenda, whether revised evidence requested by the Planning Inspector had been submitted on time, and how the plan is being managed during the transition to a new unitary authority.

No committee decision required, says council

Responding to the first point, a council spokesperson said that although the Planning Inspector had requested additional work on two areas of the Local Plan evidence base following the public hearings in autumn 2025, no LPPC agenda item

was required on 22 January because no formal decision was needed.

“The Local Plan Inspector requested that the planning authority undertake two pieces of work, as set out in her post-hearing letter dated 22 October 2025,” the spokesperson said.

“There was no item on the agenda for the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee on 22 January 2026 as there was no decision to be made in relation to the submission of this evidence base.”

Critics had argued that, given the significance of the work and the proximity to the council’s own stated submission deadline, the committee should at least have been asked to note or review the position.

Evidence submitted by deadline

On the question of whether revised Green Belt and Land Availability Assessment material had been submitted by the deadline of 22 January 2026, the council confirmed that it had.

“Yes, the work was submitted by the agreed deadline,” the spokesperson said.

“The Planning Inspector will review the information in due course and advise how the examination will proceed.”

At the time the concern was raised, the updated material was not visible on the examination website, prompting uncertainty among observers about whether the deadline had been met.

Examination remains Inspector-led

Addressing wider concerns about how the Local Plan will be managed as Epsom and Ewell moves towards abolition under local government reorganisation, the council said the examination process remains unaffected.

“Following the submission of the Local Plan in March 2025, approved by Full Council on 10 December 2024, the Local Plan entered its Examination stage, which is led by the appointed Planning Inspector,” the spokesperson said.

“This will continue to be the case until the Examination stage concludes.”

The council’s response does not address whether any further member oversight or discussion of the Local Plan will take place before the examination ends, but confirms that responsibility for the process now rests with the Inspector rather than the council’s policy committees.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Related reports:

[Stage 2 Examination of Epsom & Ewell’s Local Plan opens Tuesday](#)

[Epsom & Ewell’s Local Plan under the Green microscope](#)

[Epsom and Ewell Local Plan Submitted for Examination](#)

[Epsom and Ewell Council response to Local Plan criticism](#)

[The Local Plan plot thickens after revised NPPF](#)

[Council minority vote Local Plan to next stage with Green Belt in](#)

[...and many more - search “local plan” in our search box.](#)

Redhill developers make a towering mistake

31 January 2026



Two major landmark towers that would have dominated a Surrey town have been dismissed with campaigners claiming a major victory in their long-running battle. Developers Solum Regeneration had been hoping to build high-rises of 14 and

15 stories next to Redhill station, but were refused planning permission by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council in 2024. Undeterred, they dug in and challenged the decision through the courts forcing a long drawn-out process. Residents, however, galvanised to challenge the process.

Now, they are celebrating after the planning inspectorate threw out the bid to create Redhill's tallest buildings saying it would forever harm the town's character, blot out existing views of wooded hills outside Redhill, and create pedestrian safety risks. Redhill Residents Action Group (RRAG), formed to represent hundreds of residents and rail users.

The appeal, brought by Solum Development, a partnership between Network Rail and Keir, was opposed on planning grounds relating to design quality, impact on heritage and town character and the effect on access to a vital transport hub.

Jan Sharman, Campaign lead for RRAG said: "We have always believed this was the wrong development for such an important site. Redhill station should be embracing the future, with integrated rail, bus and active travel. "Developers need to think with vision and create places that genuinely work for communities."

Solum had insisted the development was needed for the town and would deliver 255 much needed housing to the area - particularly as the council is missing its targets. The scheme would have also revamped the railway station, and increased footfall to town centre.

The taxi rank would have been relocated to the back of the station, with most drivers and cyclists directed to the steep Redstone Hill entrance. Disability campaigners said this would shut those mobility issues out. The inspector however decided the sheer size of the scheme was just too much.

Jan added: "We fully recognise the need for more homes, particularly for younger people. But homes must be genuinely affordable, well designed and properly integrated into their surroundings. Building housing that people cannot afford, in the wrong place, helps no one."

The inquiry was held over September 2 to 5 and continued between November 24 to 28 last year. Planning inspector Joanna Gilbert issued her decision on January 19, 2026. She said: "The proposal would provide the benefit of 255 housing units that carries substantial weight. There would be other benefits to which I have afforded significant, moderate and limited weight. However, I have afforded very substantial weight to the adverse effects on the character and appearance of the area."

"There are moderate, limited and very limited levels of less than substantial harms to designated heritage assets and a moderate indirect adverse effect on a non-designated heritage asset. There would also be significant weight to the harm in respect of highway and pedestrian safety, including parking. Additionally, there would be moderate weight to the harm to living conditions for some occupiers of Quadrant House."

She added: "For the reasons set out above, the appeal is dismissed."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Redhill Train Station development 15-storey tower block distance CGI (Credit Solum planning documents)

Council's refusal leaves Esher's Marquis of Granby derelict

31 January 2026



The owners of the Marquis of Granby in Esher have hit back at Elmbridge Borough Council after it refused to recognise the venue as a restaurant. They said the decision they say is "wrong" and "based on a misunderstanding".

Greene King, which owns the site on Portsmouth Road, has now submitted a fresh planning application asking for a Certificate of Lawful Existing Use. They want official confirmation that the Marquis of Granby should be classed as a restaurant, not a pub.

They argue the council made a "fundamentally flawed" decision last year when it rejected their original application in November 2023.

According to Greene King, the venue has operated primarily as a restaurant since 1994, with alcohol sales playing a secondary role. In simple terms: most people went there to eat, not just to drink.

Elmbridge council, however, ruled that the premises looked more like a “drinking establishment with expanded food”, a specific planning category used for pubs that also serve meals. The classification puts it outside the normal restaurant category and limits what the building can be used for in future.

Although 77.8 per cent of its sales come from food, officers said in their 2023 report, this is typical for modern pubs, which commonly serve meals, and pointed to industry data showing similar patterns nationwide. They also highlighted pub-style features including a large bar area, self-seating, multiple beer taps, a cellar stocked with kegs, gambling machines, event nights with DJs, and the venue’s own website branding itself as a “local pub”. The council found these characteristics outweighed the presence of a restaurant area and concluded the premises more closely resembles a pub, not a restaurant, leading them to refuse the certificate.

But Greene King strongly disagrees. They say the council has misunderstood the planning rules and how they apply to the site. Their planning consultants argue:

- The Marquis of Granby has never been a drinking-led pub, so it cannot suddenly be classed as one.
- Planning rules do not allow a restaurant to automatically change into a “drinking establishment with expanded food” without permission.
- The business was still food-led even after its carvery deck was removed in 2020.
- Features like a bar, beer taps and a garden do not automatically make somewhere a pub and many restaurants have these too.

They also say the council relied too heavily on a trade magazine article about pub food and drink sales, which they describe as “meaningless” evidence.

Greene King points out that it successfully secured the same certificate for six similar venues elsewhere, with no objections from councils. The Marquis of Granby is the only one that has been refused.

Since closing, the building has become run down, with heavy graffiti, vandalism and anti-social behaviour. Greene King says the lack of a certificate is “sterilising” the site and stopping it from being reused and that it is now a potential fire risk.

A spokesperson said the evidence clearly shows the venue was laid out for dining, with large kitchen facilities, menus focused on meals, tables set with cutlery and condiments and most of the space is dedicated to seated customers. They argued this proves food was the main attraction.

Greene King is now asking the council to reconsider and approve the certificate without delay. If granted, it would officially confirm the Marquis of Granby as a restaurant, making it easier to bring the site back into use.

The council has not yet commented on the new application.

.

Emily Dalton LDRS

.

Marquis of Granby pub on Portsmouth Road, Esher. (Credit: Google Street View)

.

Epsom waste site plans refused after years of noise and disruption complaints

31 January 2026



Plans to retrospectively approve changes at a controversial waste and recycling site near Epsom have been refused, following years of complaints from residents about noise, dust and early-morning lorry movements.

Surrey County Council's planning committee voted to reject the application for land at the Chalk Pit on College Road, where skip hire firm Skip It Epsom Ltd operates, at a meeting on December 17.

Residents speaking at the meeting and objecting to the scheme online slammed the plans. They described how the site had been "destroying their lives" and making it a misery with constant noise, intruding on their home life and impacting nearby schools. Locals complained that site has not been built according to its planning permission.

The application was not for a brand-new site, but to regularise changes that had already been made to buildings and operations at the former waste transfer station, which was granted permission in 2023 to become a materials recycling facility.

However, councillors were told the development had not been built as approved and crucially, a required drainage system was never installed.

The operator wanted permission to change several conditions attached to the original approval, including:

- Buildings being built on a different footprint and with altered materials
- A new entrance and staircase
- Moving noisy waste-sorting machinery into a different building
- Changes to HGV parking and electric vehicle charging points

Officers described most of these changes as relatively minor and, on their own, acceptable even though the site sits in the Green Belt.

So why was it rejected? The refusal came down to one major issue: drainage. Councillors heard that the surface water drainage scheme approved in 2023 had never been installed, and that new assessments now showed a much larger soakaway was needed.

But part of the required drainage system would sit outside the application site, meaning it could not legally be approved or enforced through this planning application.

As a result, officers said an essential planning condition could no longer be met or reimposed, leaving the council with no option but to recommend refusal.

Local residents spoke passionately against the application at the meeting, describing years of disruption since operations ramped up in 2020.

Bernie Muir, local councillor for Epsom, told the committee that the site had been "destroying lives for five years". She said: "People can't use their gardens, open windows or work from home [...] There are serious mental health impacts from the constant noise."

More than 170 objections were submitted overall. Residents complained of:

- Banging, clanging and crashing from skips being dropped
- Heavy lorries arriving as early as 5.30am
- Dust, light pollution and breaches of operating hours
- Noise carrying across the landscape due to the bowl-shaped chalk pit

Fiona, who lives around 350 metres from the site, said she had no problems for years after moving to the area until operations changed. "On some days the noise I experience in my garden is banging, clanging and repetitive crashing," she said.

She also raised concerns about drainage, saying the site sits near a protected groundwater zone and the chalk geology is highly porous. "This is an unfixable flaw," said John Beckett, an Epsom and Ewell borough council member.

Residents' groups also argued that moving noisy machinery and changing the building entrance had directed sound towards homes that were never properly assessed in earlier reports.

Speaking for the applicant, a representative said she was aware of concerns but claimed the developer had not been invited to some of the multi-agency meetings.

Cllr Tim Hall said he was "surprised" by the claim, given the number of meetings held with residents, agencies and council officers over five years.

The applicant's agent defended the criticism by describing the chalk pit as a "very busy site" and it is difficult to keep all the workers across the procedures to keep the doors closed and noise down. She also said the early starts referred to residents were "alleged breaches on the site" and the noise could be coming from elsewhere nearby.

Some councillors acknowledged residents' frustrations, while others pointed out the site has long been industrial. Cllr Ernest Mallett MBE said: "At the end of the day, people bought houses next to an industrial site." But others felt the problems went beyond normal industrial impact.

The refusal does not shut the site down but it does mean the unauthorised changes cannot be approved. To move forward, the operator would need to submit a new full planning application, including a drainage solution that can be properly assessed and enforced.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Related reports:

[A question of Chalk Pit noise and dust](#)

[Chalk Pit action - a tale of two committees](#)

[Chalk Pit debate deferred by late abatement](#)

[Will the dust ever settle on Chalk Pit conflict?](#)

["Heat and Dust" epic in Epsom](#)

Surrey countryside campaigners warn new planning rules risk more speculative development

31 January 2026



Local countryside campaigners have voiced strong concerns over the Government's newly announced changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), warning that the reforms could increase speculative development across Surrey without delivering the affordable housing and infrastructure communities need.

The changes, announced by the Housing Minister this week, form part of the Government's wider pledge to accelerate housebuilding and address England's housing shortage. Ministers say the revised framework is intended to simplify the planning system, reduce delays, and ensure local authorities play a more active role in meeting housing need.

Among the key changes outlined by the Government are a renewed emphasis on meeting housing targets, revisions to how land supply is assessed, and proposals to allow some areas of the Green Belt to be reclassified as so-called "grey belt" land where development is judged to have limited environmental or landscape value. Ministers have also argued that the reforms will reduce repeated legal challenges and appeals that, they say, slow down development.

Responding to the announcement, CPRE Surrey said it was "deeply concerned" that the changes would fail to meet their stated aims while placing greater pressure on countryside land.

Andy Smith of CPRE Surrey said the proposals were "unlikely to meet the Government's aim of speeding up housebuilding but will certainly blight more of our countryside with the shadow of unwanted development".

"Yes, we need more affordable housing but these proposals won't achieve that," he said. "What we will see is a further increase in speculative development which boosts the profits of developers but will not produce the housing or public services that we really need."

CPRE Surrey has questioned why the Government is pursuing development on Green Belt land when national figures indicate there is capacity for at least 1.4 million new homes on brownfield sites across England. Campaigners argue that the absence of a legally enforceable "Brownfield First" policy means developers will continue to prioritise greenfield sites, where land values are higher and projects are more commercially attractive.

"Why, when across England there is space for at least 1.4 million new homes on brownfield sites, does the Government still want to reclassify much of the Green Belt as 'grey belt' and build on it?" Mr Smith asked. "Why do Ministers want us to lose farmland and open spaces to the developers?"

The Government has also said the changes are intended to prevent repeated attempts to overturn planning decisions. In Parliament, the Housing Minister said the reforms would help end a system that allows parties to "come back again and again if they don't get the outcome they want".

CPRE Surrey disputes that characterisation, arguing that it is developers, not local communities, who benefit from repeated appeals. Mr Smith said that if a planning application is approved by a Surrey council, local residents generally have no right of appeal, whereas developers can submit multiple revised applications or appeals following refusals.

"Developers can indeed 'come back again and again' with appeals and revised, often barely changed, planning applications, aiming to wear down the objectors," he said. "The proportion of legal challenges brought by local communities is tiny compared to the number of developments that are pushed through."

While ministers insist the revised NPPF will streamline decision-making and unlock new housing supply, CPRE Surrey said it could not see how the changes would genuinely speed up development or improve outcomes for communities.

"All these changes will do is play into the hands of speculative developers," Mr Smith said.

The revised National Planning Policy Framework is expected to guide planning decisions across England once formally adopted, with local authorities required to update their planning policies in line with the new national framework.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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

Related reports:

110-Home Scheme at Langley Vale Sparks Green Belt Fears

Golf course housing tees off Green Belt preservers

Mole Valley setting a green belt development trend?

Epsom Green Belt Debate Intensifies

Blockbuster cinema and 480 homes plan for Leatherhead town centre

31 January 2026



Hundreds of new homes in blocks of up to 12 storeys high, as well as a three-screen cinema, could be coming to Leatherhead town centre if newly submitted plans are approved. The Leret Partnership, a joint venture between Mole Valley District Council and Kier Property, has submitted its formal application to regenerate the Swan Centre and Bull Hill in Leatherhead. They want to build up to 480 new homes with 81 of those, spread between two blocks, classed as affordable. The site, already set aside for development as part of the council's local plan, would also get a cinema.

The plan has been submitted as a single build but is split across two distinct sites: Bull Hill and the Swan Centre. Detailed plans show Bull Hill will be converted into six blocks of 276 homes, 133 of which will be one-bed flats, with a further 133 two-bed apartments and 10 three-bed homes. The 81 affordable homes will be housed in blocks E and F. The private blocks will be six storeys high while block E will stand five storeys tall and block F rising to nine storeys. There are also further outline plans to go up to 12 storeys at the site to provide an additional 203 homes, office space and potentially a nursery.

The second part of the application covers The Swan Centre, which has served as Leatherhead's shopping hub since it was constructed in the 1980s. The plans want to demolish Leret House to open the space and create a new public square with a three-screen 239-seat cinema. "The Applicant has been in discussion with leisure agents and cinema operators and the building has been designed to accommodate other leisure uses (competitive socialising) should the occupier change in the future", planning documents read.

There are also plans to build a new multi-storey car park, office space, as well as a potential GP surgery, shops, and cafes and restaurants. The council described the submission of the planning application as a key milestone in its Transform Leatherhead regeneration and that, when built, it will bring more people into the town centre. It also expects to receive about £9m in developer contributions, which can then be used on infrastructure and community improvements elsewhere in the borough. Residents are able to submit their views to the council before its planning committee votes on the proposals.

Cllr Keira Vyvyan-Robinson, cabinet member for property and projects, Mole Valley District Council, said: "The submission is a significant milestone in the delivery of the Transform Leatherhead programme and a real step forward in boosting Leatherhead's unique position as the gateway to the Surrey Hills. The proposals will breathe new life into Leatherhead's town centre, rejuvenate the Swan Centre and deliver much-needed homes for the district, providing jobs and securing sustainable investment for the local community."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Image: Jv Planning Submission

Epsom and Ewell's first neighbourhood plan

31 January 2026



A leafy Surrey suburb is about to make its mark for the local community. Stoneleigh and Auriol are poised to be able to say 'yes' or 'no' to planning developments that do not match their design plan for the neighbourhood with legal backing.

Members of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's (EEBC) licensing and planning policy committee gave the new local scheme the go ahead to move to the next stage on November 25. The Stoneleigh and Auriol Neighbourhood Plan (SANP) is the first of its kind in Surrey's smallest borough.

"This plans' compilation has taken an immense amount of effort by all those involved and it's been an enormous undertaking," said Cllr **Tony Froud** (RA Stoneleigh), part of the SANP working group. "The remarkable thing about this is they [the residents group] have done it all on their own with just a keen interest in preserving the character of the neighbourhood. It's an immense body of work by residents, lay people and non-professionals. Due to the costs involved, no outside help could be sought or brought in."

The SANP, along with some tweaks, is set to go to a public referendum in February 2026. If residents vote 'yes', this plan will become law for the area. This will shape what can be built, how it looks and protect things like shops, green spaces, housing character, and more.

If adopted, future planning applications in Stoneleigh and Auriol will be judged against the neighbourhood plan's policies as well as broader strategic policies.

For locals, that could mean tighter control over what gets built. This aims to preserve the area's distinctive character, leafy streets and sense of community, while still allowing carefully managed change. The SANP must strike a balance between protecting what residents love and accommodating new housing and development where appropriate.

The journey has not been quick. The neighbourhood forum behind the plan took on the task over five years ago in gathering evidence, consulting residents, drafting policies, and refining proposals.

Cllr **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) said: "This has been a great example of what residents can do when they want to put together really clear guidance around planning." He told the committee that not every group of residents can put in the amount of work, time and effort into making a neighbourhood plan rather than campaigning and protesting about developments and planning decisions.

After the Plan was submitted to EEBC in May 2025, a six-week public consultation took place between June 20 and August 1. Eight organisations and individuals, including expert bodies, submitted comments. An independent examiner was then appointed and delivered their report on 23 October 23, recommending the plan proceed to referendum subject to a number of changes.

Council planners and the neighbourhood forum have now accepted all the examiner's recommendations. The revised plan contains 11 clear policies, setting out rules for building, design, green spaces, flood risk, transport and more.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Image: View from Newbury Gardens down to Stoneleigh Park Road. (Credit: Epsom and Ewell Borough Council documents)

Epsom and Ewell housing targets in the crosshairs

31 January 2026



The borough of Epsom and Ewell is currently engaged in a critical juncture of its planning future. The Council's Regulation 19 draft Local Plan is under examination by the Planning Inspector, and at the same time the Government's

own statisticians, the Office for National Statistics (ONS), have published their new household projections. The juxtaposition of these two sets of figures highlights a growing tension between demographic trends, the Government's national housing policy tool (the "standard method"), and local deliverability constraints.

Household growth projected by ONS

According to the ONS's "2022-based" household projections for local authority areas, the number of households in Epsom & Ewell is forecast to rise from approximately **31,299** in 2022 to **35,493** in 2042 — an increase of about **4,194 households** over 20 years, which corresponds to roughly **209 additional households per year**.

It is important to emphasise that these are demographic projections (households forming under assumed migration, fertility, mortality etc). They do *not* translate directly into the number of homes that must be built: they make no allowance for planning constraints, land supply, local infrastructure, or policy decisions.

What the draft Local Plan proposes

The draft Local Plan for EEBC, covering the period 2022-2040, sets out the following key housing supply/requirement numbers:

- A minimum housing requirement of **4,700 dwellings** over the Plan period, which equates to approximately **261 dwellings per year**.
- An identified supply to deliver around **4,900-4,914 dwellings**, providing a modest buffer above the minimum requirement.
These numbers reflect the Council's assessment of what is realistically deliverable given local constraints (Green Belt, flood risk, infrastructure, viability etc).

The "standard method" for housing need

Under national planning policy (the National Planning Policy Framework or NPPF) the "standard method" is the Government's default tool for calculating housing need in local authorities. This is not a requirement automatically to be delivered by local authorities, but sets a starting point that local plans should address.

In the case of EEBC:

- In the Plan examination evidence the Council cites a standard method calculation of **10,242 dwellings** over the plan period, which equates to about **569 dwellings per year** — a figure more than double the Plan's proposed annual rate.
- Separately, analysts have calculated that under the more recent **stock-based standard method** (introduced in late 2024) which uplifts areas with higher affordability pressures, EEBC's implied requirement would be around **871 dwellings per year**, i.e. nearly 900 homes a year.

Why the "affordability uplift" matters

A key message that has emerged from CPRE Surrey and elected members is that the new standard method gives very heavy weight to the "affordability uplift" — the ratio of house prices to local earnings — and that this seriously disadvantages boroughs such as Epsom & Ewell.

As **Tim Murphy** (CPRE Surrey) put it: "The latest numbers from the Government's own statisticians show that the housing target set by the Government for Epsom and Ewell is totally unrealistic. The target would mean that, over the next twenty years, the Borough would lose much of its existing open space - the character of the area would be changed for the worse for ever."

Specifically:

- The standard method compares local house prices with *local* earnings. In Epsom & Ewell many resident households earn London or Canary Wharf salaries (commuting to central London) which inflate local house prices but are not captured in the earnings base used for the formula.
- There is no adjustment (in the national method) for such commuting-induced distortion of house prices. The result: the formula treats Epsom & Ewell as a high affordability-pressure area and drives a very large uplift in the 'need' figure.
In short: the standard method may be overstating "need" in places where price inflation is driven by non-local earnings rather than purely local demand or local pay.

Contrasting the figures: ONS vs Local Plan vs Standard Method

Here are the headline comparisons:

- **ONS household formation projection:** ~209 new households per year (2022-2042)
- **EEBC draft Local Plan requirement:** ~261 homes per year (2022-2040)

- **Standard method (2023 NPPF basis):** ~569 homes per year (10,242 over the period)
- **Updated stock-based standard method (2024 NPPF basis):** ~871 homes per year (analyst estimate)

What this shows:

- The Local Plan's 261 homes per year is *above* the demographic projection of ~209 households per year, thus it can be argued that the Plan is planning for growth above simple demographic trend.
- However, it remains *far below* the standard method starting points (569 or 871 per annum) – representing a significant gap between what the national policy tool implies and the local Plan provides.
- The gap calls into question how far the Borough should be expected to “deliver” the full standard-method figure given local constraints, and whether a higher rate is justified (or deliverable) in practice.

Additional context from councillors

Councillor **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) notes that: “Epsom and Ewell has a huge housing crisis now and can't provide suitable homes for its current residents so the borough needs to build more than just enough to keep up with household growth. There are people in serious need of rehousing who are waiting years ... the Residents Association ... needs to stop looking for reasons to block new housing and start working with developers to build decent homes for residents.”

This underlines that local housing need is not only about future households but existing unmet need: social housing shortages, long waiting lists, temporary accommodation of poor quality, and the knock-on effects on children's life chances, health, education and emotional well-being.

Councillor **James Lawrence** (LibDem College) adds further policy context, reminding us that the draft Local Plan is being prepared under the December 2023 NPPF (which uses the earlier standard method approach). He points out that the updated 2024 NPPF uses the stock-based standard method, raising further questions of whether the Plan needs to be reassessed in light of the new method. He also highlights the circularity argument: using future population projections to determine how many homes to build, when building more homes will itself change future population.

Councillor **Peter O'Donovan** (RA Ewell Court), Chair of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Licensing Policy and Planning Committee responded: “The Councils Local Plan was submitted to government in March 2025 and is now being examined by a government appointed Planning Inspector, this is known as the examination stage. The revised ONS household projections data do not impact the examination of the Local Plan. Keep up to date with the Local Plan Examination here: [Local Plan Examination | Epsom and Ewell Borough Council](#)”

Implications for Epsom & Ewell

The mismatch between demographic projections on the one hand and national policy-based housing “need” on the other has several implications:

- **Deliverability and infrastructure:** The higher standard method numbers assume a very much higher rate of building than the Borough has historically achieved. If such rates were imposed, the supply of suitable land, infrastructure capacity (transport, schools, services), viability of development and environmental constraints (Green Belt, flood zones) would all come under significant pressure.
- **Green space and character:** As Tim Murphy rightly flags, if nearly nine hundred homes per year were required over twenty years, the borough's character, open spaces, suburban nature and amenity would face significant change. For many local residents preservation of character is a live concern.
- **Affordability link and commuting distortion:** The standard method's reliance on local earnings means that boroughs like Epsom & Ewell (with many commuters earning London wages) may be unfairly treated. The commuting effect inflates prices but is not compensated by the earnings measure. The formula may therefore over-inflate “need” in such areas.
- **Focus on genuine need:** The local context shows that, beyond future household growth, there is an existing backlog of need (e.g., social housing, temporary accommodation, unsuitable homes). If the borough simply aimed to match new household formation it might still fail to meet the existing need. Councillors emphasise that making provision for those already housed in inadequate conditions must be part of the strategy.
- **Policy and timing:** The draft Local Plan uses the earlier standard method (2023 NPPF) calculations; the switched methodology in the 2024 NPPF potentially changes the baseline “need” significantly. This raises questions as to whether the Plan remains future-proof and whether the examination will ask for an updated technical basis.

For the readership of the Epsom & Ewell Times and stakeholders across the local community, the following points merit emphasis:

- Clarify that the ONS figure (~209 homes per year) shows what is *likely* in demographic terms, but that housing targets set by policy may differ significantly.

- Highlight the role of the affordability uplift and how the standard method treats areas like Epsom & Ewell (with commuting wage influences) differently from truly local-wage areas.
- Encourage the Council and stakeholders to scrutinise whether the standard method’s assumptions are appropriate in the local context and whether the draft Plan provides sufficient evidence to justify deviation from higher figures.
- Promote transparency on how the Plan addresses existing housing deprivation, not just future household formation: how many social or affordable homes, how many temporary accommodation units, how many conversions of unsuitable homes, etc.
- Ask whether the local infrastructure, land supply and environmental constraints realistically allow delivery of very high build rates, and whether the Plan sufficiently tests viability at the higher levels implied by the standard method.
- Encourage local residents to comment on the Plan and its housing provision strategy, especially in light of the gap between national “need” figures and local deliverability.
- Recommend that the Council monitors any changes in Government policy or standard method revisions (e.g., if further changes to the affordability uplift or commuting adjustments are introduced) and updates the Plan accordingly.

Epsom & Ewell’s draft Local Plan appears modest but credible when viewed against demographic household growth alone. However, it falls far short of the housing “need” implied by the Government’s standard method calculations. The prominence of the affordability uplift in that method raises particular concerns for commuter-belt boroughs such as this, where local earnings do not fully capture the incomes of many resident households. The key challenge for the borough is to strike a balance between realistic deliverability, protection of local character and amenity, and the clear social housing need that exists today. The examination process offers an opportunity to test whether the Plan is positively prepared, justified and effective — but it will also require robust scrutiny of whether national formulae appropriately reflect local circumstances.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Related reports:

[Stage 2 Examination of Epsom & Ewell’s Local Plan opens Tuesday](#)

[Epsom & Ewell’s Local Plan under the Green microscope](#)

[The Local Plan plot thickens after revised NPPF](#)

..... and many more. Search “local plan”.

Surrey home extension charges aired in Parliament

31 January 2026



“Complex and inflexible” rules that unintentionally and “unfairly penalise” homeowners with six-figure fines “for the apparent crime of building a home extension” will be reexamined, the housing minister has said.

The problem of Community Infrastructure Levy charges being unfairly or disproportionately applied to homeowners has inflicted pain on dozens of Waverley residents with the borough council saying it is tied by Government guidelines on how to enforce the charges.

The charges are supposed to help offset the impact of large scale developments in an area - and help fund the infrastructure to support it.

In Waverley, dozens of homeowners have found themselves inadvertently caught in the tangle of bureaucracy. One resident, Steve Dally was stung with a £70,000 ‘contribution’ with others threatened with imprisonment or having their

homes repossessed.

The issue came to a head this week in Parliament with Godalming and Ash MP Sir Jeremy Hunt raising the matter to housing minister Matthew Pennycook.

Sir Jeremy said: “My constituent Steve Dally was charged £70,000 by Liberal Democrat-controlled Waverley borough council for the apparent crime of building a home extension. I met the housing minister earlier this year to talk about abuse of the community infrastructure levy. Could he update the House on his plans to stop it?”

Mr Pennycook told the commons that he agreed there had been a number of “unintended consequences of the 2010 CIL regulations—they have unfairly penalised some homeowners.

“I can only reiterate the commitments I gave him during that meeting. In principle, we are committed to finding a solution to this issue, and I am more than happy to meet him again and update him on the steps we have taken in the interim.”

The news has been welcomed by Waverley Borough Council, which has set up its own discretionary review panel to examine cases of wrongdoing – although uptake has been extremely slow with only two cases coming forward so far.

Councillor Liz Townsend, Waverley Borough Council portfolio holder for planning and economic development said: “We welcome the recent comments made in Parliament by the Housing Minister acknowledging the unintended consequences of the current Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) regulations.

“The legislation is overly complex and inflexible, and like many residents we are frustrated by a system that can leave homeowners facing large bills for genuine mistakes. We have been pressing the Government for reform for some time, so it is encouraging to hear a clear commitment to finding a solution.

“While national legislation limits what councils can do, we are doing everything possible to support our residents. She added: “The case of Mr Dally, which was raised in Parliament, was one of the situations that highlighted the need for change.

“Following discussions with him, the council reviewed his case and concluded that his CIL charge should be withdrawn and refunded. His experience helped shape the introduction of our Discretionary Review Scheme, so that other residents would have a clear route to request a review.”

The council said it would continue to lobby Government for urgent reform to ensure the CIL system “is clearer, fairer and more proportionate for homeowners” and called for the collaborative work between themselves, Sir Jeremy and ministers “to help shape a fairer and more compassionate system that still supports local infrastructure.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Godalming and Ash MP Sir Jeremy Hunt in parliament raising the issue of CIL injustice (Parliament TV)

Related reports:

[Waverley not waiving planning fees spark protests](#)

[Planning a house extension in Epsom and Ewell? A hard lesson from Waverley](#)

Historic Surrey Hills mansion saved from falling into “rack and ruin”

31 January 2026



An additional 27 homes will be built at an abandoned Surrey Hills mansion and stables to stop the heritage buildings falling into “rack and ruin”. In February 2023, Mole Valley District Council approved the creation of Audley Headley Court, a 112-home retirement community at the historic site. Now, following the October 1 meeting of the council’s development committee, the extra units will be added to the green belt land to make the project financially viable to the developers.

The plans were passed without objection from councillors who were echoing residents’ desire to see the old site returned to use and for its much-loved garden spaces to be opened to the public. David Preedy of Headley Parish Council said: “Headley Court is critical to our community both in terms of its history and the impact on the village.” He admitted the extra homes were not without controversy but that the parish backed the plans to put an end to the “years of disruption and significant decay to the heritage of our village and the gardens and the heritage buildings”.

The mansion house has been vacant since the departure of the Ministry of Defence, with the Jubilee Complex gardens used by the NHS and Surrey County Council during the pandemic. The estate has also been used to support Help for

Heroes, those who fought in the Afghanistan war and more recently the NHS throughout the pandemic.

Developers said the refurbishment and reuse of listed mansion houses and stables, alongside sensitive reinstatement of the extensive grounds, will make much of the land publicly accessible for the first time. It would also help meet the need for specialist housing for older people as well as bring social and community benefits, the meeting heard.

The applicant's agent said: "It has received no objections from the local community with whom we have engaged extensively since our first involvement with the site back in early 2022. We will continue to ingratiate ourselves into the local community as we have done elsewhere and bring the site back to its former glory."

Councillor Roger Adams (Liberal Democrat, Bookham West) said: "This is a historic site and it would be a great shame to see it fall into rack and ruin." He added: "It was a pity that green belt land must be taken but on the other hand if it must be taken to preserve the whole site and improve the whole site, then so be it."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Headley Court. Credit Angle Property.

Related report:

14 against 59 = 70? Dilemma for Headley

Stage 2 Examination of Epsom & Ewell's Local Plan opens Tuesday

31 January 2026



The Inspector appointed to examine Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's draft Local Plan, **C Masters MA (Hons) FRTPI**, will open Stage 2 hearings at **Epsom Town Hall, The Parade, KT18 5BY**, on **Tuesday 30 September 2025 at 9.30am**.

These hearings test whether the Plan is "sound" — whether it has been positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national planning policy. The hearings are open to the public for observation from the Council Chamber gallery. Only invited participants may speak, but all are welcome to attend and watch the process unfold.

Hearing dates:

- Tue 30 Sept (09:30 start)
- Wed 1 Oct
- Thu 2 Oct
- Fri 3 Oct (10:00 start)
- Tue 7 Oct
- Wed 8 Oct
- Thu 9 Oct
- Fri 10 Oct (reserve day)

The full hearing programme, Inspector's questions and examination library can be found on the Council's Local Plan examination page.

Spotlight on Horton Farm (Site Allocation 35)

Among many proposed sites across the borough, **Horton Farm (SA35)** is by far the largest single allocation, earmarked for around **1,250 homes, a 7-hectare public park and 10 Gypsy & Traveller pitches**. It sits next to Horton Cemetery and near Horton Country Park.

- **Clarendon Park Residents' Association (Alex Duval)** argue that the Council has not demonstrated the "exceptional circumstances" required to release high-performing Green Belt land. They raise concerns about

flooding, sewage, school places and transport, and question why alternative sites for the Traveller pitches were not properly considered.

- **CPRE Surrey (Tim Murphy)** objects to the loss of Green Belt at Horton Farm, urging a stronger focus on brownfield redevelopment and urban densities. Council for the Protection of Rural England.
- **Friends of Horton Cemetery (Lionel Blackman)** do not oppose Horton Farm outright but call for binding commitments that developer contributions restore the historic cemetery as a garden of rest.
- **The Church Commissioners**, who own Horton Farm, strongly support the allocation. Their planning consultants argue it is a sustainable and deliverable location, capable of providing affordable and family housing, community facilities and transport links. They accept surface water flooding is a constraint but say it can be managed through design. They oppose the Council's request for 20% biodiversity net gain, though they commit to meeting national standards.
- See our report on an apparent conflict of interest concerning this allocation for the Council's consultant who's employer also represents the Commissioners. Conflict on Epsom's Green Belt plans of another kind?

Other sites

The Inspector will also be examining numerous other proposed development sites across the borough. Horton Farm is singled out here because of its size and prominence, but EET will continue reporting on the full range of allocations and community responses.

Practical note for readers

- Public seating is first-come, so arrive early for 9:30 starts.
- Proceedings are formal but led by the Inspector, not adversarial.
- Key documents, timetables and updates are on the Council's Local Plan examination page.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Related reports:

[Epsom & Ewell's Local Plan under the Green microscope](#)

[Epsom and Ewell Local Plan Submitted for Examination](#)

[Epsom and Ewell Council response to Local Plan criticism](#)

[The Local Plan plot thickens after revised NPPF](#)

[Council minority vote Local Plan to next stage with Green Belt in](#)

[...and many more - search "local plan" in our search box.](#)

From field to fight: Bramley camp faces enforcement questions

31 January 2026



An unauthorised traveller camp has been built on land earmarked for inclusion in the Surrey Hills National Landscape - and now plans to make the site permanent have been submitted. Witnesses reported several caravans moving on to Unstead Lane in Bramley last week, sparking frustrations among residents over the lack of enforcement action. Since then a petition has been created calling on immediate action to be taken - with more than 600 people already signing.

It says: "Residents and taxpayers expect and deserve equal protection under planning law. The Surrey Hills National Landscape and Green Belt exist to safeguard our countryside for the benefit of all, not to be eroded by unlawful development. Allowing this encampment to remain would set a dangerous precedent that planning law can be ignored without consequence."

Guildford Borough Council has said it was aware of the work carried out and understood people's concerns. Officers visited the encampment and completed background work to gain a full understanding of the situation.

Councillor Jane Austin, leader of the Conservative opposition group in neighbouring Waverley Borough Council, represents the Bramley and Womersley ward near the site. She said: "People went to bed on Friday looking out to a field and now they have this. Saturday the road was blocked and they were clearly doing something without planning permission, but nobody could get hold of anyone. That field was due to be national landscape land, deemed to be of that high quality. The land is on floodplain and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, they won't ever be legally built. People around here are reasonable and agree the GTL (Gypsy Traveller League) community need somewhere to live. Everybody should follow the law of the land without exception, planning is there to build sustainable communities and must be followed."

Councils must provide adequate land for housing - whether fixed homes or traveller pitches. If they cannot demonstrate enough provision, sustainable planning applications are difficult to reject as they are often won on appeal - with the council liable for costs. In 2024 Guildford Borough Council was only able to identify 2.59 years supply for traveller pitches, below the minimum five years. Elsewhere in Surrey, Runnymede Borough Council's decades-long failure to provide the legal minimum number of Gypsy and Traveller pitches has forced families to take matters into their own hands and build their own. Runnymede's planning committee recently felt obligated to approve 12 new pitches in Hardwick Lane, Chertsey, despite concerns the site would be overcrowded and the roads unsafe.

Guildford Borough Council said it could not be expected to predict or prevent this type of incident occurring, but would react and manage it as quickly as possible. A spokesperson said: "If a breach of planning control is confirmed on any site in the borough, we have several enforcement options including negotiation and formal action. However, the enforcement powers available to local authorities do not achieve an instant solution."

A planning application for the site was submitted on Saturday September 13. If it contains the correct paperwork, the council must validate it - with nearby residents contacted and given the opportunity to submit their views before any decision is made.

Surrey County Councillor Matt Furniss said he has been speaking with Guildford's planning team and that Surrey Highways Enforcement has also visited the site to assess the new unauthorised access onto the highway for safety and to determine next steps. He added: "It is always disappointing when some individuals choose to work outside the planning process and I will be pressing both councils for a quick resolution."

MP Jeremy Hunt said: "Residents all express the same sentiment - why is there so little action to address unauthorised encampments like this, which are appearing with increasing frequency. It is absolutely infuriating to see the law being ignored this way - and the people who do it getting away scot-free. This latest case is another rural field, recognised as being of such quality that it is earmarked for inclusion in the Surrey Hills National Landscape. Yet local people now face the prospect of potentially years of planning enforcement action - with no guarantee of success. The point is that such drawn-out processes risk consuming vast amounts of council time and money, while the local community continues to suffer the consequences. Early intervention and decisive action such as prompt issuance of a Stop Notice would help prevent situations like this from worsening."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Image of site in Unstead Lane, Bramley

Elmbridge resists London's creep into Surrey

31 January 2026



Outline plans for 60 homes on the edge of a Surrey village have been scrapped again in a bid to stop “London creeping towards us”.

Elmbridge councillors said the land north of Raleigh Drive in Claygate is green belt not ‘grey belt’ and ruled it unsuitable for housing at a planning meeting on September 16.

They also said the plans failed the flood risk ‘sequential test’ meaning safer sites should be looked at first before building there.

The scheme would have seen new homes (up to 50 per cent affordable), open space and landscaping built on the land north of Raleigh Drive and to the east of Claygate House.

The application triggered more than 300 objections from residents, alongside opposition from Claygate Parish Council. Concerns centred on traffic, flooding and the loss of open countryside.

Cllr Janet Turner said: “I have seen over the years how London is creeping towards us.” The member for Hinchley Wood explained: “When you come out of London to Hinchley Wood or Esher or Long Ditton, you will immediately relax because you have an open aspect.

“This is what Elmbridge and Surrey are all about. This is the entrance into our cultural area and we must protect it. Once it’s gone you cannot bring it back.”

Other members agreed, arguing if you weakened one patch of the green belt, you weakened the whole metropolitan ring. Cllr Alistair Mann described it as “death by a thousand cuts” to the green belt if piecemeal applications keep being approved.

The site, next to Claygate house, once home to a bowls green, pitch and putt course and tennis courts, has reportedly fallen into disrepair.

A similar plan was refused in 2023 and dismissed at appeal last year with inspectors at the time ruling it was inappropriate development in the green belt.

Planning officers initially recommended the new scheme for approval, arguing that housing demand and national policy around the green belt has changed.

Elmbridge can currently only demonstrate a 0.9-year housing supply- well below the five years required by the government. Elmbridge currently has a house building target of 1,443 homes annually.

“Our housing need is so critical now, I don’t think this scratchy bit of land is putting green belt in danger,” said Cllr Elaine Sesemann.

She explained: “I would protect greenbelt forever along with every other councillor in this chamber but the world of planning has changed so dramatically.”

Council leader Mike Rollings admitted the local housing need has dramatically increased since 2023 when the plans were first put forward. However Cllr Rolling still determined the square patch of land was not appropriate for house building.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Illustrative view looking south of application site (left) and former Claygate House with Shanly Homes Oaklands Park development to the rear (Credit: Elmbridge Borough Council)