

Umpire pulls up stumps on cricket plan

30 April 2024



A long-standing Surrey cricket club's ambitious plans to construct modern facilities has sparked controversy in the local community, leading to a tense planning decision.

Banstead Cricket Club's plans to modernise its ground have been rejected, by the narrowest of margins. The club, which has been in the village for more than a century and a half, had hoped to update its dilapidated changing rooms and clubhouse to give it a home ground fit for the 21st century.

Residents living near the ground objected over the harm it would do to the character of the green belt. In a nail-biting finish it hinged on whether there were exceptional circumstances to build on the green belt. In the end it came down to the chairman to cast the deciding vote after members were split down the middle.

In an unusual turn of events the planning chair voted against officer recommendations and the cricket club's plans were refused. Councillor Simon Parnall said: "I knew this was going to happen. You have your name on the block sometimes."

He added: "Given the weight of the meeting, and the way that people have their feelings quite openly expressed, I, contrary to my normal position which is to support officers, I think now I ought to stand and vote for the reason for refusal because this is so controversial and it would need another go."

Reasons the club had wanted new facilities included money gained by renting out the space for events. It was also in part due to the massive growth of the game among girls and women, and therefore the need for changing rooms for women.

Martin Long said he was representing the 107 objectors who had written in against the development, where he claims the vast majority live in Banstead Village. He said: "The report does not mention that of the 157 letters of support only 10 per cent are from addresses within the borough.

He said there are three other community venues in the borough, all with better access, and questioned why a fourth was needed. He told the meeting that the Lady Neville park was given to the people of Banstead, not the Banstead Cricket Club.

Opposition focused on the scale of the development and not the club's need to modernise. He added: "A vast two-storey development would be an appalling blot on the green belt, the surrounding treeline and the view from the park itself.

"A single storey cricket club house is all that is needed not a vast function venue with an all round terrace. The impact of noise and traffic that this new facility will have on residents is unimaginable."

The Thursday, April 24, meeting of Reigate and Banstead Borough Council's planning committee heard the primary focus of the club was the provision of cricket but it needed revenue for other activities to survive financially. The club wanted to demolish its current clubhouse and replace it with a new modern facility to conform with "Sport England and the sports governing body standards".

It also wanted to refurbish its pavilion to create a dedicated changing space for women and girls. The plans had been recommended for approval and received more letters of support than opposition during the consultation stage, although it was argued the majority if this came from outside the borough.

Ray Smythe, a resident of De Burgh Park which backs on to the grounds, spoke against the plans. He said they were inappropriate for the green belt and should only be approved if there were very special circumstances.

He said: "The positioning of the new premises will eliminate the only distinct view from the recreation ground that is not currently obscured by buildings in the area." He added that clubhouse's second floor was not needed for cricket and the financial implications were not a planning matter. He said they could also reduce the cost of the project by scaling back the clubhouse.

Arguing for the plans was Ian Thorpe who told the meeting the club had been in Banstead since 1850 and that its facilities were no longer fit for purpose. The new proposals, which had already been scaled back and revised, was needed to fit in with the latest guidelines for sport.

He said the clubhouse was no longer compliant for all players regardless of gender or age and that the site would operate under its current licensing hours with no desire to extend them further. He said: "Its hoped that the facility will be more than just a cricket club to the local community. With this proposal Banstead Cricket Club is seeking to offer its members and the local community a clubhouse to be proud of."

Related reports:

[Just not cricket to replace Banstead pavilion?](#)

Image - visualisation of new pavilion and current inset.

Prairie dogs ‘cock a snoop’ at planning

30 April 2024



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s Planning Committee grappled 18th April with the prairie dogs enclosure at Hobbledown Farm in Epsom.

The proprietors of this animal amusement park had established the enclosure without prior permission and were seeking retrospective permission from the Council.

There were several other developments on the site for which retrospective permission was being sought. A number of residents of the adjacent Clarendon Park housing estate objected, being particularly fearful of an increased risk of flooding arising from these unauthorised developments.

The debate began with Councillors complaining of insufficient time to process numerous emails supplied to the committee just minutes before the meeting started.

Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) protested “I really wouldn’t want to consider these applications this evening. I can’t even say if the information is relevant to the application or not. It was too much information and it came too late.” Later she accepted assurances that the emails did not materially change the application.

Cllr **Julian Freeman** (Lib Dem College) declined to read the emails in question stating: “I made a specific point of not going through all the email exchange, because it doesn’t form part of the papers for this meeting. I can understand that there is ambiguity, and there are questions to be asked and answered, and the place to do that is here and now, not by an email exchange.”

Cllr **Jan Mason** (RA Ruxley) gave her opinion “I’ve got a question. And probably everyone sitting here will agree, I hope, but I’m heartily fed up. I want to know how many retrospective blooming applications we’ve had to sit here and go through, only to be told “it’s already there, they’ve done it”. So why do we bother to have a planning committee?”

The Chairman, Cllr **Humphrey Reynolds** (RA West Ewell) responded that her question was not a matter for the Planning Committee.

Later in a further forthright statement Councillor Mason said: “I don’t think there’s anything we can do. This firm knew perfectly well what they were going to do. And they’ve cocked a snook at us. It’s our land. It is on the green belt. They’ve made it like Disney World. That’s what they want. And I’m just angry that we keep doing these little bits of drip, drip, drip. So in the end they get what they want. We’ll all say, “Oh we can’t pull it down”. Me, I’d pull everything down that they’ve put in.”

The applications had come before the committee in February and been deferred for more information about flood risks. The ward Councillor for Horton, Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative) was invited to speak. He argued: “I do not believe any substantial additional information or clarity has been provided. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out strict tests to protect people and property from flooding, which all local planning authorities are expected to follow. Where these tests are not met new developments should not be allowed. One of these tests the NPPF requires is the application of a “sequential test”. Where the test is not performed or not met, development should not be allowed.”

A local resident, **Alexander Duval**, was invited to address the meeting and he said: “As the majority of committee members and planning officers will be aware, the residents of Clarendon Park have objected to a significant number of the planning applications submitted by Hobbledown over recent years. The majority of these have been retrospective: build first, get permission later. Numerous compelling planning reasons have been put forward by residents for refusing planning permission. Where the developments have not complied with national planning guidance, local planning policies and precedents set by case law. Despite this, all planning applications have been recommended for approval by officers. The residents, those directly affected by the applications, are at a loss as to why this should be the case. Hobbledown is located within the green belt. According to national planning guidance and local development policies, this is supposed to afford protection against development and seems to elsewhere, but not on this site.”

There was controversy as to whether Mr Duval’s several other written objections had been made available to Councillors to consider. Cllr **Bernie Muir** (Conservative Horton) “The planning committee should, when considering an application, take into account all views on material and planning considerations that are expressed in a way that is openly heard and fairly considered. I’m really worried about this process. This happened last time. Mr. Duval repeatedly asked where his comments were on the website, and they weren’t there. They were posted by the council on the day of the meeting. Twelve minutes [the time allotted to Mr Duval to speak at the meeting] is not the same as articulating point by point. You’ve presumed that every councillor here has received something from Alex Duval.”

She added: “To be told something is being received, but it is not uploaded to the website, so we can’t see it. That’s not

acceptable.”

Discussions continued long into the night with references to planning policies, flood risk assessments, conditions and other details.

The marathon three and a half hour meeting concluded with a series of votes. Generally, permissions were granted across the board of hitherto unauthorised changes at Hobbledown, some on the casting vote of the Chair.

Image: PictureWendy

The Bucknill plan stops here....

30 April 2024



A plan to cram 5 three-bedroomed houses on a single bungalow plot in Bucknills Close, Epsom did not meet Councillors’ approval.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s Planning Committee met 18th April and refused an application by Nuro Homes Ltd despite their agent’s plea to the meeting to allow it.

Plain speaking Cllr **Jan Mason** (RA Ruxley) gave her reasons for refusal and her own strong sentiments on the application in saying to her committee colleagues: “Right, here we go again. Same old “Back Land”. Call it what you like: “Development”. And as my grandma would say, trying to put a pint into a half pint pot.... They could have designed it so that they weren’t in Outer Hebrides with their bins to try and take to the front. Ridiculous.” [A reference to challenges to the Council collection of domestic refuse.]

She added: “I think this is not well thought out, any of this. And I put it down to the fact that you’re trying to cram too much in. It makes money. We all know the story. I’m not convinced about the flooding,, if there’s slight flooding around, this will get it. It’s just all too much. So I’m sorry, but as far as I’m concerned, this is ill designed. So for my part, I’m not happy.”

During the meeting it was argued that children would use the short-cut the development would create. Cllr **Neil Dallen** (RA Town) was for refusal on the grounds of highway safety and the distance that residents would have to take their bins for collection. Commenting on a varied application he said “It’s fine moving the bins another few yards towards the road, but there is still a huge distance for those to go. The waste manager has said it’s unacceptable.”

Cllr. **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) observed: “If we were proposing a refusal on highways grounds, we have to take into account that we’re flying solo because Surrey County Council aren’t behind us on this, and they are the highway authority.”

Cllr. **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) was concerned about routine refusal of new housing developments and said: “It is providing for homes for people in Epsom and Ewell and we know how dire the housing situation is in the borough. I don’t think any committee with a response to its residents can continue to refuse every single application that comes in front of it.”

The application was refused by five votes to four, the Chair Cllr. **Humphrey Reynolds** (RA West Ewell) not voting.

Getting teed off by golf club’s landfill designs

30 April 2024



A Surrey golf club has been accused of being a “landfill site in disguise” after anger at the sheer volume of heavy lorries

that could be needed to drop waste off at the site.

The owners of Merrist Wood Golf Club, off Holly Lane, are hoping to redesign and reconstruct the existing course including water features and the creation of a heathland and wetland habitat.

The remodelling would include making use of nearly 600k tonnes of recovered 'inert materials' across the 55-hectare site. 'Inert waste' is discarded materials that do not biodegrade or chemically react with other substances.

These plans, which are currently under consideration, could see around 141 Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) movements at the sites for up to 256 days a year across the possible two years of the renovation project. A six-hour period is proposed for these movements meaning at peak times there could be one HGV movement every 2.5 minutes.

The planning application has received 55 objections and only one letter of support. Opposing the application, locals have raised concerns the HGVs would exacerbate an already congested road and increase wear and tear. One resident said: "Everything is just a constant worry. We moved here for peace and now it feels like it has been taken away."

Road safety issues were highlighted by some residents, suggesting footpaths will be "destroyed" and there will be "no safe place" for students and parents to cross the road for Merrist Wood College and Fairlands School. Locals expressed fears about how the HGV movement would impact on 'school run' times and rush hour, citing the narrow lanes as already dangerous.

Despite residents' anxieties about the development's impact on the road, Surrey County Council (SCC) officers have concluded that "there are no unacceptable highway and transport impacts".

The applicant argues the many road journeys over the construction period will be less disruptive than traffic caused by piece-meal course maintenance. As the source of the inert soils is still unknown, it is likely routes from both the north and the south will be used to access the site.

Comments asked what 'inert materials' will consist of, with some dubious of where the matter will be sourced. Sceptical commentators have described it as a "landfill scheme in disguise" with the amount of material suggesting it is being "dumped on the site".

Rather than 'borrowing' existing soil on the course, inert waste is described as the 'best way' to create new terrain. Planning documents state if inert waste material was not used in the project, 'virgin' soil would have to be used.

Constructed in 1996, the applicant argues the 18-hole golf course has 'deteriorated' and "suffers from a number of underlying design defects". Taking over the course in 2020, Lavershots Oaks Ltd complained the club has a "poor reputation' and is 'failing' as a sports club and as a business.

The Guildford MP Angela Richardson has written to residents affected by the Merrist Wood Golf Club planning application to alert them to the proposals and the consultation. She raised concerns about the traffic disturbance, congestion caused and whether detritus will be left on the ground.

The Wooldridge Group (formerly known as Lavershot Oaks), which specialises in civil and contract build projects, filed for administration on February 5 this year. The Wooldridge Group has been approached for comment.

Consultation on the application ends April 16.

Image: Entrance to Merrist Wood Golf Club. (Credit: Google Street View)

Council getting belted by Green Group?

30 April 2024



The **Epsom Green Belt Group** has submitted a "complaint" to **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council**, expressing grave concerns over what they perceive as significant failures in the governance, oversight, and leadership of the **Local Plan**. The group's submission outlines several key issues they believe have hindered the proper scrutiny and preparation of the plan, which will shape planning permissions for buildings in the future.

In their communication to the Council, the Epsom Green Belt Group emphasizes the importance of preserving green spaces and utilizing brownfield sites to deliver affordable homes within the borough. They express frustration at what

they see as resistance from planning officers to cooperate with members of the **Licensing and Planning Policy Committee (LPPC)**, hindering the committee's ability to provide direction and challenge to the Local Plan.

According to the group, the LPPC, tasked with influencing and controlling the development and use of land in the Borough, has not fulfilled its obligations effectively. They argue that the LPPC should have been actively engaged in the preparation, adoption, and review of the statutory Development Plan, including Local Development Documents. However, their analysis reveals a concerning lack of involvement and debate on critical aspects of the plan.

Of particular concern, the Group argues, is the apparent absence of discussion or challenge regarding the Spatial Strategy, Plan policies, and critical decisions related to the Local Plan. Despite the completion of a public consultation, which garnered 1,736 responses, the Group asserts that none of the LPPC meetings addressed the results or expected impact on the Regulation 19 Local Plan. This lack of engagement is compounded by the cancellation of several LPPC meetings and a significant increase in the Local Plan budget without corresponding scrutiny or accountability.

The Epsom Green Belt Group urges the council to address these issues urgently and provide clarity on the timetable for scrutiny, challenge, and direction of the Local Plan by the LPPC. They demand assurance that the committee will have the freedom, opportunity, time, and resources necessary to fulfill its mandate without undue constraints or interference from officers. Additionally, they call for a contingency plan in case of further delays to the Local Plan timetable.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council were swift to respond with answers to **six** demands made by the Green Group:

1. The detailed timetable for the scrutiny, challenge and direction of each significant element of the Local Plan by the LPPC

The Proposed Submission Local Plan with a recommendation will come to Licensing and Planning Policy Committee (LPPC) in November 2024. Councillors can discuss, debate and if needed change the recommendation at this meeting. If supported, the recommendation would then go to full council in December 2024 for all Councillors to discuss and debate. If supported, this would then be put to public consultation in January 2025.

2. The date on which the analysis of the consultation results, and proposed amendments arising from it, will be presented to the LPPC for adjustment and/or approval

A Consultation Statement will be published as part of the agenda pack for the LPPC in November 2024 where the Proposed Submission Local Plan will be considered. The exact date of this meeting is to be confirmed.

The Consultation Statement will summarise the responses received on the Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) and how they have been considered in producing the Proposed-Submission (Regulation 19) version of the Local Plan.

3. That the LPPC will be given the freedom, opportunity, time and resources sufficient for it to fulfil its mandate, as set out in its Terms of Reference, without undue constraints or interference from officers

Correct. In line with the Council's constitution, officers advise Councillors in their professional capacity, and Councillors are responsible for decision making in respect of the Local Plan and its content.

The Council's constitution can be accessed from the following link:
<https://democracy.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?Cid=205&MId=1619&Ver=4&Info=1>

4. That review, challenge and direction of the Local Plan will be included in the agenda of every meeting of the LPPC to be held until publication of the Regulation 19 consultation

The Council's Constitution provides the terms of reference for the LPPC, these are set out in Appendix 3 (p16-18). Agenda items coming to Council Committees are typically brought to arrive at a decision.

The LPPC responsibilities include making decisions at key stages in the production of Local Plan documents as set out below:

- Considering and approving Draft (Regulation 18) Local Plans
- LPPC considered and approved the Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) for consultation on 30 January 2023.
- Considering and recommending for approval to Full Council, submission versions of Development Plan documents
- LPPC will consider the pre-submission Local Plan in November 2024.

The next decision related to the Local Plan regards the Proposed Submission Local Plan (Regulation 19) at the November LPPC meeting.

5. That there is sufficient time and budget to accommodate any and all changes the LPPC may recommend

As has been reported to LPPC, the Local Plan timetable has a limited degree of flexibility to ensure that the Local Plan is submitted to the government for examination by the 30 June 2025 deadline, which is the deadline set by government for submission under the current Local Plan system. The scale of changes made will influence whether there is a delay to the programme- for example, minor typographical errors or clarification of wording will not impact the programme. However, changes that require amendments to the evidence base could lead to delays that result in the transitional arrangements deadline being missed.

6. That a contingency plan is in place should the currently proposed Local Plan timetable slip for any reason, including matters arising from the review and challenge set out above.'

There are elements of contingency in the plan, but if the Local Plan timetable slips and as a result it will not be possible to submit the Local Plan to the government by the 30 June 2025, we will prepare a Local Plan under the reforms set out in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act. The government are due to publish further legislation in relation to plan making reforms that will need to be considered.

Just not cricket to replace Banstead pavilion?

30 April 2024



A long-standing cricket club's ambitious plans to construct a modern pavilion and expand its facilities have sparked a debate from people that live in the area, saying it would "ruin the village feel".

A centuries old sports club wants to modernise its facilities, in part due to the massive growth of the game among girls and women, although some warn its ambitious plans overstep the mark.

Banstead Cricket Club has applied to demolish its current clubhouse, which it says was only ever designed to last 10 years but has stood for 60, and replace it with a new modern facility that conforms to "Sport England and the sports governing body standards".

It is also seeking to refurbish its pavilion to create a dedicated changing space for women and girls. While opponents to the plans aren't arguing against its need to modernise, and would like to see the 182-year-old cricket club get a new clubhouse - they say they are worried about the size and location of the plans. They feel the potential increase in social events at the site, could have a negative impact on people living near the ground.

The club, however, told the Local Democracy Reporting Service that they are "not trying to just suddenly become an events business" and that "the most important thing to stress is that Banstead Cricket Club is a cricket club". The application has already had 252 comments with the majority (151) backing the plans and 91 objecting.

Club chairperson Neil Bowman said: "We need something bigger and we need something that has more than one room. We need to have other areas where people can hang out, or have a team meeting. We didn't design it as a wedding venue, and we do appreciate the neighbours' concerns, there was a concern about creating an event venue, and all the additional traffic, noise.

"I can entirely understand people's concerns, but we are not trying to do that, we are trying to build a modern clubhouse." The club said that Sport England and the England and Wales Cricket Board have been consulted in terms of the most ideal sighting for the new building and it's the internal layout.

Its new location will allow people to take in matches from either of the club's two pitches. The club has also said it will re-lay its car park with an environmentally friendly solution. Project head Ian Rusbridge said: "We are not trying to just suddenly become an events business, that's not our game.

"We don't foresee (a surge in) event hire, there may be a little bit more during the summer - because at the moment we can't hire it out at all. The other thing to stress, is that the cricket club is run by volunteers, who have full time jobs, and lives and children. They haven't got the capacity to run a cricket club let alone an events business." Adding to that, in terms of the design the architects we employed, their speciality is sport pavilions."

The club has a licence until 1am but says it is rarely used and that the events held usually stop serving alcohol at 11pm. It said it did not see this changing in the future. Among the objections however include the increase in traffic around the green belt area, noise that would come from an expanded pavilion, and the determination visual impact it would have.

One objector wrote that the scale of the two-storey building was "far too large" and would "ruin the village feel" of the site. He felt the current buildings were perfectly adequate and would support plans that improved and updated the facilities within the same space.

The Local Democracy Reporting Service spoke with another resident who has also written in to object. Robert Garbut lives off Park Road, near the club, and challenged the size of the plans, its impact on traffic and neighbourhood fears the site could become a late-night venue.

He said: "It's massive. It's a 350 per cent increase over two floors, on another field that had never been built on before. Earth-moving trucks that will have to move into the park - I'm sure people just don't realise what is happening. Having said all of that, the cricket club has been there for a hundred years, it's hugely successful, they need more changing rooms.

“We assumed they would knock down the old clubhouse and build an all-singing all-dancing version of that. They also own the practice field adjacent to that – that’s where they want to build, you can understand that as it makes sense to build it on your own land rather than land owned by Reigate and Banstead Council.

“All of our objections are about the superscale of this social venue, nobody but nobody wants to be mean spirited. We want the club to be a great building not the ramshackle thing they’re in now.”

The planning application is still with Reigate and Banstead Borough Council’s planning team. A date has yet to be set for when it will be determined.

Image - visualisation of new pavilion and current inset.

New SEND school blocked by Nimby?

30 April 2024



A group of Surrey parents say they are “devastated” and fear it is back to the drawing board after plans for a ‘much needed’ special needs school will likely be quashed.

Planning permission was approved by Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) in March 2023 for a state-run Betchwood Vale school on the site of the vacant Chalcraft Nursery and garden centre. Around 82% of kids with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) have to commute out of the district to go to a specialist school. One mum said she covers 80 miles a day on the school run to access education for two of her children

But a single claimant took it to the High Court to challenge the procedure on the way the decision was made on two grounds: application of the environmental habitat regulations and traffic flow. The court has said the first point is valid and thrown out the second.

Using his delegated authority, the council’s Deputy Chief Executive decided not to defend the legal challenge, asking the court to quash the decision, given the legal costs.

Originally scheduled to open in September 2023, parents say they were thrilled to think there might ‘finally be a school locally’ to cater for their needs.

Elizabeth Marett, mum and campaigner for the school, told the Local Democracy Reporting Service that she feels education for disabled children is not being prioritised. She said: “I am disappointed, angry and upset with the local residents who have taken it upon themselves to oppose the schools because they are essentially saying the education of disabled children is unimportant.”

“There are children who need schools, and if this isn’t built, their future is very bleak. Is there any way we can convince these people that what they’re doing is really damaging for the local children of the future? These schools are hard to come by. There are so many children in the county that need to go to this school.” Other parents called it a “bitter blow” to the SEND community.

Elizabeth said some children in her son’s class “have nowhere else to go” as mainstream school is not possible for children with anxiety and complex needs.

Betchwood Vale school is likely to be for high-functioning autistic children, who do not have other learning disabilities, if it goes ahead. It would teach children between seven and 19 years old, providing places for around 60 pupil in its first year and going up to 180 children over a few years.

Currently, more than 100 autistic children who live in Mole Valley and require a specialist place go to school out of their district, meaning they spend a long time every day travelling large distances between home and school.

One mum said she covers 80 miles a day on the school run to access education for two of her children whilst another is transported 22 miles in the opposite direction.

Fighting against the application in the planning meeting (March 2023) was an unofficial group called Ladyegate Road Residents Association Ltd (LRRRA). The group, named after a private road near the site, objected to the application because of the adverse impact on traffic flow and approach to Dorking, the negative effect on biodiversity and that no alternative options have been investigated for the site.

Planning documents reveal Surrey County Council (SCC) Highways warned of “minor” impacts to traffic on the A25 junctions as a result of the proposed school. It also added conditions of improving vehicle access on nearby Punchbowl Lane.

Cllr Joanna Slater (Conservative for Leatherhead South) said: “What is also troubling is that this has happened completely behind the scenes. Councillors did not know.”

The council's Development Management Committee (DMC) meeting on 3 April heard that the team claim they were not informed of the SEND school decision being changed or is likely to change. A spokesperson for MVDC said it is not "unusual practice" for a decision to be taken by a senior officer under delegated authority. They said all local ward members were kept updated in the proceedings.

Cllr Slater added: "At best this is a delay to the SEND school opening. At worst, it will result in the whole project failing as the budget for planning permission has been spent."

Clare Curran, Lead Cabinet Member for Children and Families at SCC, said: "We are disappointed with Mole Valley's decision not to defend the judicial review. The proposed Betchwood Vale Academy is critical to achieving Surrey's ambition that autistic children are educated closer to home."

SCC have promised to deliver 2,440 permanent additional specialist school places in Surrey between 2019 - 2026 to create capacity for 5,760 planned places by 2030/31.

SCC said it has been advised by the Department of Education of their ongoing commitment to deliver Betchwood Vale Academy in full once a positive planning application has been confirmed.

A Mole Valley spokesperson said: "We are working as quickly as possible to get a decision from the Court. Once that is made, we will reconsult on the planning application and soon after - return the application to the Development Management Committee to make the planning decision."

It added: "This will allow us to ensure that there is no future potential for legal challenge and that once a new decision is made, if it is to again approve the application, then the delivery of the school can start swiftly."

The Department of Education has been contacted for comment.

The Ladyegate Road Residents Association is not an official body. The Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) tried to contact the group for additional comment but was unable to do so.

Related report:

Surrey to SEND £40m for special schools

Image: Betchwood Vale SEND school plan. From Design and Access statement. Credit: Jestico + Whiles Associates Ltd.

Enforcing planning enforcement in Epsom and Ewell

30 April 2024



In a comprehensive analysis of the **Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's** planning enforcement procedures, a recent audit report titled "EPSOM & EWELL BOROUGH COUNCIL INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT 2023-24," conducted by the Southern Internal Audit Partnership in February 2024, has brought to light a litany of deficiencies and failures. These findings, detailed in a thorough examination of the council's practices, underscore significant shortcomings in record-keeping, response times to complaints, and the enforcement of regulatory measures.

Central to the audit's findings is the examination of the administration of planning enforcement, a critical function entrusted with ensuring the adherence of development activities to established regulatory frameworks. Despite assertions by the council regarding the existence of a comprehensive Local Enforcement Plan, purportedly designed to outline clear guidelines and timelines for enforcement actions, the reality paints a starkly contrasting picture upon closer scrutiny.

"Testing of a sample of cases revealed a disconcerting trend of non-compliance with stipulated timelines," the report notes. Contrary to the Local Enforcement Plan's mandate of acknowledging receipt of planning enforcement complaints within five working days, numerous instances were found where this requirement was not met, resulting in prolonged delays and a lack of clarity for complainants.

Moreover, deficiencies in the triage process, a critical step in determining the priority level of enforcement cases, were exposed. Despite the plan's directive to assign priority levels ranging from one to three, the absence of mechanisms within the council's system to accurately record these priorities severely hampered monitoring efforts. As a result, the council's ability to effectively manage and expedite enforcement actions was compromised, leading to further delays and inefficiencies.

"Key documentation associated with enforcement actions was found to be missing altogether," the audit report reveals, casting serious doubts on the thoroughness of investigations and the efficacy of enforcement measures. In several instances where enforcement notices were issued, no evidence of follow-up actions to ensure compliance was found,

directly contravening statutory requirements under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

The repercussions of these systemic failures extend beyond procedural lapses to tangible impacts on the community and the council's reputation. So heard a meeting of the Council's **Audit and Scrutiny Committee** Thursday 28th March. Councillor **Jan Mason** (RA Ruxley), drawing from her extensive experience in planning, expressed profound dismay at the council's failure to uphold its responsibilities in enforcing planning regulations. "I am totally surprised that we haven't dealt with this in a more timely fashion," she remarked. "This reflects poorly on our council, and I am deeply concerned about the potential consequences of unchecked development activities."

Echoing these sentiments, Councillor **James Lawrence** (LibDem College) highlighted the significance of planning enforcement to residents, citing recurring issues and delays in addressing enforcement matters. "For many residents, planning enforcement is a top priority," he emphasized. "The council's failure to act swiftly in response to complaints undermines public confidence and raises serious questions about its commitment to upholding regulatory standards."

In response to queries raised by councillors, council officers sought to clarify the circumstances surrounding the appointment of a permanent Enforcement Officer. While acknowledging the existence of temporary officers in the past, they emphasized the recent transition to a permanent role as a step towards addressing staffing concerns within the planning department.

Fast track your planning application at a premium

30 April 2024



From 1 April 2024, applicants submitting certain planning applications in Epsom & Ewell will be able to choose to 'fast track' their application.

Developed to meet customer demands, the new optional service will be helpful to applicants who have a builder waiting to start work, or who need building work to start or finish by a certain date. Applicants will be able to pay to have their planning applications determined more quickly than the statutory eight-week period.

The types of applications that can be fast-tracked are:

- Householder Applications - for instance, those required for extending homes e.g. building a single storey rear extension, or front porch.
- Certificate of Lawful Development Proposed (Householder) - an application to show that the work you are proposing to do to a house is a 'permitted development' and therefore doesn't need a formal application. Sometimes you will need a certificate of this nature when you sell a house.

The fast-track fee is £350 for a Householder Application and £150 for a Lawful Development Certificate and is paid to the council, in addition to the usual cost of submitting a planning application.

Councillor **Steve McCormick**, (RA Woodcote and Langley) Chair of the Licensing and Planning Committee, said,

"We are incredibly proud of our Planning department who in the last year, have overcome significant challenges to go from being one of 10 UK council teams performing below an expected threshold of 70% for minor/other applications, to well exceeding national targets. It is brilliant that Epsom & Ewell Borough Council can now facilitate a service which will meet an obvious need for many residents wishing to progress building projects within the borough.

"I hope that this will ease stress for many people working to tight timelines for their builds."

Applicants can learn more about the service and apply by visiting the council's dedicated webpage: [Fast Track Service | Epsom and Ewell Borough Council \(epsom-ewell.gov.uk\)](#)

A Green Group that won't belt up

30 April 2024



In a comprehensive critique of **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's** handling of the Local Plan, a local environmental advocacy group, known as **Epsom Green Belt**, argues there are shortcomings in the council's approach.

In a response to the council's Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) (reported by the Epsom and Ewell Times [HERE](#)) they assert that the council's failure to provide clear and timely information about changes resulting from public consultation leaves residents in the dark about crucial decisions that will shape the borough's future.

One of the group's key contentions centres around the council's delay in analyzing consultation responses. Despite assurances of ongoing analysis, no outcomes have been made public, leaving residents to speculate about the fate of their feedback. This lack of transparency, the group argues, undermines the democratic process and erodes trust in local governance.

Furthermore, the Group criticizes the council's handling of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee (LPPC), highlighting concerns about the committee's apparent exclusion from significant decision-making processes. By sidelining the LPPC, the council risks bypassing important checks and balances, raising questions about the integrity of the Local Plan's development.

A central focus of the group's critique is the contentious issue of Green Belt development. They accuse the council of disregarding public opinion and pressing ahead with plans to build on protected Green Belt land without adequately demonstrating the exceptional circumstances required by National Planning Policies. This, they argue, not only threatens valuable green spaces but also reflects a disregard for community sentiment.

In addition to these overarching concerns, the Group points to specific discrepancies in the council's representation of housing needs and affordability. They highlight the council's reliance on inflated housing figures and failure to explore alternative solutions, such as maximizing brownfield sites. This, they argue, calls into question the accuracy and integrity of the data informing the Local Plan.

Epsom Green Belt calls for immediate action from elected councillors to address these concerns and restore public confidence in the Local Plan process. They emphasize the need for transparency, accountability, and evidence-based decision-making to ensure that the interests of residents and the environment are adequately represented.

The full case being argued by Epsom Green Belt can be accessed [HERE](#).

Related reports:

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

[Minister gets heavy on a Local Plan delay](#)

[Mystery Local Plan critic revealed](#)

[Local Plan costs eat into Council reserves](#)

[Local Plan to move forward after passionate debate](#)

and many many more. Search "local plan".

Here we go again on the Local Plan?

30 April 2024



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has launched a dedicated FAQ section on its website to inform residents about the ongoing development of the borough's **Local Plan**. According to the Council this initiative aims to provide transparency

and dispel any misinformation circulating regarding the plan's objectives and progress.

The Local Plan holds significant importance in shaping the future of the borough, covering various aspects such as job creation, environmental conservation, leisure facilities, housing sites, and infrastructure enhancements. The Council states that no final decisions have been made regarding policy formulations or site selections. Currently, the council is in the process of reviewing feedback received during the initial public consultation on the draft plan and gathering additional evidence to inform its development.

Councillor **Steven McCormick**, Chair of the Licensing & Planning Policy Committee, (RA Woodcote and Langley) emphasized the complexity and necessity of the Local Plan's development, stating:

"The development of our Local Plan is as complex as it is vital. We want to make sure that all those who live in, work in and visit the borough have access to the latest information about the Local Plan, to ensure that they are informed and to dispel rumours and myths about the Plan. We encourage everyone to take a look at the FAQs, either on our website or by coming in to the Town Hall and asking for a copy at reception."

On the key areas of most interest to residents the Council's position is stated and Epsom and Ewell Times summarises:

Local Plan Decisions Still Pending

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) has yet to finalize decisions regarding policy formulation and site allocations for the upcoming edition of the Local Plan. Despite ongoing efforts to adhere to the government's planning framework and reviewing feedback from the Draft Local Plan consultation, no definitive choices have been made at this juncture. The council is actively engaged in compiling a comprehensive evidence base essential for the development of the Proposed Submission Local Plan, also known as the Regulation 19 Local Plan.

Spatial Strategy Uncertain

Concerns loom over the confirmation of a Spatial Strategy crucial for guiding development across the borough. Originally slated for submission to Surrey County Council for transportation modeling by January 2024, the Spatial Strategy's confirmation has encountered hurdles. Following member briefings earlier this year, the council has been unable to solidify the strategy, prompting a reevaluation of available options.

Timeline for Local Plan Decisions

With the evidence base still under development, decisions regarding the Local Plan's content are slated for later this year. The Licensing and Planning Policy Committee (LPPC) is expected to receive recommendations on the Proposed Submission Local Plan, incorporating site allocations, by November 2024. Subsequently, the LPPC will forward its recommendations to the Full Council for deliberation. Only upon Full Council approval will the plan proceed to another round of public consultation, marking a critical juncture in the decision-making process.

Data Informing Local Plan Preparation

EEBC has relied on a diverse array of data sources to inform the preparation of the Draft Local Plan. Evidence spanning various thematic areas was gathered and published to support the consultation process. Additionally, ongoing efforts are underway to gather further evidence, with updates expected to be made available on the council's website upon completion.

Housing Needs and Requirements

Calculating the housing need for the borough involves employing the Government's 'Standard Method,' which utilizes 2014 Household Growth Projections data. While recent updates to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) have reaffirmed the use of this method, the draft Local Plan aims to address just over half of the calculated housing need. This draft plan will undergo extensive scrutiny during the independent planning inspector's examination.

Current Housing Needs and Challenges

The borough faces challenges in meeting its housing targets, with housing delivery falling short of expectations. Despite efforts to address housing shortages, the Council's Authority Monitoring Report highlights a deficit in housing delivery. Moreover, the increasing number of households on the housing needs register underscores the urgent need for affordable housing solutions.

Brownfield Sites and Development

While brownfield sites play a crucial role in meeting development needs, there are concerns about their sufficiency. Although a range of brownfield sites has been considered for development in the next stage of the Local Plan, it is deemed insufficient to meet the borough's housing and economic requirements.

Preservation of Industrial Estates

Industrial estates such as Longmead and Kiln Lane are integral to the borough's employment landscape and are safeguarded against housing development. Recognizing their importance in providing employment opportunities, the draft Local Plan designates these sites as Strategic Employment Sites, prioritizing their protection for employment-generating uses.

Green Belt Protection

The Green Belt, governed by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), enjoys robust protection against development. However, authorities have the discretion to review and alter Green Belt boundaries under exceptional circumstances, subject to stringent conditions. Despite this flexibility, any proposed changes must demonstrate adherence to outlined criteria, ensuring the enduring preservation of Green Belt land.

The FAQs can be accessed on the council's website at www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/local-plan-faqs.

Members of the public can sign up to receive an alert for future consultations by completing the form at <https://epsom-ewell.inconsult.uk/>.

Opposition Voices Express Frustration Over Lack of Transparency

Cllr **Julie Morris**, Liberal Democrat group leader (College), expressed frustration over what she perceived as a lack of transparency and decisive action in the development of the Local Plan. She stated: “Some many months after several public protests about the inclusion of sites within the Green Belt, do we finally have some information about the status of our Local Plan, relatively bland though it is. Weasel words ‘no decision has been made on site selection’ need to be read alongside answers to a FAQ on the council’s website, where it quite clearly says that site options have been given to Surrey County Council (SCC) who are currently completing their transport modelling. These options may not be the final decision, but most councillors in Epsom & Ewell are not even aware of what these options are, so at this point in time SCC probably know more than us. The Liberal Democrat group of councillors remain frustrated and very concerned at the lack of transparency in decision-making from the party in control of the council – the Residents Association group.”

Cllr **Kate Chinn**, Labour group leader (Court), acknowledged the council’s recent efforts to inform residents about the Local Plan’s progress but criticized what she described as a history of secrecy surrounding decision-making processes. She stated: “It is good to see that the Residents Association (RA) councillors are finally starting the process of keeping residents informed on the progress of the local plan. The confidential briefings, which are shrouded in secrecy and leaks of information have fuelled the rumours, myths and conspiracy theories that prevail. With such a huge majority the ruling group should be able to develop a vision to present to residents that enables homes to be built to meet residents’ housing needs. Instead the borough continues to face uncertainty with the RA’s divisions, dither and delay meaning decisions are not made.. As the webpage notes ‘Following member briefings in early 2024, a Spatial Strategy was not able to be confirmed and therefore options are being considered.’

Without a spatial strategy the local plan is in effect paused. The lack of progress is endangering meeting the deadline to present a plan to the planning inspectorate by the 30th June 2025 leaving the council at the continued risk of unplanned, speculative development. The Labour group would happily contribute and work collaboratively to produce a local plan that sensibly addresses the borough’s acute housing need.”

Related reports:

Minister gets heavy on a Local Plan delay

Mystery Local Plan critic revealed

Local Plan costs eat into Council reserves

Local Plan to move forward after passionate debate

and many many more. Search “local plan”.

New housing around Surrey’s cathedral in contention

30 April 2024



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

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

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

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

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

The main appeals argue the visual prominence of the development will blend with the heritage asset. Apartment blocks

and roofscapes will “sit within the landscape”. Reducing building heights, landscaping and tree planting were also cited as ways to keep the green collar and “longer-distant views” towards and around the Cathedral.

A council report noted that the submitted design proposals would “harm the landscape character and the visual experience of the site to the east”, but would “benefit” the approach to the cathedral from the west. The council concluded that the proposals would “still result in moderate adverse landscape and visual effects” concerning Surrey Hills as an area of natural beauty.

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

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

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

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

Starting 5 March, the public inquiry will be conducted by a planning inspectorate and last ten days. Vivid homes is footing the bill for the appeal, despite the application also made on behalf of Guildford Cathedral.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Guildford Cathedral and Vivid homes were invited to comment.

Related report:

[Surrey County’s Cathedral citadel conserved...](#)

Image: Grahame Larter

Red, blue and orange go Green in belt protest

30 April 2024



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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Related reports:

When a meeting is not a meeting, in brief.

Mystery Local Plan critic revealed

Councillors belted-up on Green Belt?

and many more. Search "Local Plan".

When a meeting is not a meeting, in brief.

30 April 2024



The vexed issue of whether a "members' briefing" is a "meeting" or not has received some attention of late. Anxiety was aroused by fears that a "confidential" meeting of **Epsom and Ewell** Councillors might effectively determine whether Green Belt land would remain in the Local Plan as potential sites for housing development. The "meeting" on 10th January was "met" by a small group of protestors who had caught wind of the event.

According to Cllr. **Alison Kelly** (LibDem Stamford) "I did tell a friend that I was going to a member's briefing. I didn't realize that I was not to disclose that. I just gave that out because a friend asked me why I can't come out. I don't understand why they cannot be publicly declared as meetings."

She revealed this at the meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee of 25th January. This was a meeting and the press and public were allowed in as usual. During a debate about the Council's new "Communication Strategy" Cllr Kelly also said: "we've recently faced accusations over secrecy with response to the Local Plan Green Belt members briefings and some legal guidance; we've also been asked to remain silent on some matters including the existence of a briefing meeting and we seem to have had quite a lot of part two sessions [*sections of Council meetings that are closed to the press and public*]. How does this strategy help us to address the issue of secrecy levelled at us by the residents?"

In response RA leader Cllr **Hannah Dalton** (Stoneleigh) said: "The purpose of member briefings is for members [*i.e., councillors*] to be informed and in a safe and confidential space to ask questions, to understand information, to obtain data from officers, whether from our council or other councils or the LGA [*Local Government Association*] or whomever. To then provide a steer to... what then comes to committee."

The Council's law officer advised: "I don't think there's problem actually saying that you're coming to a council briefing. If you went further to say I'm coming to a council briefing on xxx subject then that is disclosing at times confidential information."

Cllr **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley Vale) told the Epsom and Ewell Times 15th January: that the 10th January "members' briefing", "...was not a secret meeting; it just wasn't a public meeting. I stated publicly at the September LPPC Committee and extraordinary full Council on 24 October 2023 that Member briefings regarding the Local Plan would be taking place during this time period assuming the local plan was unpaused by full council, which it was."

Epsom and Ewell's Member of Parliament **Chris Grayling** has weighed in and on 31st January told constituents: "The Council has now decided to press ahead with its plans, and while details of the updated proposals remain confidential, I understand from Councillors in the ruling group that they continue to include substantial green belt development in the area. This is despite the fact that existing brownfield sites can deliver most of what is needed."

He urged residents to make their views known to the Council.

Related reports:

Councillors belted-up on Green Belt?

Mystery Local Plan critic revealed

Image: Cllr Alison Kelly at the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting

Minister gets heavy on a Local Plan delay

30 April 2024



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mystery Local Plan critic revealed

30 April 2024



Epsom and Ewell Times reported in full the speech from a member of the public at the Licensing, Planning and Policy Committee (LPPC) of 22nd November 2023. He addressed Councillors forcefully on a response to the Government’s

revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). See report [here](#).

Undeterred the gentleman appeared again at the Thursday 18th January meeting of the LPPC. Cllr. **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) asked Chair Cllr **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley Vale) to identify the speaker. As far as we could tell his name is John Seaston or Seaton.

Following the private “members’ briefing” of 10th January about the Local Plan, reported in the Epsom and Ewell Times [HERE](#), there was anticipation that something would be said in public about that meeting on Thursday. Nothing was said.

The only contribution about the Local Plan was the three minutes Mr Season/Seaton was permitted. Again, our transcript of his address is published in full. Epsom and Ewell Times invites corrections and responses to his opinions.

“Last year, this Council voted to pause the Local Plan process. In order to buy time to base its regulation 19 Local Plan on Government’s revised NPPF. The great news is that this pause strategy worked. The critical thing now is to take full advantage of the opportunity that you have created. To do this, you need to be very clear about the changes to NPPF that Government has made.

There are two very important points that you must fully understand. First point: Government has clearly stated that the standard method calculation just gives an advisory starting point. When I spoke to you at the start of your last meeting, I emphasized how Government has used its standard method to set a negotiation anchor. Government has now admitted that its anchor is not credible. So it has rebranded it as an advisory starting point. It is critical that all councillors and officers involved in a Local Plan process fully understand that there is nothing binding about the standard method number.

You do not need to meet this target in full. You do not even need to meet half this target. You do not have to meet any specific proportion of this target. You just need to meet the actual needs of our borough.

Second point: Paragraph 145 of the new NPPF states there is no requirement for Green Belt boundaries to be reviewed or changed when plans are being prepared or updated. That was a direct quote from NPPF.

Could government have been any clearer? In case you missed it, there is no requirement for Green Belt boundaries to be reviewed or changed. I have highlighted during previous LPPC meetings that this Borough can fully meet its actual housing need over the plan period using only brownfield sites and previously developed land within the Green Belt.

In the Regulation 18 Local Plan, Council used the brownfield sites shortfall versus government’s anchor to declare the exceptional circumstances required to alter Green Belt boundaries. The two changes to NPPF that I have just highlighted together with the quantum of brownfield and previously developed sites available in the Borough make this declaration of exceptional circumstances and resulting changes of Green Belt boundaries unjustifiable.

It would not be consistent with achieving a balanced Local Plan which meets Council’s legal duty to achieve biodiversity net gain and a credible local nature. Any proposals to change Green Belt boundaries in the regulation 19 Local Plan would expose Council to legal challenge. And the associated cost and programme overruns as well as angering the residents you are supposed to serve.”

Related reports:

[Local Plan costs eat into Council reserves](#)

[Local Plan to move forward after passionate debate](#)

[Local Plan \(2022-2040\) Un-Pause Recommended](#)

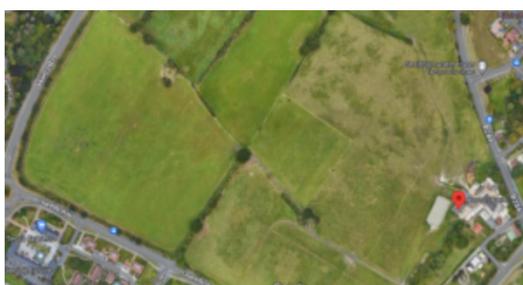
[Cllr Persand intervenes ahead of Local Plan debate](#)

and many many more. Search “local plan” in search function above.

Image: Clockwise from Chair: Cllrs - Steven McCormick (RA), Peter O’Donovan (RA), public speaker (Seaston / Seaton), Keiran Persand (Con), Julie Morris (LibDem), Clive Woodbridge (RA), Phil Neale (RA), Steve Bridge (RA), Council officers.

Councillors belted-up on Green Belt?

30 April 2024



In a recent closed-door meeting held at the Town Hall, local councillors in the Borough of Epsom and Ewell, convened to *apparently* deliberate on potential areas for housing development, with a particular focus on the contentious issue of Green Belt land. The meeting, held on January 10, has stirred controversy and prompted reactions from concerned

citizens, leading to a series of letters and press releases. Councillors were greeted at the entrance by a small and polite protest group.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There is currently a huge amount of work being done for our Local Plan, including considering the implications of the revised NPPF published in December 2023. Work will continue over the coming months before the next stage of public consultation (Regulation 19), which is due to commence in January 2025, if supported by LPPC in November 2024 and full council in December 2024."

Related reports:

[Local Plan costs eat into Council reserves](#)

[Local Plan to move forward after passionate debate](#)

[Local Plan \(2022-2040\) Un-Pause Recommended](#)

[Cllr Persand intervenes ahead of Local Plan debate](#)

and many many more. Search "local plan" in search function above.

East Street Development gets Green Light

30 April 2024



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

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

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

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

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