

Epsom and Ewell Council answers parking complaint immediately

10 October 2024



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

8th October 2024 10:28 hrs

Dear Sirs,

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

Charles Moseley

Hurstpierpoint

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bikes that blight the blind

10 October 2024



Dear Editor,

I would like to bring a serious problem to the attention of Epsom residents, that is if they are not already aware of it but do not want to do anything about it. For at least the last year I have been battling and campaigning against motorbike delivery riders who insist on illegally parking in Epsom Square (formerly Derby Square) off Epsom High Street and all along that stretch of the High Street.

Continually all through the day these motorbike riders park their motorbikes and I do mean the whole of the motorbike, on the pavement. They ride their motorbikes on to the pavement and park up. At times there has been as many as 21 motorbikes parked on the pavement outside shops like McDonalds. It is a serious safety issue as well as being an illegal parking matter.

I have reported this issue to Surrey County Council Parking Enforcement Team dozens of times and all that happens is that they send an Enforcement Officer out, who simply moves the motorbike riders on and what always happens is the riders return later on. The Parking Enforcement Team should be fining them and then they might start to listen.

I have contacted my local new MP a couple of times about this issue but I have yet to receive an acknowledgement about the matter. I am sure my local MP is very busy as she is newly elected but this is a local issue and that should be the focus of any MP, to deal with their local issues. I am a blind person living in Epsom and there are a higher than average of blind people in Epsom as there is a residential housing building in Epsom for blind people.

Surrey Parking Enforcement Team need to get a grip of this situation before there are some serious accidents.

Regards

Russell Bailey

Swail House Association for the Visually Impaired

Image: Delivery moped on pavement in Epsom - Google

Non-political and all-political

10 October 2024



Dear Editor,

It is good to see that, despite stepping down as a Borough Councillor, Vince Romagnuolo has lost none of his enthusiasm for historically partisan approach to local politics. Labelling Resident Association councillors closet Conservatives is nothing new. Vince and the Labour Party have never understood the concept of local volunteers whose national voting patterns are often diverse, but who come together in a non-ideological commitment to promote a shared view of localism, civic duty and what is right for all residents in Epsom and Ewell.

If only Vince knew the real national preferences of RA councillors, he might be surprised. Although I never discussed national political allegiances with my RA colleagues, it is sometimes not difficult to know them. There were and are councillors who nationally support the Labour Party, and at least one RA Councillor who was a Labour Party Councillor in another local authority.

So come on Vince, by all means criticise Residents Association councillors if you disapprove of their policies, but please don't use labels and unfounded accusations of national party-political bias to explain the clear voting preferences of residents, the long absence of Conservative councillors, and the actions of Epsom and Ewell MPs over the last 87 years.

With all good wishes

County Councillor Eber Kington

Residents Association Ewell Court, Auriol and Cuddington

[Ed: A right of reply was warranted but we now draw this particular debate to a close on our pages.]

Up to 2003 MPs happy no Conservatives on Epsom and Ewell Council

10 October 2024



Dear Editor,

I note with interest the letter from Mr Kington “*Epsom and Ewell was the first Conservative free Council*” outlining the dire electoral fortunes of the Conservative Party in Epsom & Ewell. But he doesn’t tell the full story.

With the odd exception, despite sporadic efforts by eccentric Tory candidates, it is true that it is only since 2003 that the Tories have made a concerted effort to gain seats on the council. The truth is that successive Tory MPs for the area seemed quite happy with the composition of the council due to the fact that, on the whole, the ruling group was made up of small ‘C’ conservatives and in some cases, card carrying Conservative and UKIP members.

It was during the Labour government, with local government being property funded, that they embarked on a spending spree with taxpayers money. But they gleefully reverted to type when the austerity obsessed Tory/Lib Dem coalition government came to power in 2010 that budgets were slashed following Tory edicts.

Yours faithfully,

Vince Romagnuolo

Former Epsom & Ewell Borough Councillor, 1999-2007, 2015-2019

Green view of Mole Valley elections

10 October 2024



Dear Editor,

In Mole Valley national issues probably mostly impacted the main parties who lost support. However these local election results will be of little significance in the forthcoming General Election in Epsom and Ewell constituency for several reasons.

Firstly only a small area of Mole Valley falls within the parliamentary constituency of Epsom and Ewell, namely Ashted and Leatherhead. While these two areas will be very important to our campaign in the General Election there did appear to be some tactical or protest voting in the local elections in

Mole Valley as there was no great change in turnout. In Leatherhead Liberal Democrats were elected with a similar vote compared with 2023 despite their record of supporting development in the Green Belt.

The Green Party targeted resources in the Dorking area of Mole Valley in order to maintain a previous strong showing there. Secondly, as local elections did not take place for the Epsom Borough Council area the bulk of voters in the Epsom and Ewell constituency were not able to express their choices at the ballot box.

Nevertheless the threat to the Green Belt will be one of the key issues in the General Election in Epsom and Ewell as a whole so voters will have a genuine opportunity to test candidates about this particular matter, which is of great priority for the Green Party, including in Ashted and Leatherhead where we

will be actively campaigning to galvanise our support there.

Finally, whilst votes were quite well dispersed across different parties in the local elections in Mole Valley there will be even more parties standing in the General Election in Epsom and Ewell including the Green Party. The share of the vote will also probably be quite dispersed as a result in the General Election and in this scenario tactical voting will be of limited benefit. In such circumstances voters will be well advised to vote for policies they believe in, as a surprise result is quite likely.

Stephen McKenna

Prospective Parliamentary Candidate Green Party Epsom and Ewell

Epsom and Ewell was the first Conservative free Council

10 October 2024



Dear Editor,

I refer to your article on the May local elections headed "**First Surrey Borough with no Conservative Councillors**" and which includes the comment that "**The result makes it [Woking] the first council in Surrey not to have a single Conservative councillor.**" However, that is certainly not the case.

From 1937, when the Borough of Epsom and Ewell was created, and until 2003 (66 years), the Conservative Party was only represented on the Borough Council twice (and by a very small number of councillors). Since 2003 the Conservative Party has maintained a constant presence, but never larger than four in number and it is currently languishing at two.

Whilst I don't wish to diminish the historical importance of the Conservative Party's demise in Woking, they have had to face regular failures at the ballot box in Epsom and Ewell ever since George VI became King.

Yours faithfully,

Eber Kington

Residents Association County Councillor Ewell Court, Auriol and Cuddington

[Mr Kington is an Honorary Alderman of the Borough of Epsom and Ewell and served as Borough Councillor for many years.]

Not all have well-wishes for proposed Alderman

10 October 2024



The Epsom and Ewell Times does not endorse Ian Strutt's "Letter to the Editor" below. Its subject, Eber Kington, declined to comment in response. We have covered the Wells community centre story before and the links are at the foot of the page. We encourage our readership to share their views on local issues in these pages. We will not publish gratuitous personal attacks. Mr Strutt's letter responds to a proposed personal recognition of a long-serving local councillor and thus falls within consideration of a Council proposal.

Letter to the editor,

How can Councillor Eber Kington deserve an award from Epsom council when he wasted an estimated several hundred

thousand pounds shutting down the Wells Social Centre, then putting forward a failed design for a block of flats on the site?

This highly impractical design was turned down 10 : 2 by the council's own planning committee.

Kington robbed Epsom residents of their very long-running centre vital to their social life and used by workers needing economic desk space to carry out their businesses.

Kington also caused a mass demonstration by Wells residents, but told protesters in the council chamber that his plan "would go ahead."

No council can afford the vast amount of money wasted by Kington.

Thankfully, the centre is re-opening in December despite Kington and his council cronies. So, my thanks are due to the Epsom and Ewell planning councillors who DID display their social consciences.

Ian Strutt

The Wells Estate, Epsom

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[Epsom's Wells Plan has a hole in it](#)

[Wells Centre's Appeal](#)

[All's well that ends well for the Wells Centre](#)

Surrey's smokescreen over Fire Service failings

10 October 2024



Dear Editor,

Last week saw the publication of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Report of Surrey Fire and Rescue Service.

The accompanying press release from the Conservative Leaders of SCC headlined the fact that the "Inspectors praised our fire and rescue service's cultural improvements and the positive behaviours that were demonstrated during their visit". Residents might therefore be forgiven if they were to think that the Inspection Report itself was something to celebrate.

However, the HMICFRS Report makes 11 judgments on the Fire Service in Surrey and, of the 11 areas inspected, just one is good and the rest judged as adequate and below.

Under the watch of the Conservatives in Surrey, key factors relating to keeping our residents safe; preventing fire and risk, public safety through fire regulation, responding to fires and emergencies and the best use of resources, all require improvement. And seven of the 11 judgments show the service as less than adequate.

Crucially, our Fire Service Officers are also being failed, with the Inspectors reporting concerns over the lack of adequate training for incidents in tall buildings, failures to identify high-risk premises and delays to the upgrade of vehicles.

Worryingly, the Inspectors also say, "We were disappointed to find that the service hadn't made the progress we expected since our 2021 inspection".

The lack of openness regarding the Inspection outcomes is unacceptable. However, far more serious are those judgments themselves. In a letter to the Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety I have called for a plan to turn this situation around, to be formulated as a matter of urgency. Our residents, our local businesses and our Fire Officers deserve much better than this.

Yours faithfully,

Eber Kington

Surrey County Councillor (Residents Association - Ewell Court, Auriol & Cuddington).

Related reports:

[Surrey Fire service praised](#)

[Not such a rosy report on Surrey Fire Service](#)

Image: Councillor Eber Kington

I want to resist 20mph speed limits

10 October 2024

ULEZ is irritating but this speed limit is totally ridiculous and can only be designed to raise more funds for the exchequer.

Had this limit been contained near schools and for school times, it is very understandable. But 24/7 and can go on for 5 miles or more is due to cause road rage and more accidents because drivers will have to keep their eyes on the speedometer rather than the road ahead.

Personally I would like to join a protest group if you know of one. Can we get the national newspapers involved?

My wife has already been caught doing 24 in a 20 area. Before paying the £100 and attending a speed awareness course I would like to know if this scheme had the approval of Parliament

Bernard Pendry

Related report:

Time for us all to slow down?

Prevention costs less than cures.....

10 October 2024



Opinion by County Councillor **Eber Kington**:

It goes without saying that, if local councils prevent something untoward happening, that will save the higher costs of repairing the damaged caused. Fill in the potholes quickly and damage to vehicles and bigger potholes is prevented. Build the flood defences, and you do not have deal with the physical and emotional costs of lost homes and possessions.

And what applies to tarmac, bricks and riverbanks also applies to our young children and families. Ensure they have a good start, and you avoid the higher costs of intervention and support in later years. That might seem obvious, but I am not sure that **Surrey County Council**, with its responsibilities for children and families really understands that.

Many **Family Centres** were closed by the Conservative administration in 2019 on the basis that SCC would target those most in need. But Family Centres, with its universal provision and encouragement of all to attend, were designed to ensure that families did not fall into need in the first place. A strategy focussing only on those that have already met the threshold for support is neither preventative nor sound.

In this year's Budget, the ruling group decided against even an inflationary increase in budget for the supportive and therapeutic **Short Breaks Services for Children** with SEND and their families. This was despite the Council's own the **Equality Impact Assessment** telling them that:

"Any reductions in capacity of short breaks services due to either or both inflation linked price increases [or] reduced current levels of investmentare likely to: reduce positive outcomes for children with disabilities and their families; and increase pressure within families of children with disabilities, which is likely to, in some cases, contribute to family breakdown if this is not mitigated - leading to increased cost for the local authority"

Short Breaks is a service that makes a real preventative difference, and even a standstill budget is likely have future financial consequences. And SCC continues to fail some of our most challenged young people in another way. Support for them comes, in part, through the development of an EHCP (**Education, Health and Care Plan**) within their school setting. But SCC has a backlog of 937 new applications which, at the current rate of action, will take until March 2024 to clear.

I understand that there are pressures, with more young people in need of an EHCP, and those with the expertise to develop them not readily available. But, all the while there are children whose needs are not being met, the longer-term costs of meeting their educational needs are rising.

SCC has to value and fund preventative services, and **Residents Association** and Independent Councillors are committed to highlighting the removal and reduction of those preventative services when that happens.

However, we are also seeking to work positively with the ruling administration to ensure that Surrey's children and

families get the best start in life and that the balance of funding between prevention and cure starts to be more clearly tipped in favour of the former.



County Councillor Eber Kington (RA Ewell Court, Auriol & Cuddington)

Top image: Epsom Family Centre within Pound Lane School.

I voted for the Plan to go to the public

10 October 2024

Letter from Cllr Julie Morris (Liberal Democrat - College Ward) referring to Cllr Nigel Collin's comments reported in the Cautious Councillors Cause College and Court Cancellations.

Dear Editor,

Councillor Nigel Collin's statement in your online newspaper that the Liberal Democrats voted for the Draft Local Plan is untrue. No-one has voted for the Draft Local Plan. A vote was taken to agree that the Draft Local Plan would go out to public consultation. That is completely different to voting for the Draft Local Plan which implies that the contents of the document were agreed and approved in a vote.

Yours sincerely,

Julie Morris - Leader Liberal Democrat Group - Epsom and Ewell Borough Council.

Sudden hike in Council room charges threatens community groups

10 October 2024



Letters to the Editor from **Peter Prowse** and **Kevin Meager**.

From **Peter Prowse** - 22nd March 2023

For the past year, Epsom and Ewell French Club has been hiring a room (The Studio) at Bourne Hall for its monthly meetings. The Council had agreed a discounted hire rate of £20 per hour, so £40 for our two hours, on the third Tuesday of each month.

Without any prior consultation and with very little notice, the Council has just announced that from April (ie in 10 days' time) the Club will be charged a new 'discounted' rate of £35.36 per hour, so £70.72 for its two-hour booking, plus a new charge of £25 per session for use of the hot water urn (which has until now been provided free of charge).

Image: Bourne Hall Ewell Credit Bobulous - Own work. CC BY-SA 4.0

That would put the cost to the club up from £40 per booking to £95.72.

The club cannot possibly afford these prices. Other community groups who use Bourne Hall will be in the same position. Unless small, local clubs and societies can continue to use Bourne Hall for something very close to the 2022 prices, many will have to close.

Epsom & Ewell French Club is a non-commercial community group, provided for the benefit of its members and anybody else who want to come to its meetings. It is closely allied to the Epsom and Ewell Town Twinning Association, which is supported by the Borough Council.

The club almost folded during the Covid pandemic and its committee worked very hard to build it back up to the point where it is now attracting enough interest and support to keep going - provided it does not have to pay these new ridiculously expensive room hire costs. Bourne Hall exists for the benefit of local residents. This latest price hike means

that many of them will no longer be able to use it.

Peter Prowse.

Letter from **Kevin Meager**

23rd March 2023

I would like to follow up on the letter to the editor regarding the hike in hire charges at Bourne Hall. I organise weekly dance classes in the main hall on Monday evenings through my organisation, Ceroc Surrey and we've been hit with similar charge increases with little to no notice. If this increase remains in place, we will have to stop running classes at Bourne Hall as the new hire charges are unaffordable. The vast majority of our dancers are local, many are of retirement age and this is either their main or only weekly social event. Apart from lockdown, we've been using the venue continuously for over 20 years!

Your faithfully,

Kevin Meager

This is "offensive".

10 October 2024



In our letters page today a Ewell resident rightly fulminates against the selfish habit of leaving dog poo bags for others to remove.

"To the person who tied a Dog Poo Bag to the fence between the NESOT Playing Fields and the College buildings yesterday (Thursday).

You said you would return to collect it later as you didn't want to carry it with you. You will have noticed it was not there on your return as I added it to my Litter picking bag.

Image - c. Bill Kasman - under licence illustrates the wider problem.

Had I come along 5 minutes later, when I wouldn't have heard your explanation, how would I have known you would collect it? How would I have known that the other (very similar) bag dropped 2 metres further on was not yours? Or the black bag on a branch in the hedge round the corner? Or another deposited in a popular dropping spot on the edge of the Rugby Grounds?

Would I have been sure that the 4 people who threw glass beer bottles into the hedge, or the cans along the roadside, or the fast food packaging etc would be collected later to be deposited in the bins on the route, or taken home to be put in their own bins? No.

Your bag probably weighed no more than 100 grams. The bag of rubbish I collected weighed about 8 kilos when I'd finished. Approximately 2,000 items (I didn't count beyond 250); Fine potential of £200,000.

You're probably saying "mine's different". NO. It's Litter. It's Offensive; It's an Offence.

Jennifer Brzowska

Cllr McCormick's own answers on Local Plan

10 October 2024



Cllr Steven McCormick (RA Woodcote Ward) Chair of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Licensing, Planning and Policy Committee writes for the Epsom and Ewell Times to answer many of the questions being asked about the Draft Local Plan. The views are his own and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Council.

Below are FAQs and items from the Epsom Green Belt group page and other sources.

The responses below are my own view and do not reflect that of EEBC or officers.

What is the Greenbelt and why should it be protected?

The Green Belt of land encircling London has protected by law since 1938 to keep urban sprawl in check, preventing towns from merging together and promoting the recycling of derelict land.

These purposes remain as important as they ever were, but now we know that retaining these areas is also critical in slowing and reducing the impacts of climate change, reducing flooding, reducing air pollution and providing essential habitats for wildlife.

Reply

Green belt exists throughout the **country** and is a barrier to prevent urban sprawl in planning terms.

▪ Isn't it prohibited to build on Greenbelt Land?

Other than for very limited uses, Greenbelt Land is protected by law from development. It isn't permitted to build housing on Greenbelt Land except in 'Exceptional Circumstances'.

Reply

It has heavy protections but very special circumstances must be shown before development can be approved. In our draft local plan we do not have enough housing supply with brownfield or urban developments and have had to consider including green belt sites.

An alternative is to build higher and denser in our brownfield/urband sites. This has a downside of likely very tall buildings and a reduction in affordable housing delivery.

Is there any Greenbelt Land that it is OK to build on?

Some land in the Greenbelt has buildings on already, or has sites where buildings used to be. This is called 'Previously Developed Land within the Green Belt'. Without considerable remedial work, this land doesn't support much wildlife and is suitable for development.

▪ Are there exceptional circumstances that require building on the Greenbelt now?

No. The Borough can continue to meet the historical trend of growth in housing need (225 homes / year) through development of Brownfield sites only.

Every year Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, as with all other Councils nationwide, have a housebuilding target. As with many other Councils, the target has not been met each year. Whilst it would be difficult (but not impossible) to meet a 576 house target each year, this is a normal situation both in Epsom & Ewell and across the country. It is not exceptional.

The Draft Local Plan states that this **is** exceptional to justify their plans to build on the Greenbelt.

Reply

The historical trend is not what local plans are driven to achieve by central government. The start point is based on the standard method, which our draft local plan achieves 52% of that need.

Yes there is a consultation on various aspects of the NPPF but at this point in time our target remains based on the 2014 ONS data. As is shown by the recent response from the planning inspector to MVDC it is not current policy, it is consultation and we have to progress on what we have in front of us and that which is currently law.

Furthermore each year a council doesn't meet its housing delivery target they have to justify to central government the reasons for this and the plans to address this. The council runs a risk of being designated which means we loose our local planning control and a central government inspector takes over.

Exceptional circumstances are shown via an evidence based approach to a draft local plan. This is what we have done. The end goal is to get a new local plan adopted and to do that it has to stand up to scrutiny and challenge.

▪ Were Clarendon Park, Livingstone Park, and Manor Park built in the Greenbelt, and if so, what's different about these proposals?

All these estates were built on the sites of the old cluster of hospitals. These were Previously Developed sites within the Greenbelt, therefore developing these sites did not have a detrimental impact on environment and wildlife.

Reply

These were sites in the green belt. They had to prove the previously developed land situation to show very special circumstances existed to develop in the green belt.

Further evidence was provided to support the development in the green belt of these sites.

▪ **There's an area of Greenbelt on the Local Plan map that isn't on the Priority Development list of 9 sites, does this mean it is safe from development?**

No. All sites bordered in green on the map have been put forward for potential development. If the Council includes any Greenbelt sites on the Priority list, all other Greenbelt sites are at risk of future development.

Any site may be included in a future iteration of the current Local Plan, could be included by the Planning Inspector in the course of their review of the current Local Plan, or could be included in future Local Plans.

Reply

As part of the process a **call for sites** was made which is a requirement of the local plan process. All sites put forward by landowners and developers have to be evaluated for viability and whether they can deliver housing.

Some sites are more deliverable than others.

Some sites are not viable I.e the development costs would be too much.

Some sites proposals may be amended to make them viable or deliverable.

The next stage of consultation, regulation 19, March 2024 will see a more detailed draft local plan put forward for a further six week public consultation.

Additional sites may come forward between now and then.

▪ **Does the Draft Local Plan meet the need to supply affordable housing for lower paid workers and the homeless?**

No. Although the plan discusses building 40% 'affordable housing' on Greenbelt land and 30% on Brownfield land, this housing may not actually be affordable to those in need.

The definition of 'Affordable Housing' in the National Planning Policy Framework is houses sold at a 20% discount to their market value. In Epsom, the average property sold over the last 12 months was £630k, to an average property sold as 'Affordable Housing' would cost about £510k. This is well out of reach of most people in need of housing in the Borough.

Reply

The Housing and Economic Delivery Needs Assessment (HEDNA) describes the requirement for affordable units across the plan period. The number is circa 670 per year. To start describing cost of housing in the way above is misleading.

There are other options, First Home scheme, social rent scheme, shared ownership schemes to help residents get a home.

Over the last 2 years the borough provided 12 affordable units.

The borough spent approximately £1.5m on overnight homeless accommodation for our residents. This is not sustainable.

This needs to change.

The draft local plan is seeking to deliver 30% affordable from brownfield and 40% from green field developments.

▪ **Is it permissible to submit a Local Plan which doesn't meet the full housing need calculated under the government's 'Standard Method', and can it be approved?**

Yes. Many other boroughs have done so or are planning to do so such as Mole Valley, Elmbridge, with Worthing Council recently got its Local Plan approved by Inspector with only meeting 25% of its target.

Reply

MVDC have had a response from the planning inspector to make progress.

Submitting a plan with numbers significantly below the target will likely yield the plan being found unsound, thrown out, forced to re-do or the planning inspector does it for us.

Epsom has a number of 5400 of 10,368, 52% of the target.

▪ **I've been told that Mole Valley had their request to remove Greenbelt from their Local Plan rejected by the Planning Inspector, is this true, and if so how does it affect the Epsom & Ewell Local Plan?**

Mole Valley is in the difficult position of having originally submitted a Local Plan to the planning Inspector which included developing Greenbelt. A number of Councillors were voted out of office as a result and the new Councillors are trying retrospectively to amend the submission. There appear to be significant hurdles to doing this.

Despite that, the Inspector has offered to pause the examination to give time for new Government legislation to

be issued (see FAQ 10, below) which may support their case for a change to the submitted plan. It looks like Mole Valley has been offered a lifeline for their challenge.

The implications for Epsom & Ewell are:

a. It is better to exclude Greenbelt from the initial Local Plan submission to the Planning Inspector than to try to change the submission later.

b. The Planning Inspector recognises the likelihood that changes to the National Planning Policy Framework will strengthen the case for excluding Greenbelt from development.

There is no reason to push ahead with a flawed plan that destroys precious Greenbelt.

Reply -

The planning inspector responded to the request stating -

She wishes to make it clear that there has not been a change in Government policy. Rather, the Government is currently consulting on a draft NPPF. Until Government policy is changed (expected in Spring 2023), the Inspector will continue to examine the submitted Plan against current Government policy, contained in the NPPF 2021. She therefore cannot recommend MMs predicated on draft Government policy that may or may not come into effect in its draft form.

The full document can be found here - <https://futuremolevalley.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ED57-Inspectors-Note-23-Reply-to-Councils-Note-31-on-Removing-Green-Belt-Sites-from-the-Local-Plan.pdf>

▪ I heard that the Government is going to abolish the mandatory housing target and no longer require Local Authorities to review Green Belt for housing. Is this true?

Yes, The National Planning Policy Framework specifically states that, with suitable justifications (such as protecting Greenbelt), the full housing target need not be met.

The government intends to implement many of its proposed policy changes by May 2023.

Policy changes include a change to emphasise that the standard method for calculating housing need is “advisory”, removal of the requirement for councils to continually demonstrate a five-year housing land supply, and new lines that stress councils are not required to revise Green Belt boundaries or build at densities out of character even if they are set to miss their house building targets.

Emerging policies do carry substantial weight in planning decisions, therefore at least 20 Councils have already withdrew or paused their Local Plan process, citing the upcoming policy changes. Therefore it is entirely up to EEBC if they would want to be against Central Government policy and continue pushing for large housing development on Green Belt.

Reply

The government has said they are going to consult on possibly changing the housing number calculations. Until they do and change the law and related policies we have to proceed under the current requirements.

MVDC has had a response from their planning inspector saying exactly that.

Until the regulations, policy and law changes we have to use what is currently in place.

▪ The roads into Epsom are already overcrowded, particularly at peak times. What are the plans to address the additional traffic from all the new housing?

According to the 2011 census, there is an average of over 1.5 cars per household in Surrey. That equates to 2,300 new cars from proposed building on the Greenbelt Horton Farm alone.

There are no obvious ways to build new roads or expand existing ones.

No infrastructure plans have been put forward to show how this increased traffic will be managed. Expect long queues!

Reply

Infrastructure is a consideration once the high level draft local plan has been published. The council works with infrastructure delivery partners after regulation 18 to determine what new additional infrastructure may be required and needed to support the proposals.

Infrastructure Delivery Partners rarely come to the table before a draft local plan is published.

▪ It is difficult to get my child into primary school / secondary school as there aren't enough places. If the proposed houses are built, will I still get a school place for my children?

Local primary and secondary schools are either full or near to capacity.

No plans have been put forward for building new schools or expanding existing ones. No land has been allocated for this either. There is no guarantee of a school place and no priority for existing residents.

Reply

Similar to the roads section above.

▪ I see there are plans to build new sites for Gypsies / Travellers. How many will there be and where will these be located?

Regulations require Borough Councils to provide for the Traveller community. The Council has proposed putting 10

traveller sites on the Greenbelt Horton Farm site.

No explanation has been provided for why they are proposed to be located in a single area or on a Greenbelt site.

Reply

Further detail will be provided in the next stage of the draft local plan. Comments from the consultation will be considered, the next stage of how these sites may be implemented will be further detailed.

▪ Why is the housing target so high?

The short answer is that it doesn't need to be.

Here's some maths to show why...

The actual population growth of the Borough over the last 10 years has been 5,798, an average of 580 people/year (Source: Draft Local Plan para 1.39).

There are 2.58 people in an average household in the Borough (Source: Draft Local Plan para 1.39).

If growth continues at this rate, there would be a need for 225 new homes to be built each year.

The target included in the Draft Local Plan is for 576 new houses per year. This is based on a 'Standard Method' (Source: [Housing and economic needs assessment - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-and-economic-needs-assessment)) which uses a household growth projection from 2014 as a starting point.

The more up-to-date 2018 household growth projection is considerably lower than the 2014 projections, reflecting more recent real growth figures.

This is then increased by 40%, based on the current high cost of housing in the Borough, to give an even higher housebuilding target than the inflated 2014 based figure.

As a result, the quoted housing target is more than 2.5x the need based on the historic population growth in the Borough.

Reply

The housing target is set by central government via the standard method using 2014 ONS data.

Even with the standard method number our draft local plan is currently showing a 52% delivery of housing supply. 5400 vs target of 10,368.

▪ There seem to be lots of sites within Epsom's urban area that are vacant, run down or underutilised, could these be developed for housing instead of the Greenbelt?

Yes.

Some of these sites have already been earmarked by the Council for development, but many haven't.

The National Planning Policy Framework (which contains mandatory guidance for preparing the Local Plan) para 141 states that before concluding 'exceptional circumstances' exist for developing on Greenbelt, the strategy must:

- a) make as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land; and
- b) optimise the density of development... including... a significant uplift in minimum density standards in town and city centres and other locations well served by public transport.'

There are lots of sites across Epsom town / urban areas which are not being put forward for use in the Local Plan or appear to be underutilised (for instance the Council's proposals for the town hall site don't meet the minimum density requirements they set in policy S3).

Reply

The Epsom Town Masterplan is due to complete at the end of March and will input into the next stage of the draft local plan. The site area will be reviewed, optimised with options coming forward to members for a steer/view.

▪ Does the Borough have to build houses on Greenbelt Land to meet the housing target?

No. In fact it is only permitted to build on Greenbelt in 'Exceptional Circumstances'.

The National Planning Policy Framework specifically states that housing targets need not be met if it would require building on the Greenbelt (para 11 note 7).

Reply

Similar to an item above. If we are unable to deliver all our housing from brownfield or urban sites we have to consider green belt. Some green belt sites have been put forward during the call for sites which have been evaluated. A small number of these are considered viable at this point and could deliver housing.

▪ The Ashley Centre Local Plan display states that development will be 'Located away from areas of flood risk'. How has Horton Farm been selected for development as it regularly gets flooded?

'Horton' roughly translates from Old English to 'muddy farm'. Both the Environment Agency flood maps and Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's own 2018 Flood Risk Assessment show that Horton Farm is at high risk of flooding from surface water (because there is clay just below the surface) and in practice it is often flooded. A 'Critical Drainage Area' runs through the site.

The Draft Local Plan appears to ignore the flood risk assessment and only considers flooding from rivers.

If the Greenbelt Horton Farm is built on, there is a significant risk that it will result in increased flooding into West Ewell and Ewell Court.

Source: Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 2018, Figure 108. Brown areas are in the highest category of flood risk.

Reply

The Ashley Centre Local Plan, read the display boards showing key items of the draft local plan in the Ashley Centre.

Any site being put forward would still need to submit a full and thorough planning application which may include flood risk evaluation and mitigation.

The draft local plan does not get into that level of detail so the statement that it **ignores** the flood risk assessment is misleading at best.

▪ I'm told the Council has spent £1m on preparing this plan. Would it be expensive to change direction now?

The money that has been spent is largely on reports that were required to be prepared whatever direction the plan went in.

The earlier changes are made to protect the Greenbelt, the cheaper it is to make those changes.

Reply

All funds spent on the local plan have been shown in LPPC and S&R committees.

Yes there are consultants involved to prepare reports and evidence as we don't have that skillset; this is not unusual and many other boroughs adopt the same approach.

It has to be understood that there is a large body of evidence behind the local plan. Adding or removing sites from the spatial strategy itself has a knock on of recreating that evidence.

The decision point on changes to the spatial strategy and which sites are in or out has no relevance on cost. The work still needs to be done, the evidence still needs to be created.

If the plan is paused then the evidence base may need to be re-worked depending on the length of pause.

▪ How will developing the Greenbelt land affect wildlife?

The Greenbelt land is a vital habitat, providing food and shelter for hundreds of species of mammals, birds, amphibians and insects as well as native trees and flowers.

As an example, Horton Farm supports roe deer, bats, greater spotted and green woodpeckers, sparrowhawks, house sparrows, stag beetles, song thrushes, hedgehogs, common toads, and other priority species.

Reply

Any planning application coming forward would have to consider the environmental impact. The updated policies coming forward in our draft local plan are up to date and current on once adopted would help structure applications coming forward.

What follow are questions I was asked at the Bourne Hall and Ashley Centre drop in sessions.

Q: Why aren't residents at and around the proposed sites being communicated with? In the same way as when a planning application is lodged, impacted households get informed.

A: The planning application approach typically has limited effectiveness and a broad communications approach to all borough residents was selected.

Q: Residents only just heard about this because of the Ashley Centre display boards.

A: This was the goal of the boards in the Ashley Centre factored with social media, Borough Insight, Libraries and other outlets.

Q: Is this the only chance we have to input?

A: It is stage 2 of a 7-stage process. This is the first consultation piece.

Q: Infrastructure. Where is it in the plan(s)?

A: At this stage infrastructure delivery partners rarely come to the discussion table at such an early stage. This is part of the motivation to get our draft local plan published to kick start those discussions. There are sections in the draft local plan document on infrastructure but they are high-level at this stage.

Q: Why are we putting the green belt forward?

A: Based on the brownfield and urban sites that have come forward via the call for sites we are very short of our housing number target/start point of 10,000+ We either intensify our brownfield and urban sites by building higher or we consider green belt sites that have come forward.

Q: Why are only 90 homes in the Town Hall allocation?

A: The Epsom Town Masterplan is due to complete in March and will inform the draft local plan into Regulation 19. It is expected this number would increase significantly especially given the steer from council to move to 70 East Street.

Q: Where does it stop? After this local plan do we get asked for more housing by the government?

A: A very good question, at this point based on what we know, come 2040 we may be challenged again to deliver more housing.

Q: Mole Valley has paused and removed all its green belt. Why can't we do the same?

A: In theory we can however Mole Valley are at a very different stage. Pausing at this point would be to wait and see what the outcome of the consultation, mainly on housing numbers. Our draft local plan currently proposes to deliver 52% of the housing number. Any update on housing numbers would only be beneficial to us if that number came down significantly. In the meantime we need to progress.

The planning inspector has just replied and told MVDC that they can't remove green belt via the major modifications method and that a pause is possible but they should consider not protracting the examination.

Q: As these sites are in the draft local plan is that it?

A: No, the process flows through to Stage 7 and even then a planning application is still required.