

More affordable housing now. Cllr Kate Chinn

7 December 2022

The Local Plan of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council should specify a minimum requirement of 40% of affordable housing in each new housing development of 10 or more units (Use Class C3) of which at least 25% will be reserved for social rent and comply with the vacant building credit.

Labour are asking that the Local Plan specifies a minimum amount of both affordable housing and social housing for rent. Our targets are quite low with many councils providing more however, other councils don't have such a low bar as their starting point. Epsom and Ewell have the lowest percentage of social housing in the county.

In the last 3 years the affordable homes built in the borough were: -

2019-2020 15%

2020-2021 3%

2021-2022 6%

If Covid was a factor in this its even more important for even more homes to be rapidly built in the borough to catch up and, it's very clear indeed, many more affordable homes must be built to make the strategy deliverable.

I think that the Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy, for those who don't have much homelessness in their ward, clearly explains the cost of homelessness for an individual, a family and society. There's also the financial cost to the borough of just under £2m and to society as the health and well being impact of homelessness increases the demand for health and social care resources.

I hear of individuals living in overcrowded accommodation. I have families who live separately during the week, often with grandparents, so the children can attend schools which meet their need. Many people are living out of borough losing contact with their known and trusted support networks.

Building affordable homes - I recall just two units, as part of a development, coming to planning recently and they were not of a good standard space or amenity wise and affordable housing should not be substandard housing so on the advice of the officers it was rightly refused.

I constantly hear that providing affordable homes as part of a development is unviable. Well, why not tell developers to open their books as they must do in Brighton and the council can check their calculations.

I see application after application being refused or deferred and Epsom needs to be building homes of a good standard that residents can afford to live in, settle in and raise their families.

The Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy recognises that residents are unable to access affordable homes, and this is a main causal factor for homelessness in the borough.

At the briefing on the Homeless and Rough sleeping Strategy some of us attended a graph showed a clear dip in homeless numbers which was when the Hollymoor Lane development became occupied. A development of affordable and social housing, environmentally friendly, with solar panels and EV points, and built to a good standard.

The borough needs more developments like this

The Labour group welcomes the action plan to increase availability of affordable accommodation and welcomes the action to build homes and identify appropriate council owned sites.

However with soaring rents, S21 evictions happening again coupled with the lack of social housing we do fear numbers of homeless people will increase.

Epsom and Ewell council needs to ensure and facilitate building affordable homes. Currently it is changing from a NIMBY borough to a BANANA borough. Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anyone.

It needs to change. The council should identify appropriate sites and continue to engage with Housing Association and responsible developers to get homes built.

Affordable Homes for residents need to be built and they need to be built now.

Councillor Kate Chinn - Labour Court Ward

Local Planning Matters

7 December 2022



Tim Murphy's opinion piece on Epsom and Ewell's Local Plan. An up-to-date Local Plan is a necessity. It indicates to those proposing new developments or conversions to properties just what they are allowed or not allowed to do. It is also the yardstick by which locally elected councillors assess whether a particular planning application should be permitted.

The current Epsom and Ewell Local Plan was approved as long ago as 2007. It does not meet the requirements of the most recent planning legislation. In particular, it is failing to deliver the type of housing that is needed locally – affordable and in close proximity to a range of retail and social facilities and public transport. By contrast, the current Plan has been very largely successful in protecting the Borough's much valued Green Belt from inappropriate development. Two reports commissioned by the Council have confirmed that our Green Belt is performing as it should against the five criteria set out in planning legislation.

A new draft Local Plan is very likely to be discussed by the Council's Licensing and Planning Policy Committee on 21 st November. The preparation of the Plan has been overshadowed by a quite unrealistic housing target of nearly seven hundred new homes to be provided every year in the Borough.

Where does this target come from? It is set by central government and is based on outdated projections about how fast our number of households will grow in the future. Astonishingly, the number is so high because it incorporates what is known as an 'affordability' uplift – because house prices locally are so high, it is assumed these will fall markedly as more houses are built. There is no evidence that this is how our housing market operates.

Our councillors have a choice to make. They can try to meet most, and maybe all, of the centrally-determined housing target. The Borough has only limited built-up areas that would lend themselves to redevelopment for housing so, inevitably, extensive areas of our Green Belt would be sacrificed. Judging by the type of housing that has been approved over the past few years in the Borough on what are called greenfield sites, it is unlikely that the homes that are provided will meet local needs.

What guarantees will be in place to ensure that such significant increases in population will be matched by more educational and medical facilities and better transport provision? Alternatively, as in neighbouring Elmbridge, our councillors could decide not to meet the housing target but rather prioritise the provision of those types and sizes of housing most needed locally, including affordable homes, on existing built-up areas so that no valuable Green Belt need be lost.

The comprehensive redevelopment of existing commercial estates to incorporate a significant element of new housing should be a component of this way forward. Excellent design standards will be essential. Recent statements by our new Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Communities, Michael Gove, support this approach.

What will our councillors decide?

Tim Murphy

Tim Murphy has worked as a Chartered Town Planner in local government in London, and as an environmental specialist both with WS Atkins and Partners, the Epsom-based engineering consultants, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) where he was responsible for examining the environmental and social impacts of the EBRD's investments in Eastern Europe. Since retiring, Tim chaired the Surrey Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) for several years, and he is currently Chair of CPRE's South East Region and heads up CPRE's Epsom and Ewell local group, campaigning to protect the local Green Belt and other open areas.

If you have views and opinions on "Local Plan Matters" – do write to us admin@epsomandewelltimes.com

David King, Epsom Common Assn. on BBC's "nimbyism" report.

7 December 2022

David King, Chair of **Epsom Common Association** writes:

In my opinion several aspects of this BBC report are, at the least, questionable. I am not competent to comment on the important housing issues raised, but have serious concerns regarding the section discussing development on the Green Belt. Although not named in the BBC report, this clip was recorded on the the edge of Epsom Common at Woodcote Side.

The small part of the Common shown, grass and a highway ditch, was disparagingly described as “technically Green Belt land” by a representative of LandTech, a software company providing products for property developers.

Those recording the clip could not have missed the noticeboard headed “Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve” just feet out of shot, but chose to ignore the significance. They also chose not to show the mature woodland immediately behind the camera. The implication that the land shown was suitable for housing development was clear. By contrast, Natural England (the government body that advises on the natural environment) describe Epsom Common as a “nationally important wildlife site”; so clearly development would be a disaster for biodiversity.

Given its various designations: Registered Common Land, Local Nature Reserve, Site of Special Scientific Interest or Site of Nature Conservation Interest, as well as Green Belt, I hope that the Common is not at risk of development, but that ultimately depends on the will of politicians.

Even if the Common is safe from development, the suggestion made in the BBC report that Epsom & Ewell “could meet all of its annual housing need by by developing just 1% of the Green Belt in the Borough” does raise a more insidious threat. This statement means precisely what it says: at a typical outer London housing density of about 40 dwellings per hectare, 1% of the Borough’s Green Belt would provide space for just one year of central government’s imposed target of 577 houses per annum.

Of course not every piece of Green Belt is sacred and everyone must have a decent home, but we do have to be intelligent how we achieve this essential goal. After a few years development at the pace suggested in the BBC report, much of the rest of the green space in the Borough would have been built over. This would leave Epsom Common increasingly isolated, with many animals and plants unable to survive, having lost the essential freedom to move to and from adjacent land that previously also had space for nature. To quote a 2011 government White Paper: “We should be thinking not of isolated spots of green on a map of England but of a thriving green network linking wildlife sites with farmland, forestry and urban parks and gardens...” I should also note that an independent report by W.S. Atkins for the Borough Council in 2017 found that “Metropolitan Green Belt land within Epsom and Ewell is, on the whole, highly performing” and “continues to play a vital role in preventing urban sprawl”.

As well as damaging biodiversity, which government is legally obliged to improve, large scale development of green land (whether “Belt” or not) will also exacerbate the catastrophes of climate change and reduced food and water security that threaten both human society and much of life on the planet. The beneficial effect of open space to the physical and mental well-being of local (and often not so local) people would also be reduced. The value of the Common to many became particularly clear during the pandemic when it was exceptionally busy. Although some areas of Green Belt do not have good public access, an issue that could – with political will – be tackled, the more London is allowed to sprawl, the harder it will become for its population to visit and benefit from extensive natural spaces.

David King, Chair – Epsom Common Association

8th September 2022