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Epsom and Ewell Council response to Local Plan criticism

8 January 2025

Dear Editor,

Government's English Devolution White Paper

We are working through what the Government's English Devolution White Paper means for Epsom & Ewell. Our commitment is to do what's right for our residents, local businesses, and visitors; and to ensure that the high-quality public services that our residents need and deserve continue to be delivered.

Proposed Submission Local Plan (Regulation 19)

The Proposed Submission Local Plan seeks to address the balance between meeting development needs and protecting the borough's environment. Consultation on the proposed submission local plan commenced on the 20 December and will close on the 5 February 2025.

This consultation provides the opportunity for those with an interest in the borough to comment on whether the local plan is legally compliant or sound. Guidance on legal compliance, soundness and how to respond to the consultation can be found on the council's website and on the consultation website(link is external).

The Council has considered the responses received during the consultation in the Draft local Plan undertaken in early 2023 in developing the Proposed Submission Local Plan. Information on the changes made is detailed in the Consultation Statement published alongside the Proposed Submission Local Plan.

The borough has a high level of need for affordable housing for a range of property types and sizes, including family homes, with over 1,350 households being on the council's housing needs register. The greatest need is for affordable rented homes (which includes social rented housing) and the affordable housing policy in the Local Plan reflects this, whilst having regard to the national policy and viability evidence.

Consultation over the Christmas and New Year period has been necessary in order to meet the new deadline imposed by the National Planning Policy Framework for submission of Local Plans under the 'old' system. Our previous intention was to wait until January 2025 but that could cause us to miss the deadline.

The Local Plan will be submitted before the 12 March 2025 and examined against the December 2023 version of the NPPF which makes it clear that it is at the discretion of local authorities as to whether Green Belt boundaries should be amended. This flexibility is to reflect that Green Belt authorities (such as Epsom and Ewell) have their own unique characteristics, challenges and requirements, and that local plans must address competing and conflicting demands for land.

In terms of changes to green belt land, the Local plan proposes that:

- 52.6 ha of greenfield green belt land is removed from the green belt (site allocations SA33-SA35), this equates to 3.36 % of the boroughs Green Belt.
- 85 ha of previously developed green belt land, including the hospital clusters and part of the NESCOT estate is removed from the green belt, this equates to 5.44% ha of the boroughs Green Belt.
- Less than 0.4ha of land is removed from the green belt following minor boundary amendments.

Following the consultation, we will submit the Local Plan, supporting evidence and all responses received to the consultation to the Secretary of Statewho will then appoint a Planning Inspector to undertake an independent examination. As part of the submission the council can propose changes to the local plan, however it is at the discretion of the planning inspector as to how these are dealt with.

Yours faithfully,

Councillor Peter O'Donovan, Chair of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee.

Read the full Epsom Green Belt Group letter here.

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