

Epsom and Ewell Local Plan tensions surface as committee debate curtailed by chair

12 March 2026



A meeting of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Licensing and Planning Policy Committee (LPPC) on 10th March exposed growing tensions over the borough's Local Plan after councillors attempted to debate how revised evidence is being submitted to the Government's Planning Inspector.

The committee ultimately voted seven in favour with two abstentions simply to "note" the Local Plan update report, with the chair not voting.

But the discussion revealed frustration among some councillors over the level of member oversight of changes being made during the examination process.

Inspector requires further work on Local Plan

The meeting began with a detailed briefing from the council's Head of Planning Policy explaining that the Local Plan, submitted for examination in March 2025, had been judged "unsound" by the Planning Inspector and required further work before it could proceed.

He told councillors that the Inspector had requested additional technical work to determine whether modifications could make the plan sound.

Two pieces of revised evidence had already been submitted earlier this year:

- a revised section of the Green Belt Topic Paper
- an updated Land Availability Assessment

Further work has now been requested, including the preparation of potential additional site allocations and updates to the housing trajectory, sustainability appraisal, habitats regulations assessment, transport assessment and infrastructure delivery plan.

All of this work must be submitted to the Inspector by 10th April 2026.

Officers warned councillors that national policy now discourages long pauses in Local Plan examinations and that delays could risk the plan being withdrawn.

Debate centres on councillor oversight

Much of the discussion that followed focused not on housing sites themselves but on whether councillors had sufficient opportunity to scrutinise documents being submitted to the Inspector.

Independent councillor **Alex Coley**, who had requested the agenda item, raised concerns about the process and argued that wider oversight of the evidence base was necessary.

He told the committee that effective decision-making required proper evaluation of alternatives and meaningful access for councillors and the public to the decision-making process.

Coley also suggested that some of the conclusions contained in recently submitted evidence appeared contradictory and said this demonstrated the need for greater scrutiny.

"I believe that sets out just one example of why wider public oversight is so important," he said.

Chair maintains procedural limits

However, councillors were advised that the committee could not introduce procedural motions or amendments relating to the Local Plan submissions.

Coley told the meeting that members had received advice from the council's Monitoring Officer stating that motions from the floor were not permitted under the committee's procedures.

He questioned that interpretation, suggesting it relied on provisions from an older model constitution that the council had replaced in 2023.

Despite this, the chair, Councillor **Peter O'Donovan** (RA, Ewell Court), maintained the procedural position and the meeting proceeded without amendments to the report or further debate on altering the process.

The committee therefore confined itself to noting the update report.

Questions raised about future scrutiny

Councillors also asked whether the committee would have further opportunities to review documents before they are submitted to the Inspector.

Officers said the timetable made that unlikely for the next stage of work.

"With the deadline for the evidence base being the 10th of April... there isn't time for a committee to do that," councillors were told.

Instead, public consultation on the new material will take place later in the examination process once the evidence has been submitted.

Campaign concerns continue

Outside the council chamber, the Local Plan debate continues to attract strong public interest, particularly over potential Green Belt development.

Campaign group Epsom Green Belt circulated a message to councillors following the meeting expressing concern that revised Local Plan documents could be progressing without full scrutiny by elected members.

The group urged councillors to ensure that any material changes affecting Green Belt land are properly reviewed and debated.

Next steps for the Local Plan

The Local Plan examination will now move into its next stage.

Key steps expected include submission of new evidence to the Inspector by **10 April 2026**, followed by consultation on the new documents and potentially further examination hearings.

If the Inspector concludes that the plan can be made sound with modifications, the final decision will return to Full Council, where councillors will vote on whether to adopt the revised Local Plan.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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