



Epsom and Ewell's new housing targets in Surrey perspective

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Housing targets in Surrey are set to skyrocket, with some areas expected to deliver double the number of homes under new Government plans. On December 12, the long-awaited update to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published, setting out what councils and developers can and cannot do – leaving boroughs and districts “disappointed” and “deeply concerned.” Across Surrey, the number of new homes expected each year has risen by 4,635 to a total of 10,981, with some areas bearing a significantly heavier load than others.

Worst affected is Elmbridge Borough Council, where housing targets have more than doubled, from 653 to 1,562. This increase comes alongside the prospect of having no local plan, giving developers greater freedom over where and what to build. A spokesperson for Elmbridge Borough Council said they were “reviewing the new NPPF and its implications for Elmbridge’s Local Plan.” The council was told in November that its housing strategy must be withdrawn and restarted or risk being deemed “unsound.” A decision on next steps will be made in February 2025.

Other boroughs facing substantial increases include Waverley, where targets have risen from 710 to 1,481, and Reigate and Banstead, which sees an increase from 644 to 1,306. Woking, the only council to see its figure drop, still faces a significant rise from 436 to 794. These adjustments align largely with July consultation targets. However, Woking residents hoping for a break in town-center skyscraper developments and green belt preservation will be disappointed, as the reduction amounted to just one unit from the earlier proposal.

Housing targets for Surrey boroughs under the new NPPF are as follows:

		Old housing target	New NPPF target	% increase
1	Elmbridge	653	1562	139
2	Surrey Heath	320	684	114
3	Waverley	710	1481	109
4	Reigate & Banstead	644	1306	103
5	Woking	436	794	82
6	Mole Valley	460	833	81
7	Guildford	743	1170	57
8	Epsom & Ewell	569	889	56
9	Tandridge	634	843	33
10	Spelthorne	631	793	26
11	Runnymede	546	626	15
	SURREY	6346	10981	73

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council’s executive member for planning, Councillor Rich Michalowski, described the Government’s decision not to heed their feedback as “disappointing.” He said, “The borough’s housing target in the new NPPF of 1,306 homes per year is nearly three times higher than our current local plan target of 460 and more than double the previous NPPF target of 644 homes. These changes will have severe implications for Reigate and Banstead’s green belt and the character of our towns and villages. The standard methodology for calculating housing is flawed, as it doesn’t account for environmental and infrastructure constraints.” He emphasized the council’s commitment to exploring all urban development options but acknowledged that a Green Belt Review might be unavoidable.

Waverley Borough Council echoed these concerns, particularly regarding the methodology and its impact on green belt. Cllr Liz Townsend, Waverley’s portfolio holder for planning, called the more than two-fold increase “unrealistic and uncalled for.” She noted that the requirement for 1,481 new homes annually is two and a half times the current target and could increase the borough’s population by 50% over 20 years. “There is simply no evidence of this level of demand, nor that building this many homes would make them more affordable,” she said. Cllr Townsend highlighted the borough’s existing issues, including water supply disruptions, sewage overspills, a crumbling rural road network, overstretched health services, and power shortages stalling new developments.

All councils must now face the new reality as their starting points for planning new homes. Each borough will need to demonstrate to Independent Planning Inspectors that they have explored all possible avenues for delivering these targets. This challenge will require balancing housing needs with environmental, infrastructure, and community considerations.

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Campaigners have set up a petition against the new targets:

<https://www.change.org/p/excessive-targets-for-new-homes-in-surrey>