

Epsom Civic Society say Local Plan should be agreed on Wednesday

18 November 2024



The **Epsom Civic Society** (ECS) (motto being “Shaping the future, safeguarding the past”) has urged councillors to support the borough’s draft Local Plan, warning of the risks associated with further delays. In a press release issued yesterday, ECS Chair **Margaret Hollins** emphasised the importance of progressing the Plan to protect Epsom from speculative and inappropriate development.

“For the past eight years, our newsletters have chronicled the ongoing saga of Epsom’s efforts to adopt a new Local Plan,” Ms Hollins stated. “Without an up-to-date Plan, the Borough remains vulnerable to developments that may not align with the character and needs of our community.”

The Society acknowledges the challenges posed by central government planning reforms, which have increased housing targets and tightened timescales for Local Plan updates. While the draft Plan falls short of fully meeting housing targets, ECS believes it represents the borough’s best chance of success in the face of these constraints.

In a letter to members of the council’s Licensing and Planning Policy Committee, ECS highlighted the consequences of rejecting the draft. “Having no meaningful Plan to take forward to the next stage is significantly more threatening,” the letter warns. “Without an up-to-date Plan, the Borough faces prolonged vulnerability to speculative development, which could lead to inappropriate urban projects and greater threats to the Green Belt.”

The letter acknowledges the difficult compromises required in the draft Plan, including limited encroachments on less strategically important Green Belt land. However, ECS views this as a necessary trade-off to protect higher-value areas and secure much-needed housing. The Society is urging councillors to act swiftly, particularly given anticipated changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which may increase housing pressures further in the new year.

“Some compromise now is the best way to defend the rest [of the Green Belt],” the press release concluded. ECS is advocating for the adoption of the Plan as recommended in the council’s report, emphasising the risks and costs of restarting the process.

The Licensing and Planning Policy Committee will meet tomorrow to consider the draft Local Plan. The decision could shape the future of development in Epsom for years to come.

Councillors now face the challenging task of balancing housing needs with the preservation of the borough’s character and natural assets, while navigating increasingly stringent national planning policies. All eyes are on Wednesday’s meeting to see how they respond to the Civic Society’s call for decisive action.

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