

Fresh Local Plan row as councillor questions Green Belt revisions and governance at Epsom and Ewell

5 March 2026



Concerns are growing over Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s Local Plan after campaigners and a borough councillor raised questions about revised evidence submitted to the Government Planning Inspector — including whether key changes were made without councillor oversight.

The controversy centres on documents submitted during the independent examination of the borough’s Local Plan, which will determine where housing development can take place for years to come.

A Green Belt campaign group, a planning expert and Conservative councillor Kieran Persand have all raised concerns about revisions to the evidence base — particularly a Green Belt Topic Paper which could influence whether some land currently protected as Green Belt is opened for development.

Campaigners question governance of revisions

The issue first surfaced in a widely circulated email from the Epsom Greenbelt Group to borough councillors warning of “urgent and serious concerns regarding the recently submitted revised Local Plan documents and the process by which they appear to have been approved and issued.”

Campaigners argue that councillors previously authorised officers only to make minor corrections to documents submitted to the Planning Inspector — not material revisions to the evidence.

They say that if significant changes were submitted without member oversight it would raise serious governance concerns and undermine democratic accountability.

The group has called on councillors to clarify what authority officers relied upon when submitting revised documents and whether the Council’s Monitoring Officer has reviewed the matter.

Expert analysis identifies potential Green Belt changes

Planning expert Tim Murphy has reviewed the Council’s January 2026 Green Belt Topic Paper and identified 33 Green Belt sites assessed for their contribution to preventing urban sprawl and protecting countryside.

Mr Murphy said several sites which scored relatively highly under the Council’s own Green Belt rating system were nevertheless recommended for boundary changes that could allow development.

The sites highlighted include:

- Land north of College Road at Downs Farm
- Land near Ewell East Station
- Land west of Burgh Heath Road near South Hatch Stables
- Land extending the Noble Park estate within the Hospital Cluster

Mr Murphy said the justification offered was the existence of “exceptional circumstances”, but added that he did not find the arguments convincing.

He noted that these sites have ratings comparable to Horton Farm and the Hook Road Arena — two locations which generated significant public opposition during Local Plan hearings last year.

Other Green Belt sites treated differently

Mr Murphy also pointed out that other Green Belt locations with similar ratings are **not recommended for boundary changes**, including:

- Hollywood Lodge
- Drift Bridge Farm

- Land off Banstead Road
- Land east of Burgh Heath Road
- Several smaller sites near Downs Road

The difference in treatment raises questions about consistency in the assessment process.

Meanwhile, a separate planning application for **110 homes at Langley Vale** — on land not recommended for Green Belt boundary change — was recently rejected by councillors by six votes to two.

Councillor calls for urgent review

The debate intensified this week when Horton ward Conservative councillor **Kieran Persand** wrote to the chair of the Council's Local Plan Policy Committee (LPPC) urging urgent action.

In his email to councillors, Persand said he had become aware that revised evidence had been sent to the Planning Inspector which "materially differs from evidence previously submitted," including a document known as **COUD_021**.

He said the document appeared to have been submitted without review or approval by the LPPC, the committee responsible for overseeing the Local Plan.

Persand wrote that he had already identified "important errors and other concerns" in the document which he believed should have been addressed before submission.

He also said he had been unable to find any significant change in circumstances — such as changes in national policy — that would justify altering the conclusions of the borough's earlier Green Belt assessment.

Further Green Belt additions possible

Persand warned that the situation may be evolving further.

According to correspondence with the Planning Inspector cited in his email, council officers indicated that **additional evidence and amendments could be submitted by 6 March**, potentially including recommendations for **further Green Belt sites to be added to the Local Plan**.

Persand noted that there were no Local Plan Policy Committee or full council meetings scheduled before that date.

"This suggests that the officers' amendments to submission documents, and proposals for changes to the Local Plan they plan to submit on 6 March, will also not be subject to any review or approval by the LPPC or Full Council," he wrote.

He warned that proceeding without councillor oversight could expose the council to accusations of failing in its duties and even potential judicial review.

Call for documents to return to councillors

Persand has asked the committee chair to arrange for all evidence documents submitted to the Inspector to be brought before the Local Plan Policy Committee before any further submission.

He acknowledged that doing so could delay the council's proposed timetable but argued this would be preferable to risking more serious problems later in the process.

Questions to the council remain unanswered

The *Epsom and Ewell Times* contacted the council's communications department on 28 February seeking clarification on the situation.

The newspaper asked whether a revised paper recommending the removal of some sites from Green Belt protection had been submitted to the Planning Inspector.

At the time of publication, no response had been received.

What happens next

The Planning Inspector will ultimately decide whether the borough's Local Plan is "sound" and can proceed.

However, the council itself remains responsible for setting the borough's strategic direction.

If significant changes to the evidence base are confirmed, councillors may face renewed debate over housing numbers, Green Belt protection and how the Local Plan examination is being managed.

The outcome could shape where thousands of new homes are built in the borough — and whether parts of its Green Belt remain protected — for decades to come.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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