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Mole Valley Local Plan paused: official

Inspectors have agreed to pause the examination of Mole Valley's 6,000 home blueprint amid attempts to remove all green belt sites for development.

Mole Valley District Council had written to the Planning Inspectorate asking to remove all green belt sites from its draft local plan in anticipation of government changes to the planning system. But these hopes have been dashed by the inspector on the grounds it could not prejudge any prospective changes. Despite the setback, the inspector said they would be happy to delay hearings until May – when any new rule changes become clearer- and that is where things stand.

Local plans are the basis for planning decisions in an area. They outline the type, location and density of development that is likely to be permitted. Without one, developers have much freer range to chance their arms.
The council also does not have a five year housing land supply, which again tips the favour towards developers and increases the urgency with which Mole Valley District Council needs to get its local plan signed off.

Mole Valley District Council's leader member for planning, Councillor Margaret Cooksey, said that, while disappointed the local plan has been delayed yet again it is a better outcome than having to start the process from scratch. She said: "I am disappointed we are having to pause and delay. The longer we are without an adopted plan the more at risk our green sites are. If we carry on we have to work on current National Planning Policy Framework rules and greenfield sites we have in the plan. That is what we are trying to prevent. But if we just abandon the current plan we would have to start from scratch and that would take a lot longer. We don't want to lose the good parts of the draft plan."

She said they have already received an application to build on one of the green belt sites they are trying to remove from the local plan.

The planning inspector agreed to delay examination of the local plan until May 25 at which time there should be greater clarity around future national planning policy and will also accommodate the implications of the council's all out local elections in May.

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