Epsom and Ewell's new housing targets in Surrey perspective

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 The council was told in November that its housing strategy must be withdrawn and restarted or risk being deemed "unsound."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.

Related reports:

Can Epsom and Ewell get more dense?

The Local Plan plot thickens after revised NPPF

Can the green light to Epsom's Green Belt housing turn red?

Campaigners have set up a petition against the new targets:

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

Epsom and Ewell FC get marching orders from Sandhurst

Epsom and Ewell FC 1-2 Sandhurst Town. Combined Counties League - Premier Division South. Tuesday 17th December 2024.

Following our defeat at Chipstead in November I advised that we regularly seemed to struggle to produce a good performance against any of the teams below us in the League. Although that trend was bucked with a good win at Alton, we were back to our old ways as a starting eleven that was unchanged from our Vase victory over Burnham failed to keep their intensity up and slipped away in the second half to a 2-1 defeat at home to Sandhurst Town, allowing them to claim a League double over us and leapfrog us in the table too.

We were a little slow out of the blocks and Mark Holley produced a good early run that ended with a shot that was sliced wide. However, we began to get back into the match and Conrad Essilfie-Conduah sent a header over the bar from an Adam Green free kick, although our man was offside in any case. Our next chance came from a great crossfield pass from Will Kendall that was perfect for Sean-Michael Anderson, but his strike on target was closed down immediately by a defender.

We started to push our visitors back a little more from this point and took the lead in the 19th minute, when a Green corner was missed by the Sandhurst keeper Harry White and then appeared to strike the thigh of Elliott Miles, rebounding into the net from a couple of yards out. It was at first suspected that our defender Anthony Nazareth had got a touch, and he certainly celebrated as though he had done, but it was later confirmed by a couple of sources that this would go down as our fifth own goal of the season, which was a shame really, as a goal just before Christmas from Nazareth would certainly have been appropriate!

Ethan Nelson-Roberts was next to try his luck from 18 yards, but his powerful strike was just over the bar. Then suddenly, it nearly all went pear shaped as a pinpoint crossfield pass from our opponents put Shane Qolori through on goal, only for Dan O'Donovan to make a superb save with an outstretched leg to keep them out. They also struck another warning shot just over our crossbar in injury time after a good move. We went in with a lead, but by no means a secure one.

And so it proved early in the second half. With Sandhurst kicking towards the Tolworth end, Qolori had an opportunity. It looked at first as though his team mate had got in the way, but he retained the ball, and then drew a couple of defenders before drilling the ball low into O'Donovan's left hand corner from fairly close range in the 52nd minute to level the scores.

We had a brief shout for a penalty when Kionte Gillfillian-Waul just reached the ball ahead of a defender and nodded the ball past him before going to ground, but in all honesty, I felt that there wasn't quite enough there to award the spot kick and the referee felt the same way.

The match began to meander and we were no longer as dominant as we had been in the first half. Then we started to make errors. Firstly, Nazareth miskicked a clearance just a matter of yards out and the visiting striker saw his shot well blocked by O'Donovan with Nazareth himself able to recover to make a block from the next shot. Our defender was then clattered into by one of the opposition and although he recovered a little after treatment, he limped off a few minutes later and was replaced by Callum

Wilson.

We then picked up another injury after Niall Stillwell was caught by a high foot that earned Morgan Elliot a yellow card, and again, he would limp off a few minutes later for debutant Tobi Falodi from Guildford City to take his place. We then had our best chance of the half after Gillfillian-Waul sent in a long throw that was flicked on by Craig Dundas for Green to strike, although White did well to parry the strike away to safety. Another opportunity followed after Green had split the defence with a pass to Kendall, but although he was through on goal, the defender chasing him probably did enough to force him into an earlier shot than he would have liked and he put the ball wide from only twelve yards out.

The visitors could have been 3-1 down in that time, but they weren't, and began to grow in confidence as the game reached its closing stages. They had a great chance in the 88th minute when a ball through on goal looked harmless enough until O'Donovan sliced his clearance on the bobbly surface, leaving Frazier Osunkaya with a good opportunity from an angle, but the contact wasn't the greatest and our keeper was able to reach the ball just before it crossed the line. We failed to heed the fairly large warning though and just a minute later Holley finished the game in a similar way to how he started it; with a good run from left to right, although this time he produced a much more accurate strike that O'Donovan could only palm into the goal from twelve yards.

Ultimately, this proved to be the winning goal and although I don't believe we deserved to lose over the ninety minutes, we hadn't really worked hard enough to win it either and if I'm honest, we probably should have done from the position we were in. It would be easy to say that this wasn't a very important League match, and it's true that we've had many more pivotal fixtures this season. However, this was another flat performance, particularly in the second half and will become a concern if repeated too often.

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O'Donovan, Niall Stillwell, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Nicolas Bostan, Anthony Nazareth, Ali Fofahan, Conrad Essilfie-Conduah, Will Kendall, Jason Bloor, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Callum Wilson for Nazareth (65), Luke Miller for Anderson (68), Tobi Falodi for Stillwell (83)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Watching out for tomorrow's film talent in Epsom and Ewell

Creative Media students from North East Surrey College of Technology (Nescot) were joined by their tutors, family and friends for the premiere of their short film, 'The Watching' which was screened at Epsom Picturehouse last week.

The Watching' was filmed on location in the South Downs in November by Nescot's Level 4 and HND Creative Media students as part of their domestic filming project. Written by and starring former student, Charlie McCarthy, 'The Watching', is a psychological drama, exploring themes of identity, state control and the human cost of forgetting, set against the desolate beauty of an isolated coastline.

Louise Gaskin, Head of Curriculum for Creative Industries at Nescot said, "A huge well done to our cast and crew. We are so proud of their efforts and hard work on this project which has resulted in, I think, one of the best films we've made as a department. Thank you to Epsom Picturehouse and Satisfied Eye International Film Festival for supporting our students, we were thrilled to be able to showcase our students' film on the big screen."

Abigail Partington-Moran, Creative Media tutor at Nescot added, "The students have worked really hard on this filming project and enjoyed themselves too. They've taken the early starts, late nights, cold weather and countless unit moves all in their stride. The project has given them the real-world experience of working on set, and alongside the technical film-making skills, they've also learnt team work, problem-solving and time management skills."

After the film screening, key cast and crew members involved in the filming took to the stage for a Q&A session with Creative Media tutor demonstrator, Alex Marshall. They included, former student, Charlie McCarthy, Script Writer and Actor, and Sam Gower, Actor; HND student, Hannah Lealan, Producer; Level 4 student Frankie Hamley and HND student Nathan Elford, Directors and Level 4 student, Amani McKenzie, Script Supervisor.

Former student Charlie was part of Nescot's Gold Medal winning Creative Media team at WorldSkills UK 2023. He said his inspiration for the script was the filming location, "I liked the idea of writing something satirical with reference to the beach. Everyone involved was brilliant and so dedicated all of the time. We had lots of fun making this film and I do hope audiences enjoy

it."

HND student, Nathan, who had the role of Director along with Level 4 student Frankie said, "We all worked really well together, there were no arguments which was great! Both Frankie and I collaborated to bring together the visual aspects of the film. The whole production was very professional. The experience has given me an idea of the job role I'd like to get into."

"Even though it was stressful at times, it was good stress and taught us how to problem-solve. We have learnt a lot from this whole production. It has made us ready for the film-making industry," added Frankie.

HND student, Hannah who had the role of Producer said, "We were essentially two different classes, working together. We turned a challenge from never having worked with someone before into an opportunity to develop, work and learn from each other. We had lots of fun on set between takes which made the experience enjoyable."

Level 4 student Amani explained that as part of his role as Script Supervisor, he had to ensure there was continuity through the whole production from props to the actor's lines, to make sure everything ran smoothly. "It's been an amazing experience and has prepared us for handling industry-related situations. We are ready!" he said.

Nescot Creative Media alumnus and industry professional, Luke James was present for the screening. Addressing the students, he reminisced about working on a similar filming project nine years ago when he was a student at Nescot and offered them key advice. He said, "Filmmaking is a labour of love and there are endless opportunities in this industry. The opportunity to make something like this film is just so valuable, and you may not feel it now, but you should all be extremely proud of yourselves."

'The Watching' has been entered into the Student Short (UK) category for the 2025 Satisfied Eye International Film Festival

Nescot's Level 4 and HND Creative Media students on location for the filming of 'The Watching'. Credit NESCOT

Sutton & Epsom topple league leaders

Sutton & Epsom RFC 20 Beckenham 19. Saturday 14th December.

For the final league match at Rugby Lane in 2024 the crowd were treated to the visit of the league leaders Beckenham. Twice previously this campaign have proud pole position players descended upon Cheam. Firstly, Sidcup were dispatched and then Medway had their colours lowered by the Black & Whites. Could Rugby Lane prove again to be a graveyard for the aspirations of the high-flying? This is the first of the reverse fixtures this season and the visitors' hopes were bolstered by their September success at Balmoral Avenue by 29-14. However, it was Sutton who triumphed 20-19 to collect, arguably, their most valuable scalp of the season.

After one week away Jordan Huie and Jac Davies returned for Sutton. The Black & Whites may have the Kiwi trio of Bibby, Lennie and Rea but Beckenham included Jamaican internationals Lamar Sinclair & Rimani Richards, Barbadian Sevens caps with the Caddy brothers in the centres as well as Messrs Aoke-Tiamu, Badger, Boyce & Kakoulidis from Australia added to the mix. Freddy Bunting set the game in motion on a dismally gray afternoon, thankfully free from rain, with a crosswind in his face. It was high tempo rugby from the outset as probing attacks were battered back by formidable defences. Rob Hegarty, who is enjoying an impressive season for S&E, made the first significant break to the 22 but his side failed to capitalise. Sadly, Beckenham lost their influential 15 Bradley Bateup to an horrific dislocated knee in the opening ten minutes.

The next S&E opportunity was snuffed out as the ball was stripped in contact. It was to be a feature of the first period that Sutton ball carriers became isolated and were consumed by Beckenham's predatory pack who were excellent at the breakdown. In addition, the league leaders, from the first whistle, showed a propensity to run the ball from defence. The abrasive and robust carrying of Liam Caddy was perfectly complemented by deft offloads of his brother Jake as they tried to utilise the power and pace of Jordan Gabriel and Zane Kakaloudis on the wings. The Black & White defence had to be on their mettle and they were equal to every challenge.

After a quarter of an hour the deadlock was finally broken. A Beckenham player strayed offside and Freddy Bunting calmly from 40 metres put his side 3-0 up. Having gathered the restart the hosts did not escape the perlustration of Mr Spencer Pearce who reciprocated with a kickable penalty for the visitors. The Balmoral Avenue side were not content with levelling the score but went in search of the lead as they kicked into the corner. The league leaders illustrated their promotion credentials by scoring in the corner despite resolute defence. After several phases Tom Ward, like all good 7s, was on hand to cross the whitewash. The touchline conversion failed but the Kent team led 5-3 at the end of the first quarter.

Poor passing by the Sutton & Epsom side on halfway led to a lightning counter by Beckenham. A stunning score was nipped in the bud by a trademark covering tackle by the ageless Steve Munford. Sutton rallied with a superb scrummage winning the ball against the head that initiated their best passage of play. The game was developing into a highly entertaining spectacle as dangerous attacks were neutered by extremely efficient defences. Unfortunately, just after the half hour the away side suffered a second significant departure as loose-head prop David Aoake-Tiamu hobbled off the park.

Half time was rapidly approaching but with two significant breaks for injuries there would be a healthy amount of afters to consume. Beckenham were holding Sutton in check until a stunning break by Tom Lennard saw him advance deep into the 22 and as he was enveloped by the defensive cover flanker Dan Jones was on hand to take the well timed pass under the posts. Captain Bunting chipped over the conversion for a 10-5 lead. The Black & Whites went in search of further glory and moment later Freddy Bunting was lining up a pop at the posts. The expectant crowd, so accustomed to the excellence of their kicker, were surprised to see the ball drift wide as Bunting missed kicks are as rare as Ben Duckett leaving a ball in a test match. The final opportunity fell to the visitors but their 5-metre lineout was bundled into touch to conclude the first half with the scoreboard reading Sutton & Epsom 10 Beckenham 5.

The hosts made a rapid start to the second period. Learning from the first half the forwards advanced was ably supported and Steve Munford enjoyed a stream of fast ball on the front foot. A stunning break by Gareth O'Brien propelled him into open space in the 22 but he selflessly passed to Rob Hegarty who ran in under the posts. Freddy Bunting completed the formalities for 17-5. This was a healthy lead though when returning prop Alex Mount vociferously declared: "They cannot live with us" it was met with ribald laughter from players on both sides. Everyone at Rugby Lane knew this game was far from over. It soon came to pass, five minutes later, that Beckenham were alive but not kicking as they declined the three-point option. Then another penalty meant the hosts were defending a 5-metre line out. Geordie Boyce secured the ball and hooker Lamar Sinclair muscled his way over despite the efforts of his opposite number Sam Lennie. Lewis Bunton added a sweetly struck conversion to reduce the deficit to 12-17.

The visitors pressed hard but Sutton held on. In the dying minutes, after a relentless forty-phase attack, a blocked drop-goal attempt from Lewis Bunton secured Sutton's 20-19 victory.

Sutton & Epsom

O'Brien, Huie, Bibby, Bunting ©, Findlay, Lennard, Munford, Johnson, Lennie, Boaden, Tame, McTaggart, Rea, Jones & Hegarty. Replacements: Boaden, Davies & Hilton.

Beckenham

Bateup, Kakoulidis, Caddy J, Caddy L, Jordan, Bunton, Curtis, Aoake-Tiamu, Sinclair, Badger, Moran, Keefe ©, Boyce, Ward & Knowles.

Replacements: Richards, Latouche & Lovell.

Photo credit: Robin Kennedy

The Local Plan plot thickens after revised NPPF

The Government's revised **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**, published on 12 December, has set ambitious new housing targets, requiring local councils to accelerate their housebuilding efforts. This move coincides with Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) updating its **Local Development Scheme**, which outlines the timetable for the borough's Local Plan.

Under the updated scheme, EEBC's **Regulation 19 Consultation** will take place from **20 December 2024 to 5 February 2025**, before the Local Plan is submitted for examination in March 2025. The council aims to complete the public examination by July 2025. The Proposed Submission Local Plan (2022–2040), which Councillors approved on 10 December, is intended to shield the borough from ad hoc developments and ensure sustainable planning decisions.

Councillor Peter O'Donovan, Chair of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee, emphasised the importance of meeting these deadlines:

"We are determined to meet the Government's deadlines and will do everything within our power to achieve them. I strongly urge residents and businesses to read and follow the consultation guidance so that their feedback can be sent to the Planning Inspectorate."

Government Targets: "Builders Not Blockers"

The Government has set a bold target of building **1.5 million homes by 2029**, with councils expected to contribute to a new annual quota of **370,000 homes**. Prime Minister Keir Starmer highlighted the urgent need for reform, stating:

"For far too long, working people graft hard but are denied the security of owning their own home... Our Plan for Change will overhaul the broken planning system and deliver the homes and growth this country desperately needs."

Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner added:

"We must all do our bit to tackle the housing crisis. Local councils must adopt plans to meet housing needs, ensuring homes are built alongside the necessary public services and green spaces."

Key measures in the updated NPPF include:

- Mandatory housing targets for all councils, with increased expectations in high-growth areas.
- A "brownfield-first" approach to prioritise development on previously used land, followed by "grey belt" areas of lower-quality greenbelt land.
- Developers required to meet strict "golden rules" for infrastructure, including affordable housing, GP surgeries, and transport.

Boosting Council Resources

To support these changes, councils will receive an additional £100 million in funding and 300 more planning officers to expedite decisions. The Government is also exploring "brownfield passports" to fast-track urban developments and offering local authorities the option to increase planning fees.

Local Impact and Next Steps

The **Regulation 19 Consultation** represents the final chance for residents to provide input before the plan is examined by an independent inspector.

To participate in the consultation or register for updates, visit **epsom-ewell.inconsult.uk**.

With the new planning framework demanding rapid progress, councils across the country face the challenge of balancing ambitious housing targets with preserving the character of their communities. Epsom & Ewell's ability to meet these demands will serve as a critical test of the Government's commitment to delivering for "hardworking families" while addressing the nation's housing crisis.

Related reports and letters:

Can the green light to Epsom's Green Belt housing turn red?

Council minority vote Local Plan to next stage with Green Belt in

Epsom and Ewell's Draft Local Plan goes to Full Council

Epsom Chamber Choir Christmas concert benefits hospital

Epsom Chamber Choir was delighted to welcome The Worshipful The Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, Councillor **Steve Bridger**, and the Mayoress, Mrs. Carol Bridger, to their annual Christmas concert at St Martin's Church on Saturday, 14th December.

Starting at a family-friendly 6 pm and lasting just an hour, the choir's programme, devised by conductor **Jack Apperley**, packed in all the elements expected at this time of the year. Inevitably, there was some Rutter – his arrangement of the Sans Day Carol – and audience carols including *O come*, *all ye faithful* with the Willcocks descant. The choir also sang newer music chosen to feature women composers, including Kerensa Briggs' increasingly well-known *A tender shoot*.

Ralph Vaughan Williams, a composer closely associated with our local area, was represented by his popular *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*, based on folk tunes, with soloists from the choir.

The concert closed with a group of lighter items, including a long-time choir favourite, Peter Gritton's close-harmony version of *Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas* and a jazzy arrangement of *Rudolph*, the *Red-Nosed Reindeer*.

The Epsom and St Helier Hospitals Charity supports patients, their families, and staff at our local hospitals. We were pleased to offer them the opportunity to take a retiring collection after the concert which raised £413.94

Roger Miller

Image: Jack Apperley with Molly Simpson from the hospital charity with the Mayor and Mayoress of Epsom and Ewell

Plant-based meat alternatives might be depressing

There is mounting evidence suggesting that ultra-processed foods (UPF) are bad for our health, but if you stick to a vegetarian diet, is that still the case? Plant-based meat alternatives (PBMA) are considered to be ultra-processed foods and may be associated with similar harms.

In the first study of its kind, published in Food Frontiers, researchers from the University of Surrey found that vegetarians who consumed PBMAs had a 42% increased risk of depression compared to vegetarians who refrained from PBMAs.

The study analysed data from the UK Biobank and found no notable differences in intake of sodium, free sugar, total sugar, or saturated fatty acids between those vegetarians who ate PBMA and those who did not.

The researchers did find, however, that those who eat PBMAs had higher blood pressure and C-reactive protein (CRP) levels, a marker of inflammation, and lower levels of apolipoprotein A, a protein associated with HDL, a "good" cholesterol; PBMA consumption was, however, also linked to a reduced risk of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) by 40%.

Professor Nophar Geifman, from the School of Health Sciences at the University of Surrey and senior author of the study, said:

"The overall findings are reassuring, suggesting that plant-based meat alternatives may be a safe option when they are part of an overall balanced diet. However, the potential link between these types of food, inflammation and depression warrants further investigation."

The study presented some limitations due to the data collected, which was predominantly from a white population in the UK, and dietary information only being gathered at the beginning of the study, not accounting for potential changes over time.

Professor Anthony Whetton, co-author of the study from the School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Surrey, said:

"Ultra-processed plant-based meat alternatives can be a useful way for people to transition to a vegetarian diet effectively, and that helps with sustainable agricultural practices. Further research, including longitudinal studies and trials with more diverse populations, is necessary to confirm these findings and the relationship between vegetarian foods and mood."

Epsom and Ewell's solar powered spaceship

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has recently installed solar panels on the roof of Bourne Hall, and secured funding from the Public Sector Low Carbon Skills Fund to develop a heat decarbonisation plan for the Ewell Village community venue. These works are part of a planned programme of measures to decarbonise Bourne Hall.

This is part of the council's Climate Change Action Plan which has set an ambitious target for the council to be carbon neutral by 2035.

Bourne Hall uses the most energy out of all the council's buildings. The 52.2 kWp solar panel system will generate 45,000 kWh of electricity, covering 25% of Bourne Hall's electricity usage, and saving more than 9 tonnes of carbon each year. The panels will save Bourne Hall around £15,000 annually in costs which can then be invested back into services for the community.

The Low Carbon Skills Fund is run by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and is delivered by Salix.

Funding for the heat decarbonisation plan will enable the council to develop a detailed understanding of the different ways in which energy efficiency of this building can be improved, including decarbonising the heating system.

Windows are also scheduled to be replaced with double glazing next year, part funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Bourne Hall is a Grade II listed building, situated in the heart of the historic Ewell Village with Hogsmill River running nearby. Set in a picturesque setting, Bourne Hall has function rooms, facilities and services that the public and businesses can hire including an exhibition space. It also hosts Bourne Hall Museum, and Ewell Library which is run by Surrey County Council.

Councillor Liz Frost, Chair of the Environment Committee said: "We are passionate about our Climate Change Action Plan and take our responsibilities seriously. Changes and initiatives over the last four years has seen the council's operational carbon footprint reduce by 14% since the council first began to measure it in 2019.

"Bourne Hall is an important hub for our community, and the installation of solar panels and the development of a robust heat decarbonisation plan is just part of a series of works that will make this picturesque and historical landmark more sustainable for future generations and help continue Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's drive to be carbon neutral by 2035."

Programme manager at Salix Christopher Masters said: "We are delighted to support Epsom & Ewell Borough Council in its net zero journey. Having a robust heat decarbonisation plan is a very important step in this process.

"We are looking forward to seeing what the plan will come up with and how the council will move forward as it continues to meet the ambitious net zero challenges."

More information about Climate Change Action Plan progress can be found here - Climate Change | Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (epsom-ewell.gov.uk)

Can the green light to Epsom's Green Belt housing turn red?

Letters to the Editor

From Tim Murphy of the Surrey Campaign to Protect Rural England

A Dark Day for Epsom and Ewell

Dear Editor,

I write with deep disappointment and dismay at the decision by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) to approve a draft Local Plan that sacrifices Green Belt land in our borough for housing development. This decision marks a dark day for Epsom & Ewell and represents a significant betrayal of the community's trust and values.

On December 10, EEBC councillors voted by 16 to 8, with 7 abstentions, to approve the latest draft Local Plan, which proposes releasing large areas of our much-valued Green Belt. Planning officers claim councillors had no choice due to Government housing targets. However, this argument does not excuse the council's willingness to surrender cherished green spaces. The community clearly recognizes the value of protecting our countryside, even if the council does not.

Public opposition to the loss of Green Belt land has been overwhelming. During last year's consultation, more than 1,500 residents responded, with 87% opposing any Green Belt development. A petition against the loss of Green Belt land attracted an astonishing 11,000 signatures, and a subsequent petition was so strongly supported that councillors were forced to debate it at the December meeting. The message from residents is clear: we do not want our Green Belt sacrificed for development.

It is worth emphasizing that the council's own Green Belt study concluded that the vast majority of the borough's Green Belt is performing its intended function. This includes Horton Farm and Hook Road Arena—two areas now designated for housing—which were identified as "highly performing" under the Government's own criteria. Why, then, is the council choosing to give up such valuable land?

Protecting our Green Belt is about more than preserving open spaces. It is essential for public health, biodiversity, climate change mitigation, and preventing urban sprawl. Epsom & Ewell has largely resisted London's sprawl, maintaining its identity as Surrey's smallest district. Its open spaces are limited to either municipal parks or the Green Belt, yet these are now at risk. Over the past 25 years, the borough has already absorbed significant population growth through large housing developments on former hospital sites.

The council's reliance on private developers to address local housing needs is deeply flawed. Private housebuilders often fail to deliver affordable homes, using "viability assessments" to argue that profits would be insufficient if they included the required number of affordable units. For example, a recently approved development on Green Belt land in this borough includes no affordable housing at all.

If EEBC were serious about tackling local housing needs, it would prioritise socially rented housing by working with central government and housing associations to develop urban brownfield sites and town-centre locations. Instead, the council appears intimidated by unrealistic housing targets set by Whitehall and has chosen to offer up our Green Belt as an easy sacrifice. This raises serious questions about local democracy and accountability.

The council's decision disregards the wishes of the community it is supposed to serve. It is vital that we continue to challenge this plan and advocate for a future where Epsom & Ewell's Green Belt is valued and protected for generations to come.

Yours faithfully,

Tim Murphy, Trustee Surrey Campaign to Protect Rural England

From Katherine Alexander of The Epsom Green Belt Group

Dear Editor.

The ink is barely dry on Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's signing off on the draft Local Plan when it has been rendered obsolete.

The Epsom Green Belt Group warned the council that failing to accelerate the Local Plan process would result in disaster for the borough, and that disaster has now arrived.

The Local Plan will now be caught by the revised National Planning Policy Framework issued today by the government.

Prior to today, the council had the option not to review Green Belt boundaries and not to argue for exceptional circumstances to build on the Green Belt. It chose not to do either, but instead to revise Green Belt boundaries to permit development. Seven and a half years of delays have led us to this point.

The government has focussed its headlines on building on the 'greybelt' to make their plans sound palatable. However, the 'greybelt' definition is a smokescreen for much broader development that they want to portray. This is for two reasons:

1. All Green Belt qualifies as 'greybelt' except:

- Strips of land at the edge of a borough that separate it from built-up sections of neighbouring boroughs.
- Land that 'strongly contributes' to 'checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.'

In Epsom & Ewell, 22 of the 53 parcels of Green Belt land in the council's analysis fail to meet either of these criteria and would therefore be classed as greybelt under the new definition. No disused petrol stations to be seen anywhere.

One of the parcels that would remain Green Belt, not greybelt, under this definition is Horton Farm. However, the council has voluntarily included it in the plan.

2. The NPPF states that where there is insufficient greybelt land to meet the new housing target, councils must find enough Green Belt land to make up the difference (para 148).

The only hint of protection is if that Green Belt land need not be released if it 'would fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt when considered across the area of the plan.' There is no guidance available as to what that means in practice, but as Epsom Common and Horton Country Park will remain, this exception is unlikely to help either.

What then is the new housing target for Epsom?

889 dwellings per year. That is almost five times the historical house building rate in the borough (c.189 per year) and more than three times the rate in the proposed Local Plan (c.273 per year).

Every scrap of available land will need to be included in the plan, and even then it won't be enough to get close to the target.

The council only has itself to blame. It has failed to protect the borough, and the government has made it so the price for that failure is astronomically high.

After over 7.5 years of delays, the council's task now is to work quickly—hitherto anathema to them—to review the NPPF in detail and work out whether any of the Green Belt can be saved under the new rules. This may mean taking out land that it had already included, because there is an argument to protect it (such as Horton Farm) in order to mitigate and minimize the disastrous impacts for the borough.

The previous excuse for progressing with an unpopular plan was to protect the borough from speculative development. Because of their delays, there will be no land left for speculative development. Perhaps they've got their wish.

Yours faithfully,

Katherine Alexander

From Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

Epsom & Ewell Proposed Submission Local Plan (Regulation 19) Consultation to go ahead as soon as possible

10th December Councillors voted to approve the Epsom & Ewell Proposed Submission Local Plan (2022-2040) and that the Regulation 19 Consultation should take place at the earliest opportunity. The Regulation 19 Consultation is the final opportunity for residents to feedback on the plan before it is submitted for independent examination next summer.

At the meeting of Full Council, Councillors heard from a petitioner who requested that all green belt land should be removed from the Proposed Submission Local Plan except for previously developed land. This was debated by Councillors during the meeting, before the vote.

Commenting after the meeting, Councillor Peter O'Donovan, Chair of the Licensing and Planning Policy, said "The Proposed Submission Local Plan provides a vision for our borough that strikes a balance between providing much needed homes including affordable housing, infrastructure, and support for local businesses whilst ensuring enhanced protection for biodiversity and our borough's green spaces, and protecting the valuable local heritage and character of our borough's towns and villages.

"It is challenging to find a path that meets the many different needs of all our communities, and not everyone may agree with every aspect of this plan. However, having listened to all the feedback, and examined the comprehensive evidence base, we feel strongly that this plan ensures that everyone in our borough, both now and in the future, is given the chance to thrive in Epsom & Ewell.

The Regulation 19 Consultation will take place at the earliest opportunity. We will announce the dates on our website and on social media as soon as they are confirmed."

An up-to-date Local Plan protects the borough from ad hoc and inappropriate development and ensures responsibility for future planning decisions remains with the borough and its communities. It provides a framework for where in the borough new development should go and where should be protected.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council consulted on the Draft Local Plan in February and March 2023. The comments received on the Draft Local Plan, along with the local evidence base, informed the Proposed Submission Local Plan. The Regulation 18 consultation feedback summary report, which shows how the council has taken account of the feedback received, can be found here: Consultation response statement

During the Regulation 19 Consultation residents, visitors and local businesses can comment on whether the plan is legally compliant and sound, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework. Guidance on how to respond will be published on the council's website.

Responses collected as part of the consultation will be sent to the Planning Inspectorate with the Proposed Submission Local Plan and the evidence base documents.

Dear Editor

As someone involved in the Save Epsom Green Belt campaign I just cannot contain my disbelief and anger at the local Council.

Last week the majority of them went ahead with a policy to build on our wonderful and well used recreational green spaces doubtless under some 'exceptional circumstances' clause.

Obviously, as already said many times and with recent letters to you, it is nevertheless worth reminding all your readers of the true devastating significance of this decision.

It is a Residents' Association Majority Council. They are supposed to represent the local residents: the clue is in the name! They have not and should be ashamed at letting us down despite the many efforts to stop this. I understand that Epsom is the smallest Surrey Borough yet the most populated for its size. As many of us know, the present infrastructure is overloaded: schools, the hospital, GP surgeries, roads viz. Ruxley Lane in rush hours!

This building programme will further exacerbate the problem and severely restrict the country wide environment and its diverse wildlife. No doubt developers are already rubbing their hands with due opportunism as, thanks to the Residents' Association Group, the local Green Belt vanishes FOR EVER! YES, WITH NO COMING BACK.

Yours Faithfully,

Dr Ted Bailey

West Ewell

From Epsom and Ewell MP Helen Maguire

Dear Editor,

Housing in Epsom and Ewell: A Call for Community-Led Solutions

I write to express my deep concern over the Government's recently announced planning framework, which enables developers to bypass locally elected councillors and pressures councils to review precious green belt land for development. For communities like ours in Epsom and Ewell, this approach represents yet another example of Whitehall ignoring the voices of local people who are best placed to decide what their area needs.

Housing is a pressing issue, but the solutions must be community-led. The homes we build here must be genuinely affordable and accompanied by the services that people rely on—GP surgeries, schools, and reliable public transport. It is equally important that we protect the green spaces that define our borough.

Vulnerable families in Epsom and Ewell need safe and warm homes, but this cannot be achieved by sidelining the community. When residents are engaged and empowered, we can deliver the homes required to support those living in temporary accommodation, help older residents access housing solutions tailored to their needs, and ensure the next generation has somewhere to call home.

Unfortunately, the Government's announcement fails to address the root causes of Britain's housing crisis. The biggest issue is a desperate lack of social housing. Too often, developers use legal loopholes to shirk their obligations to build affordable homes. Meanwhile, the very term "affordable" has become meaningless to many local families who are priced out of the market. We need clearer definitions and upfront solutions to ensure that affordability is not just a slogan but a reality.

The recent decision by Epsom and Ewell Borough Council to move forward with the Local Plan, including controversial Green Belt sites, highlights the challenge we face. While I welcome the council's efforts to prepare a plan, I share the concerns of many local residents and Liberal Democrat councillors who feel that housing targets and the development of virgin Green Belt land, such as Horton Farm, are not the right path forward.

The ruling Residents Association has been slow to update the borough's planning policies, leaving us vulnerable to inappropriate and opportunistic applications. It is time for all parties to work together to prioritise robust, community-supported plans that deliver for Epsom and Ewell.

Epsom and Ewell deserve housing solutions that respect our unique character, address the needs of vulnerable residents, and safeguard our green spaces for future generations. I will continue to stand with our community in advocating for planning policies that reflect these priorities.

Yours faithfully,

Helen Maguire MP

Member of Parliament for Epsom and Ewell

Epsom led crime gang banged up

An organised crime group who carried out multiple burglaries, a vicious assault, and stole more than £215,000 worth of high-value cars have been jailed for a total of twenty seven and a half years.

In 2023, police identified a series of residential burglaries which could be linked via a distinctive Audi A8, which was one of just fifteen in the country. The Audi was then seen at a petrol station with a wonky number plate which didn't match its genuine details.

Soon after, a second car suspected of being linked to the series was identified by a distinctive GB sticker on the back. However, the challenge remained to identify the people involved and a complex investigation began which used a variety of tactics to uncover the full extent of their crimes.

Between June and August 2023, members of the group burgled multiple homes and were also linked to other offences including keyless car theft, where vehicles were taken close to the owners' house or from the front drive. Areas targeted included Epsom and Walton-On-Thames in Surrey and Croydon, Chessington, New Malden, Raynes Park and Surbiton in the Metropolitan area.

They would scope out a target vehicle, and either commit a burglary to steal the keys or use illegal devices to gain keyless entry. They would then drive the vehicle away and park it elsewhere for a short time to see if any tracking devices had been activated.

In the meantime, they would identify similar vehicles which were insured, source illegal fake number plates, and fit them to the stolen vehicles to try and evade detection. On some occasions the stolen cars would ultimately end up at 'chop shops', where they were broken up into parts and sold for profit.

During the burglaries at both residential properties and some shops, they caused thousands of pounds worth of damage and on one occasion, three of the men (Harry Mackay, Rico Persechino and Jason Connors) – assaulted the occupier of an address with weapons.

After gathering a body of evidence, on 29 August 2023 police proactively apprehended Rico Persechino and Harry Mackay outside a shop in East Grinstead. Mackay tried to escape by running inside and heading to the staff door but he was swiftly caught. Officers later found a keyless car theft device that he'd tried to discard inside the shop.

The police investigation used a variety of tactics including identifying cloned number plates, tracking vehicles through ANPR (automatic number plate recognition) and matching the suspects' descriptions and clothing to CCTV footage. Often when committing a burglary at a shop, the group brought a large white carrier bag to carry the stolen goods and a comparison of CCTV footage enabled officers to tie offences to them due to the appearance of this same bag each time.

One victim of the group's criminal activities said "The burglary was very distressing for both my partner and myself, and we felt a significant impact after the unwelcome intrusion from these criminals. I was very angry and upset and when I met with detectives the following day, I was close to tears and that's not in my nature. The thought of strangers going through your personal possessions, and the damage they caused to gain access to my property was scary. My partner lost family jewellery that had been passed down through generations. After the robbery I said I wanted to move, and I still might as this has had a long-term effect on me. I'm pleased to see the sentence this group were handed, and I was very impressed with the brilliant work of the police officers and detectives dealing with this case, they gave me faith throughout."

Lead investigator, Detective Inspector Daniel Voller, shared: "This was a sophisticated and organised operation and exposing the full extent of their crimes was only possible thanks to the hard work and diligence of everyone involved, from detectives to intelligence teams.

These thieves had no regard for anyone but themselves and escalated their offending from stealing cars outside homes to breaking inside and committing a serious assault. We have worked relentlessly over many months to prepare a strong case against them and I'm pleased our efforts have resulted in getting them behind bars."

Following a trial at Guildford Crown Court on Monday 9 December, brothers Harry, Frankie and Stevey MacKay appeared along with Jason Connors and Rico Persechino for sentencing.

■ Harry Mackay, 34 (DOB 27/04/1990), from Epsom pleaded guilty to

Conspiracy to Steal Motor Vehicles, Conspiracy to Burgle and Conspiracy to Commit Robbery and was sentenced to 8 years.

- Frankie Mackay, 35 (DOB 24/05/1989), from Epsom, pleaded guilty to Conspiracy to Steal Motor Vehicles and was sentenced to 39 months.
- Stevey Mackay, 32 (DOB 08/02/1992), from Kingston-Upon-Thames pleaded guilty to Steal Motor Vehicles and was sentenced to 39 months
- Jason Connors, 29 (DOB 25/08/1995) from Croydon pleaded guilty to Conspiracy to Commit Robbery and was sentenced to 5 years and 4 months
- Rico Persechino, 35 (DOB 01/04/1989) from Kingston-Upon-Thames pleaded guilty to Conspiracy to Steal Motor Vehicles, Conspiracy to Burgle and Conspiracy to Commit Robbery and was sentenced to 7.5 years

Custody photos of Epsom brothers Harry and Frankie Mackay