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Pause for thought on paused Plan

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Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Licensing and Planning Policy Committee reviewed the state of play with the Draft Local Plan at a meeting Thursday 15th June.

The progression of the Draft Local Plan (the framework for local planning decisions of the future) was paused in March following an outcry about its Green Belt development proposals. Michael Gove MP, the Secretary of State responsible for planning matters, is yet to deliver on the clarifications sought to his pre-May local election indications that local authorities would have greater control over housing targets.

The meeting was chaired by Cllr **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley) who advised that EEBC was bound by the housing target of 573 houses per annum as extrapolated from 2014 data. A report to the meeting confirmed that if 2018 data was relied on that target would be reduced to 253.

Officers reported on the workstreams continuing on the Draft Local Plan. These included the vetting of the 1650 responses from individuals and organisations received during the public consultation period of the now paused Draft Local Plan. Officers are re-doubling their efforts to identify brownfield sites for development including Kiln Lane and Longmead areas of Epsom and Ewell.

Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative Horton Ward) welcomed the work being done on brownfield development and called for Green Belt to simply be excluded from the Draft Local Plan.

Cllr **Julie Morris** (LibDem College Ward) drew attention to the Environment Act coming into force in November this year. Major developments require to prove a 10% gain in bio-diversity. An officer explained that this gain is measurable by a pre-development audit and post-development audit according to an established "metric". Developers can establish the gain from on-site or off-site "off-sets". Rather like carbon trading. Minor developments will be subject to the 10% bio-diversity gain requirement from April 2024. Cllr Morris argued that the new legal requirement should inhibit Green Belt development.

Cllr **Robert Leach** (RA Ewell Court), having served on the Planning Committee in the 20th century, was tired of it all and regarded the estimated half-million being spent on the process as a waste and questioned the benefit to residents. However, he acknowledged the legal requirement to have a Local Plan. He also predicted, after having read the Privileges Committee report on Boris Johnson in the morning, a change of government by the time EEBC settled its Local Plan. The councillor implied a new Labour Government would rigidly impose housing targets.

Cllr McCormick explained that a revised timetable for the progression of the Draft Local Plan will be submitted to the committee in due course. Meanwhile, all councillors will be invited to special briefings on the Draft Local Plan process and this would be especially important for the several new councillors elected in May.

Related Reports:

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Public meeting on Local Plan dominated by greenbelters.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Draft Local Plan.

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