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Possible pause to Plan pondered ……

Epsom and Ewell's Local Plan is at risk of even further delay after councillors from the ruling Residents' Association (RA) proposed pausing the process in the face of fierce opposition to proposed Green Belt development.

Seven RA councillors are proposing that development of the Local Plan is paused and have triggered an **extraordinary council meeting**, which is due to take place on 22 March. The meeting was arranged a few days after a protest against Green Belt development in Epsom town centre, which organisers have said involved over 200 demonstrators.

The Plan is currently subject to public consultation, which is set to run until 19 March.

Local elections will take place on 4 May.

Councillor **Eber Kington** (Residents' Association, Ewell Court Ward), who will propose the motion, said: "My view is that a pause will enable the Borough Council to assess the responses from residents to the public consultation and review any new information on brownfield sites."

However, it is not clear what impact the "pause" would have. Assessing responses to a consultation is part of the normal process for developing a Local Plan and the motion expressly states that this should continue.

Cllr Kington added that a pause would also allow the council to re-examine brownfield sites previously designated as non-viable.

The council did not include the Longmead Industrial Estate or the Kiln Lane area brownfield sites that **Chris Grayling** (MP) has suggested could be used to meet housing need, in its list of sites for potential development.

You can find out more about the opposing positions and viewpoints, ask your own questions at a Public Meeting on the Draft Local Plan to be chaired by Epsom and Ewell Times on Monday 13th March at7pm at Wallace Fields Junior School, Dorling Drive, Ewell, Epsom. Registration and advance questions optional Click HERE for details.

Councillor **Kate Chinn** (Leader of the Labour Group, Court Ward) said: "It is unbelievable that this RA council has spent years formulating a Local Plan; bringing in consultants to give advice and briefings; tasking officers to spend hours to formulate the plan; spending thousands of pounds and now there are several of their own members deciding it isn't what they wanted. It would be expected they would have agreed more of a consensus before reaching this late stage."

Councillor **Julie Morris** (Leader of the Liberal Democrats Group, College Ward) accused the RA of overturning "its own decisions very quickly but particularly when there's an election looming". She also said that last December, she had asked Cllr **Steven McCormick** (Residents Association, Woodcote Ward), chair of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee, to put a "short delay" to the public consultation on a meeting agenda, but the suggestion was not taken up. "They plodded on", she said, "and tried to keep the whole thing secret".

In January, the council voted unanimously to launch the public consultation on the Plan. Cllr Morris said: "The reason that I voted for public consultation was that it [the Local Plan] needed to be out there. The RA has gone to such lengths to keep everything quiet."

The Draft Local Plan sets out nine sites for potential development in the borough; five are on Green Belt land. Green Belt land includes areas of countryside that are protected from development in order to prevent urban sprawl and encourage development within existing built-up areas.

Cllr Kington also said: "Crucially we need to understand the Government's new legislative proposals, which are due to be published in May, so that we can factor the new Government's new approach into our own plans."

The proposals set to be published in May are undergoing consultation, including on a revision that states that "Green Belt boundaries are not required to be reviewed and altered if this would be the only means of meeting the objectively assessed need for housing over the plan period".

After **Mole Valley District Council** wrote to the planning inspectorate asking to remove all Green Belt sites from its own Local Plan, the inspector agreed to delay hearings until May.

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Cllr Kington added: “Finally, we have to continue to campaign against the Government’s continuing requirement for councils to use 2014 data to develop a 2023 Local Plan. If 2018 data were used, the number of required homes could be met by the use of brown field sites alone.”

Currently, the Local Plan is due to be adopted in Spring 2025. This would see it miss the government target of all local authorities having an up-to-date Plan by the end of 2023 – and make it the last local council in Surrey to adopt a new Plan.

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