EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
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# Public meeting on Local Plan dominated by greenbelters.

17 March 2023

Monday 13th March 243 members of the public attended a packed meeting to debate the draft Local Plan issued by Epsom and Ewell Borough Council. 85 more logged in online. Cllr. **Alex Coley** (RA Ruxley Ward) Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee opened proceedings with an explanation of the housing needs in the Borough. He was followed by Cllr **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote Ward), Chair of the Licensing Planning and Policy Committee (LPP) of the Council that passed the draft Local Plan to go to public consultation. (The consultation at this stage closes on 19th March.) He stated why the Council is bound by housing targets set by The Government. He urged residents to have their say by responding to the consultation. See HOW TO RESPOND on our pages.

Photo: Cllr McCormick addresses public meeting convened by Epsom and Ewell Times. Credit Ellie Ames.

**Tim Murphy**, a retired chartered town planner and chair of the South-East Council for the Protection of Rural England was on the speaker panel. He lambasted the central Government's creation of the housing targets but did not demur from their binding effect on local authorities. Chair of Epsom Civic Society and environmental and planning law expert **Margaret Hollins** reminded the audience that the Local Plan is not just about housing. Employment, business and transport are also its concerns. She disagreed with Mr Murphy on the wisdom of a pause to the Local Plan process to see what changes may be made on housing targets and their binding effect. She referred to the Planning Inspectors grant of a housing developer's appeal to build on Langley Vale Farm in part due to the absence of a Local Plan for Epsom and Ewell. Delay in adoption of one will give developers further opportunities.

The debate was open to the floor for comments and questions. The majority of which were clearly resistant to any use of green belt land for housing development. Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court Ward) appealed for a commitment for more social housing. Cllr **Bernie Muir** (Conservative – Stamford Ward) extolled the virtues of local MP **Chris Grayling's** ideas for housing and other development of the "brown field" sites at Kiln Lane and Longmead.

One upset member of the public asked why there were no proposals for green belt development in Cllr McCormick's own Woodcote Ward. Another pointed out that there was no Councillor present on the occasion of the LPP's vote on the draft Local Plan from the wards of green belt effected areas.

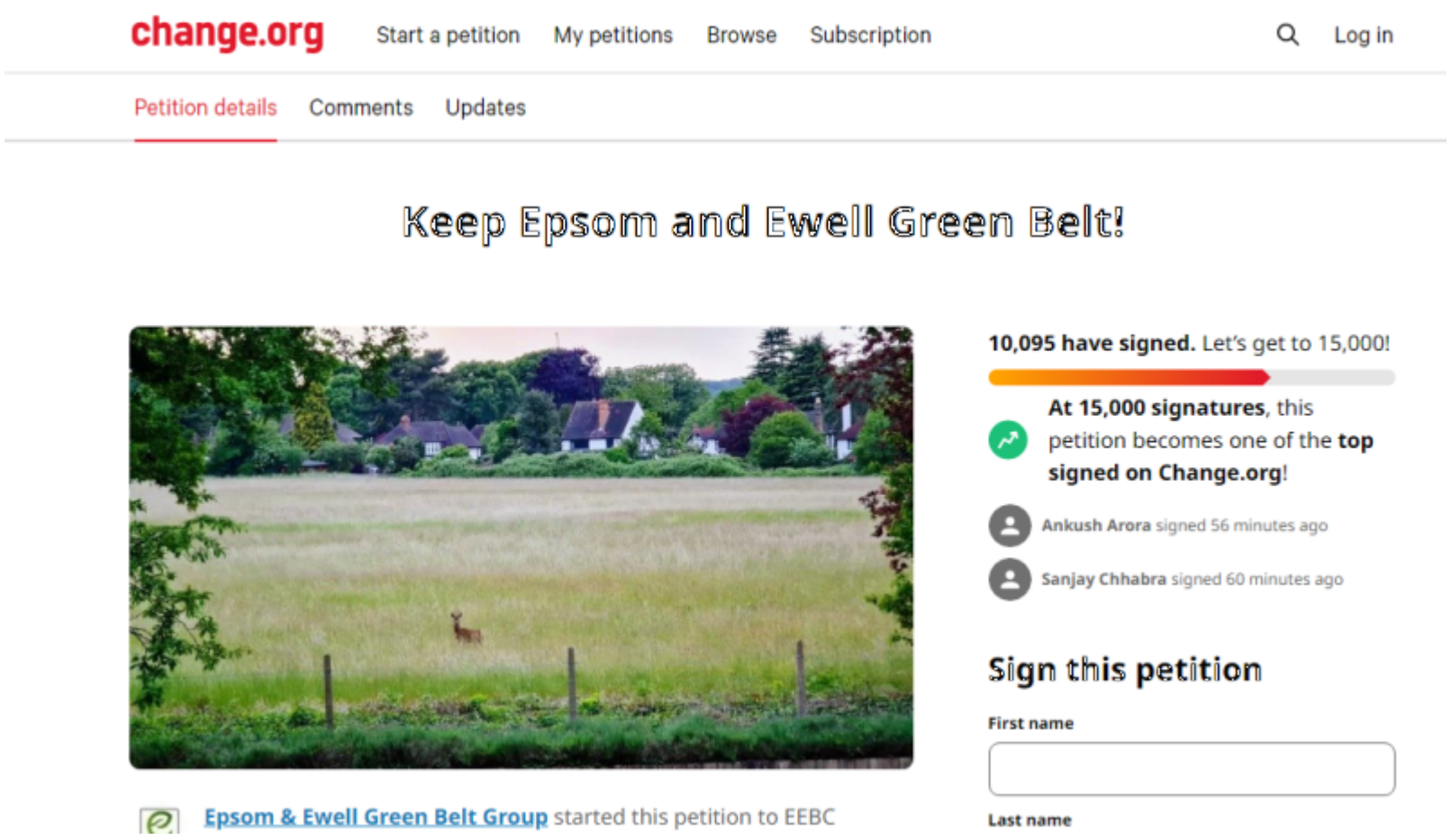
**Paul Bartlett** from Elmbridge and the London Green Belt Council stated that his Borough Council had removed all green belt housing development from its draft Local Plan after resistance was shown. He also suggested that Epsom's draft's statement that the requirement to build 5400 houses was an exceptional reason to use green belt ran a serious risk of opening the flood-gates of green belt development where the central government's target for the Borough is over 10,000.

Cllr McCormick fielded the majority of the questions and you can read in the next article on Epsom and Ewell Times his personal and considered responses to many of the frequently asked questions.

The meeting was chaired by local solicitor **Lionel Blackman**.

An Extraordinary full Council meeting has now been fixed for March 22 to debate a motion to pause the Plan until new government planning guidelines are confirmed in May, following an intervention by Cllr **Eber Kington** and other councillors.

Meanwhile, green belt protectors have mustered over 10,000 signatures to an online petition at change.org. Epsom and Ewell Times cannot verify the residency of the signatories. Below is a screenshot confirming the numbers at the time of going to press. If all petitioners are different Epsom and Ewell electors the numbers reached by the Epsom Green Belt Group compares well to an estimated turnout of about 20,000 electors at the 2019 Epsom and Ewell Borough Council election.

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