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Whose Local Plan is it anyway?

2 July 2026



Dear Editor,

Why no review?

I read with interest your article of 2 June about the recent Local Plan consultation.

Mr Brown's contention that the consultation was unconstitutional was undoubtedly correct. This is because the Local Plan documents being consulted on were required first to be 'considered and approved' by the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee (LPPC) under the council's constitution.

Digging a little further into this failure of the elected councillors to review Local Plan documents indicates that this is a pervasive and deeply concerning issue.

The Local Plan is the single most important output, by the council, for the future of the borough. Given the local government reorganisation, it should also be the council's swan song; an opportunity to provide clear and positive strategic direction for the next 14 years.

How has the council gone about achieving this? There are a plethora of articles in this paper highlighting repeated failures of the Residents Association-led council to direct, review or challenge the Local Plan process over several years. This would be concerning enough on its own, but is exacerbated by not just a reluctance, but an outright refusal by Residents Association (RA) councillors to undertake the role they were elected to perform.

Reviews of Local Plan documents should have been happening frequently and as a matter of course. As they weren't, opposition councillors took the unusual step of working together to try to hold the council to account.

Motions have repeatedly been brought both to full council and to the LPPC attempting to require councillors to review Local Plan documents, but on every occasion they have been voted down by RA councillors.

There appears, to interested observers, to have been a systematic and ongoing attempt to confound any and all attempts to scrutinise the Local Plan. This has happened for several years, with the three most recent examples being:

- The request by Cllr Lawrence in the 10 March 2026 LPPC meeting to review the new Local Plan documents before they were submitted to the Inspector. The Monitoring Officer advised against allowing this request. The Chair, Cllr O'Donovan confirmed he hadn't even seen the documents being submitted but refused the request to allow the committee to review them. Cllr Reynolds encouraged the Chair to put the decision to a vote but was turned down.

- The mid-March 2026 request by Cllrs Persand, Freeman and Geleit to hold a Special meeting of the LPPC to agree to review the Local Plan documents before they were submitted to the Inspector. The Monitoring Officer delayed holding the meeting for 2 months until 19 May 2026, after the documents were submitted. The RA councillors voted not to review the documents.

- Given the urgency of the matter and the failure of the LPPC to perform its role, on 11 June 2026, a request was made by Cllrs Persand, Freeman, Geleit, Ames, Howells, Lawrence, McCormick and Goldman for an Extraordinary Council Meeting. The motion was to require the LPPC to review the Local Plan consultation documents, and if appropriate approve them, in accordance with the constitution. The meeting should clearly have been scheduled by the Monitoring Officer to occur prior to the 2 July public hearings on the consultation documents. The Monitoring Officer has instead delayed the meeting until 21 July and tagged it onto the pre-existing council meeting, after the consultation hearing has been completed.

The councillors mentioned above, from all opposition parties, should be applauded for their tenacity and their willingness repeatedly to stand up for the residents they represent.

Residents are asking why the Monitoring Officer appears to repeatedly obfuscate, delay and obstruct, and why RA councillors are not taking the lead, or at least supporting, attempts by opposition councillors to execute the roles they were elected to perform.

Given all the above, it perhaps should come as no surprise that the RA was all but wiped out in the recent East Surrey Council elections. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, the RA should take the opportunity to do what they should have

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been doing all along, actively engaging with, and reviewing the Local Plan documents. They should be ensuring the documents are factually correct (which in many instances they have not been), that they align with the council's strategy and that they represent the views of the borough's residents.

This is the RA's last chance either to redeem its reputation and leave the door open to a future return to council membership, or to leave residents bitterly resenting the final failures of the group so many of us voted for over the years, as they hammer nails into the coffin of the RA group's legacy.

Whose Local Plan is it anyway?

The Local Plan is written by the council and is the responsibility of the council throughout its drafting and execution.

Since the examination started last summer, council officers and councillors have repeatedly distanced themselves from the changes officers have specifically proposed to the inspector. These council proposals include building on extensive additional areas of green belt land such as Downs Farm, Priest Hill, Burgh Heath Road and Cuddington Glade.

Having actively put these sites forward, officers and councillors have denied responsibility, repeatedly arguing that it is 'the inspector's Local Plan' and that they have no say in what happens.

It is worth highlighting that the government guidance says quite the opposite. When reviewing the council's Local Plan, the government is at pains to clarify that:

'The Inspector will always bear in mind that **the plan belongs to the LPA**, and subject to the duty to ensure the plan's soundness, will not seek to impose his or her own views on its vision or its content.'

(The 'LPA' is the Local Planning Authority, in this case Epsom and Ewell Borough Council).

It couldn't be much clearer, councillors, the plan is your responsibility before, during and after the examination. If you choose not to review proposals to put in deeply unpopular sites for development, you remain responsible for the proposals and accountable to residents for them.

Will the RA councillors perform the role they were elected to perform and that the constitution requires, or will they continue to shirk that responsibility? Time will tell, but that time is running out.

Yours faithfully,

Ben Cronin

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Epsom and Ewell

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