

EPSOM & EWELL GREEN BELT STUDY STAGE 2

<u>Report of the:</u>	Viv Evans, Interim Head of Planning
<u>Contact:</u>	Karol Jakubczyk
<u>Urgent Decision?(yes/no)</u>	No
<u>If yes, reason urgent decision required:</u>	
<u>Annexes/Appendices (attached):</u>	Annexe 1: Epsom & Ewell Green Belt Study Stage Two
<u>Other available papers (not attached):</u>	L&PPC Committee Report April 2017; Epsom & Ewell Green Belt Study (February 2017); National Planning Policy Framework Draft National Planning Policy Framework

Report summary

National planning policy sets out how the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. It also states that local planning authorities should use the opportunity provided by a review of a local plan to reconsider Green Belt boundaries. Emerging national planning policy states that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or updating of plans. Before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist we need to examine fully all other reasonable options for meeting the Borough's identified need for development (including housing need).

Recommendation (s)

The Committee considers the Green Belt Study Stage 2 and agrees to its publication.

Notes

1 Implications for the Council's Key Priorities, Service Plans and Sustainable Community Strategy

- 1.1 The delivery and implementation of the Epsom & Ewell Local Plan contributes towards all of the Council's Key Priorities. The partial review of the Core Strategy is a critical part of the Local Plan review process as it will set out how sustainable growth will be delivered during the plan period.

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2 Background

- 2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) demands that local planning authorities plan positively for growth, specifically housing, and 'leave no stone unturned' when considering options. In order to respond to this we commissioned W S Atkins Ltd to carry out a Green Belt Study, which provides an objective assessment of our Green Belt's performance against the five purposes as set out in the NPPF. The five purposes¹ are:
- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
 - To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
 - To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
 - To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
 - To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
- 2.2 During September 2017, the Borough Council commissioned a further Green Belt Study to provide a more detailed assessment of the Green Belt. The production and preparation of an additional Green Belt Study (Stage Two) is a normal approach for local planning authorities to take when creating their local plan evidence base. A copy is included under Annexe 1.

3 Epsom & Ewell Green Belt Study Stage 2

- 3.1 The Green Belt Study Stage Two provides a more detailed review of the lower scoring areas of Green Belt as well as those sites which have been promoted through the Local Plan call for sites process. This more detailed review process comprised a desk-top policy focused assessment of the existing constraints including land use, ecological designations, flood risk, heritage designations, agricultural land classification, pedestrian and cycle routes and any other relevant local designations. A limited review of the accessibility and connectivity was also carried out at this stage.
- 3.2 Following the desk-top stage, site visits were made to establish the setting and context of each site. This included an assessment of physical features in and around each in addition to a landscape and visual sensitivity assessment.
- 3.3 The Green Belt Study Stage Two report does not make recommendations as to which land should or should not be released from the Green Belt.

¹ These are set out under NPPF Paragraph 80.

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- 3.4 The Green Belt Study Stage Two is a purely technical assessment that forms part of a comprehensive suite of evidence base documents supporting the Local Plan update. The findings of this study should not be read or considered in isolation but in parallel with the complete series of evidence base documents.
- 3.5 The outcomes of the Local Plan evidence will require the careful balancing of the social, environmental and economic advantages and disadvantages to bring forward a sustainable growth strategy to underpin the Local Plan. This process will be undertaken through the Sustainability Appraisal Report.
- 3.6 Existing and emerging national planning policy states that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or updating of plans. Before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist the Council will need to examine fully all other reasonable options for meeting the Borough's identified need for development, including the objectively assessed housing need.
- 3.7 The findings of the Green Belt Study Stage 2 along with the wider evidence base will inform the Council's consideration to whether exceptional circumstances to amend the Green Belt boundary in Epsom & Ewell exist.

4 Financial and Manpower Implications

- 4.1 There continues to be a requirement to prepare a sound local plan that is positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national planning policy². Maintaining a robust and up-to-date evidence base is a key response to meeting that requirement.
- 4.2 Forthcoming changes to national planning policy indicate that the Borough Council will need to make a long term commitment to resourcing the regular review of the Local Plan (every five years). The Planning Policy Manager continues to seek that sufficient resources remain in place to ensure that this requirement is met.
- 4.3 **Chief Finance Officer's comments:** Any request for additional financial resources needs to be agreed by Strategy and Resources Committee

5 Legal Implications (including implications for matters relating to equality)

² This is set out under NPPF Paragraph 182.

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- 5.1 There is a statutory framework for Local Planning Authorities to follow in relation to the preparation and adoption of local plans. The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations set out the procedure to be followed by local planning authorities in relation to the preparation of local plan, including the consultation with interested persons and bodies and the documents that must be made available at each stage. Publication of the Green Belt Study Part 2 will form part of this statutory requirement.
- 5.2 ***Monitoring Officer's comments: The Local Planning Authority are required to follow the statutory framework to ensure their local plans are adopted.***

6 Sustainability Policy and Community Safety Implications

- 6.1 The partial review of the Core Strategy contributes towards delivering the Borough Council's objectives for maintaining and enhancing the Borough as a sustainable place to live, work and visit by putting in place strategies and policies to facilitate growth.

7 Partnerships

- 7.1 The Duty to Co-operate requires the Borough Council to engage with our partners on strategic issues such as the Green Belt. Officers continue to engage with neighbouring authorities and continue to provide opportunities for them to engage with the partial review process through stakeholder engagement. We intend to prepare and publish an Engagement Plan that will set out how we will discharge our Duty to Co-operate.
- 7.2 Officers will continue to work with our neighbours to ensure that the strategic purpose and performance of the wider Green Belt is not degraded. Prior to the publication of our Local Plan Pre-submission draft we will produce a statement of how we have sought to meet our duty to co-operate with our strategic partners.

8 Risk Assessment

- 8.1 Failure to provide a robust assessment of the purpose and performance of the Green Belt could leave the Borough Council open to challenge, with the associated threat of growth being directed onto sites not considered appropriate by the Council.
- 8.2 Whilst this area of risk has yet to manifest itself in Epsom & Ewell, the higher levels of housing growth anticipated for Greater London and the wider South East of England places additional pressure upon the Borough.
- 8.3 By proactively planning for future growth, identifying where it should and should not go, we will place ourselves in a stronger position to resist unsustainable levels of growth in the wrong locations.

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9 Conclusion and Recommendations

- 9.1 The Committee are asked to consider the Green Belt Study Stage Two and agree to its publication as part of the Local Plan evidence base.

Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);