

## Epsom & Ewell Borough Council

# Local Plan Draft Communications and Engagement Strategy

August 2020



## Introduction

Luther Pendragon Ltd has been commissioned by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council to advise on and support the delivery of the communications and engagement elements of the next phase of public consultation to develop the council's new Local Plan.

This includes a communications and engagement strategy which will provide an overarching plan to guide the public consultation over the months ahead, ensuring that it meets the council's core objectives, is fully inclusive and maximises participation.

This draft strategy includes a number of recommendations covering the following issues:

- 1. Objectives and principles of the consultation**
- 2. Key themes and messages**
- 3. The stakeholders the consultation must reach**
- 4. Ensuring an inclusive consultation**
- 5. Indicative communications plan**

### 1. Objectives and principles of the consultation

The council has a number of core principles and objectives which will guide the development of the Local Plan at every stage:

- The Local Plan is a critical document in shaping the future of the borough;
- The council will make decisions based on evidence to ensure that the Plan fulfills all the statutory planning and legal requirements and is deemed to be Sound;
- The council will take an inclusive approach involving as many residents, businesses and local organizations as possible throughout the whole of the process;
- The Local Plan will seek to maximize the many unique characteristics of our borough;
- The council will ensure that it fulfils all statutory requirements in developing the Local Plan as well as following all the latest guidance regarding the COVID-19 outbreak.

These principles and objectives will also influence the council's approach to communications and stakeholder engagement. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 outbreak, significant progress has already been made and the council remains ambitious about the level of outreach and engagement that can be undertaken.

The increased use of digital communications more broadly, as result of COVID-19, presents a significant opportunity to reach a greater number of stakeholders than through more traditional forms of consultation used in the past.

The council has also recently undertaken a major engagement exercise in the development of the *Future 40 Strategy* - [www.future40.org](http://www.future40.org) – which has not only delivered a wealth of information on the views of local stakeholders but has also provided valuable experience in managing a consultation of this size.

In developing and finalising this communications strategy the council should seek to use as many communication channels as possible – both physical and digital communications tools - to make engagement with, and crucially participation in, the consultation as easy and as accessible as possible.

## 2. Key themes and messages

The draft Local Plan document and consultation will be highly detailed, setting out all of the council's development policies as well as potential sites for new homes, employment growth, environmental protection and leisure uses.

**However, at its heart is a strategy for how, working together with stakeholders, the council will create, develop and maintain successful communities.**

There will therefore be a number of core messages that run through all aspects of the Local Plan which will feature in all aspects of communications and engagement.

- The Local Plan will present a positive vision for the future of the borough which will maintain and reflect its distinctive character and features.
- The Local Plan will help to protect the borough from ad hoc development.
- The Local Plan will the borough secure much needed new community infrastructure and the future health and prosperity of the borough.
- The Green Belt will continue to be one of the borough's most important assets.
- The public consultation gives local people a say in how the borough will look in the future, including the location, scale and type of new housing that comes forward.
- The council must also meet key Government requirements.

Underscoring all of this are the **six principles** that the council agreed in November 2019<sup>1</sup> to drive the development of and shape the Local Plan at every stage.

The proposed approach recognises the rich character of the borough and its high-quality green spaces and seeks to focus development in existing urban areas particularly around the key town and village centres and stations.

The principles also focus on the importance of design quality with an emphasis on greening the borough, ensuring that development addresses the council's commitments to tackling Climate Change, and making places more family friendly and accessible.

## 3. The stakeholders the consultation must reach

The borough is made up of many thriving communities with strong local representation through Residents' Associations, civic bodies and local interest groups. Similarly, the borough has many committed businesses and employers keen to invest in the borough's future, as well as institutions that enrich our communities.

The communications strategy must ensure that the council fully engages all these different varied stakeholders to gain their insights and views.

The council should also ensure that it uses a range of engagement methods to bring the consultation to these stakeholders in an accessible way. The greater use of digital communications should increase participation rates and may make it easier for harder to reach groups to take part.

Where appropriate the council should also seek to partner with key stakeholders, given their extensive networks across our communities. This could be done through physical or online events,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/news/committee-agree-six-principles-shape-local-plan>

for example educational institutions, to engage with students and young people to ensure it gets their views as part of the consultation process.

In the table below a wide range of stakeholders have been identified that the council will need to engage with.

<b>Stakeholder groups</b>	
<b>Local people and their representatives</b>	Individual residents
	Resident Associations
	Neighbourhood Forums
	Civic society groups
	Local interest groups
	Voluntary groups
<b>Local representatives</b>	EEBC councillors
	Member of Parliament
	Surrey county councillors representing Epsom & Ewell
<b>Employers, local business and representative bodies</b>	Business owners and employers
	EEBC Business Breakfasts
	Surrey Chamber of Commerce
<b>Educational institutions</b>	University of the Creative Industries
	UCA Student Union
	NESCOT
<b>Local authorities</b>	Bordering district, borough and London Borough authorities
	Surrey County Council
	Mayor of London and Greater London Authority
<b>National bodies</b>	MHCLG
	Planning Inspectorate

#### 4. Ensuring an inclusive consultation

Given the importance of the Local Plan to the future of the borough, the council should ensure that the consultation reaches and engages as many different people, demographics and organisations as possible. The approach that the council should take will be a mixture of high-quality communications, marketing and advertising to ensure the maximum reach of the consultation and engagement.

The pandemic has presented significant challenges to undertaking more traditional forms of consultation such as physical public exhibition events and consultation meetings. There continues to be uncertainty about whether the council will be able to hold public exhibition events and meetings to showcase the plans in the near future. Therefore, it will need to consider other methods to ensure an open and inclusive consultation process, while not delaying progress in the development of the Local Plan.

The council will need to consider the **use of online platforms and holding virtual meetings** to allow local people and stakeholders to view the proposals, ask questions and make comments. This also offers the opportunity to provide more regular updates and reminders throughout the course of the consultation period.

A core part of the communications activity will be the **creation of a visual display summarising the key elements of the Local Plan and the key questions of the consultation**. This will be adapted so

that it can be used at both physical and virtual events. This display will set out the key proposals for housing, transport, education, green spaces and core development policies. It will also include a map of the borough so that stakeholders can clearly see the sites that have come forward to be considered.

It will be on permanent display in the council's civic centre and be placed on the Local Plan microsite to view online. It will also be used as a display at any physical events the council can hold and adapted for use in virtual consultation meetings and briefings.

Luther Pendragon has worked with the council to create and manage a **dedicated Local Plan microsite**, which is now live:  
[www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/localplan](http://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/localplan)

Having the microsite already in place brings a number of benefits:

- The microsite will ensure that all information related to the Local Plan, including the extensive evidence base, can be found in one place;
- It will include all the consultation documents as well as a map of the Borough highlighting which sites have come forward for consideration;
- In the event of online meetings it will be the platform for stakeholders to access information
- It will be continually updated with the latest information and news regarding the Local Plan, including updates featured in *Borough Insight*;
- The microsite will include fixed URLs for key documents to make it easier to find via search engines and it is already linked to the council's main website, via the homepage and the planning department web pages.

In developing this draft strategy full reference has been made to the Government's guidance document *Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance for local government: Planning and building safely: Plan-making*<sup>2</sup> and the council's own *Statement of Community Involvement*.

The council will need to continue to closely follow the changing guidance and regulations and will adapt this strategy accordingly, particularly if physical consultation events are permitted.

The council should also continue to be mindful that not all residents have access to online resources and so physical copies of the Local Plan consultation documents and evidence should be available as well as the ability to submit views in writing via post or submission to the council.

Taking on board this experience and guidance, the table below sets out the measures that the council should take, through this communications strategy, to ensure high levels of understanding, engagement and participation.

<b>Information and participation:</b> Measures the council should take to ensure stakeholders have access to all the necessary information and can participate fully in the consultation	<b>Engagement:</b> Measures the council should take to ensure that stakeholders are fully aware of the consultation and their ability to take part
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All consultation documents, evidence and materials to be uploaded onto the Local Plan microsite.</li><li>• All documents will be made available in accessible formats on request.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Making full use of councillor, civic and community group networks – including promoting the consultation via email lists and social media groups and networks.</li></ul>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-making#COVID-1919>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The council is using online consultation software, <i>Inovem</i> to allow stakeholders to submit responses online.</li> <li>• Email/written submission of questions and follow up answers from the council.</li> <li>• Online meetings for residents and business to showcase the proposals.</li> <li>• For physical events, using accessible locations and putting in place COVID-19 secure arrangements.</li> <li>• Paper versions of the consultation to be sent on request and be available in key public buildings e.g. libraries.</li> </ul> <p><b>We also recommend that the council explores further:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using video content and updates to discuss specific issues affecting the Local Plan and provide updates throughout the course of the consultation.</li> <li>• Direct resident communications via post.</li> <li>• Leafleting at rail stations and other public places across the borough with significant footfall.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In absence of the ability to hold physical consultation events, holding virtual consultation meetings and briefings, allowing the council to present the key elements of the plan and allow for residents to submit questions for answer.</li> <li>• Email updates to the council's planning database of residents who have expressed an interest in being kept informed on progress of the Local Plan.</li> <li>• Maximising use of the council's social media accounts, Facebook and Twitter and explore how we can use Instagram effectively. This will include social media post as well as advertising.</li> <li>• Online advertising using council social media channels.</li> <li>• Advertising on council owned advertising sites.</li> <li>• Regular <i>Borough Insight</i> articles and updates.</li> </ul> <p><b>We also recommend that the council explores further:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local radio advertising and promotion.</li> <li>• High Street stalls and roadshows in areas of high footfall e.g. supermarkets/shopping centres to allow people to give their views.</li> </ul>
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## 5. Indicative communications plan

Below is an indicative communications plan. At this stage it is difficult to put fix timeframes on the plan as uncertainty remains regarding COVID-19 restrictions, but also the latest Local Plan reforms announced by the Government on 6 August 2020. It is anticipated that the consultation will run for a longer period than the statutory 12 weeks.

The council should be clear with stakeholders at the outset of the consultation, the process it will undertake so that all stakeholders can see the extent of the consultation and engagement exercise and understand how they can participate.

Month	Preparation stages	Month 1 of consultation	Month 2 of consultation	Month 3 of consultation	Month 4 of consultation
<b>Proposed activity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing existing messaging and collateral developed pre-COVID-19</li> <li>• Finalising Local Plan visual display</li> <li>• Development and agreement of final materials</li> <li>• Member briefings</li> </ul>	<p>Consultation launched post LPPC meeting and decision to launch:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media announcement and press release to local press and community news websites.</li> <li>• Letters to stakeholders informing them of the start of the consultation.</li> <li>• Radio advertising.</li> <li>• Banner on EEBC homepage to redirect to Local Plan microsite.</li> <li>• Announcement on Local Plan microsite.</li> <li>• Targeted Facebook posts announcing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programme of consultation events (physical and/or virtual).</li> <li>• Adverts in prominent borough locations.</li> <li>• Targeted Facebook adverts promoting the key dates/venues.</li> <li>• Business breakfasts (physical or virtual) with local employers and businesses to present Local Plan and gain views.</li> <li>• Possible leafleting/street stalls.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programme of consultation events (physical and/or virtual) including a round up event.</li> <li>• Targeted Facebook adverts promoting the key dates/venues.</li> <li>• Business breakfasts (physical or virtual) with local employers and businesses to present.</li> <li>• Possible leafleting/street stalls.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Press release “last chance to comment”.</li> <li>• <i>Borough Insight</i> reminder.</li> <li>• Social media reminder post.</li> <li>• Email to planning mailing list.</li> </ul>

		<p>consultation and linking to microsite.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Email to planning mailing list.</li> <li>• Video promoted through social media.</li> <li>• Permanent display at Civic Centre.</li> <li>• One-to-one stakeholder meetings with representatives and groups.</li> </ul>			
		<p><b>We recommend that the council should also consider the following actions throughout consultation period -</b>  Regular updates on microsite/Social Media/<i>Borough Insight</i>  Leafleting at stations/Direct resident communication/High Street stalls/Radio advertising/advertising in high footfall areas etc. Video updates on key issues/themes e.g. green spaces, housing mix, transport infrastructure, support for employers.</p>			



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## About Luther Pendragon

Luther Pendragon is a communications agency with a 25 year track record of ensuring clients tell their stories to the people that matter.

We provide a full-service communications offer including public relations, media support, public affairs and stakeholder engagement and management services.

Our team works with a wide range of public and private organisations to help them develop and manage communications and engagement strategies including delivering major public consultations.

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