

Epsom Civic Society

formerly Epsom Protection Society

shaping the future, safeguarding the past

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Karol Jakubczyk
Planning Policy Manager
Epsom and Ewell Borough Council
Town Hall
The Parade
KT18 5BY

6th October 2017

Dear Karol,

Local Plan Review: Issues and Options Consultation – further comments

The Society's position: preliminary

Epsom Civic Society was founded in 1959 as the Epsom Protection Society, at a time when many historic and architecturally valuable buildings and houses in Epsom and Ewell were being threatened by developers. Then, our primary role was to halt the destruction of Epsom's heritage and to ensure that new development was compatible with the traditional character of the town. In 2011, our name was changed to Epsom Civic Society. Our purpose continues to be to protect the heritage of Epsom and to encourage high standards of new planning and building; but the change of name reflects the wider concerns of the Society to promote civic pride and to inspire progressive improvement in the quality of urban life for everyone. We have over 1900 members. The Society is a founder member of Civic Voice, the national charity for the civic movement in England, and shares common aims with other civic societies.

Issues and Options

The Society values all aspects and elements that have made Epsom a great place to live. We want to see Epsom thrive economically and culturally so as to reclaim its identity as a modern, entrepreneurial, and sustainable market town. Too often we hear from local people, 'We thought we had moved to a market town, but it's become just another London suburb.' This needs reversing. We support the continuing evolution of neighbourhoods with community vitality and interaction. We seek to retain and promote **local distinctiveness** in terms of architecture, design and placemaking. We support and seek to promote significant **improvement in quality of design** and in **quality of building materials** in future development. The prospect of higher densities and taller buildings only increases the importance of the aforementioned issues. **It has always been the**

Society's policy to maintain the character of the town and to oppose high buildings. If proposed policy amendments go too far we would feel bound to oppose them.

We support the **improved provision of affordable homes and social housing**, as we stated in our response to the consultation on the Housing White Paper, 'Fixing our broken housing market (Cm 9352). More generally, the Society would support a reasonable target for new homes but **we question central government's current target of 579 homes pa**. In the Society's view, this target is unachievable and undesirable and must be rejected.

The Society **does not support Option 1** (reliance on urban intensification using high densities) for the following reasons. This option necessitates building high and reallocating open spaces, play pitches and allotments away from the urban area to accommodate development. It envisages building on garden land. **It is the Society's policy to oppose tall buildings and to maintain Epsom's heritage and character.** We value the **town's conservation areas** and support their protection from inappropriate development. We seek to encourage the continued improvement of **public spaces, green spaces, parks and gardens in the town**. They are vital aspects of Epsom's distinctiveness, and essential for the promotion of recreation, biodiversity, public health, well-being, and quality of life. We are in favour of mainstreaming green infrastructure into development plans.

The Society acknowledges the **utility and value of Green Belt** in preventing urban sprawl and protecting the identity and character of the town. **It has always been the Society's policy to preserve it.** Release of Green Belt has the potential to impair significantly its continued functionality. 44% of Epsom's Green Belt has additional environmental designations, including ancient woodland, SSSIs, LNRs, and SINCs, that make important contributions to biodiversity, well-being and quality of life. In seeking to find solutions for the increase in housing provision, the adoption of policies with potential adverse impacts on significant natural environments and open spaces is a serious concern. We also query the effectiveness of Green Belt release in terms of delivering sufficient homes to meet established need at reasonable cost, bearing in mind the likelihood of the need for increased provision of associated infrastructure. Consequently the Society **does not support Options 2 and 3** (lesser and greater Green Belt release, respectively).

We support **balanced, well-designed and sustainable development** in the Borough and in consequence **support Option 4 – Finding the balance**. It is the only option with the prospect of protecting the Borough's character and distinctiveness while enabling Epsom both to improve and grow as a place to live, work and enjoy.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Hollins
Chair, Epsom Civic Society

