

Dear Residents,

Please see below the Elmbridge press release regarding their Local Plan and their proposal to build houses on local Green Belt locations. Please also see a release by the Cobham Green Belt group, which works alongside Stoke D'Abernon Residents' Association.

Regards

On behalf of the Cobham Green Belt Group we welcome the opportunity to comment on Elmbridge's press release.

We welcome Karen Randolph's comments explaining the approach taken by the council - to delay the process to take account of the feedback from the community, to await further guidance from the government, to seek revised data and to reconsider its original plans.

As is made clear in the press release the community is essentially unanimous in its objection to development on the green belt and we fully expect the council in its next iteration next spring to present a plan in accordance with government guidelines – one featuring higher density development, brownfield site regeneration, transport centre integration, etc. i.e. not on green belt land.

The council's green belt assessment was wrong in many ways. E.g. it says its green belt land is performing strongly on at least two grounds but then strangely ignores these grounds and ranks different 'parcels' only on the other grounds. These parcels are of large areas with very diverse characteristics and they have been 'scored' haphazardly. Selection of which parcels to consider for development has been done it seems more from the perspective of size and availability rather than suitability and accessibility.

The housing target for Elmbridge set by the government is 62,482 dwellings by 2035 and in its most recent reports the council say there are already approaching 58,000 of these in place or being built. Therefore the target number required is considerably less than the council's consultation said, and this inflated target has been a key driver of the local plan. We expect the next iteration to be based on realistic goals.

A big issue for the respondents to the council was the infrastructure. It is just not possible to load on top of the existing roads, transport, schools and health systems the growth envisaged in the consultation. Even if large sums of money were suddenly available for this what land would the roads and railways be built on and how would the shortage of the requisite professionals be overcome. This is a key reason why the target number for the local plan cannot be an inflated one.

Councillor Selleck says 'it is important to protect the character of Elmbridge' – a view we fully endorse and will strive to see fulfilled.

End

Elmbridge Press Release:

Elmbridge Local Plan receives almost 50,000 individual comments but what are the next steps?

At a meeting of Elmbridge Borough Council's Cabinet on July 5, an update was presented on the Council's Local Plan – the strategy addressing the key development needs in Elmbridge, including social and affordable housing.

Following a 10-week consultation period ending on 24 February 2017, the Council received nearly 3,800 responses from individuals and organisations generating almost 50,000 individual comments. A detailed report setting out the issues raised to each of the questions asked in the consultation document, will be taken to the Council's Individual Cabinet Member Decision Making committee on 19 July 2017. Alongside this we will also make available all the separate responses to the consultation. The issues raised during the Consultation include;

- The vast majority of responses opposed any amendment to the Green Belt boundaries in order to meet housing needs.
- Responses consider the Green Belt to be sacrosanct and there are no exceptional circumstances under which it should be amended.
- A significant number of these responses also disagreed with the methodology used in assessing the Green Belt and the findings of this study.
- Many of the responses felt that there are additional urban sites available within our existing towns which could be more densely developed, however, responses from those who live in more densely populated areas opposed the further intensification of their areas.

A significant number of responses suggested alternative options should have been considered, including;

- Building a new town or village

- Doing nothing and maintaining the Council's existing strategy and housing target.
- Engage neighbouring authorities to see if they can accommodate our housing surplus.

While in the minority, there were responses submitted in support of the Council's approach, recognising that there needed to be a balance between protecting Green Belt and meeting housing need.

The impact of future development was a major concern, with many respondents stating that infrastructure was already at capacity. The most common concerns raised were with regards to road capacity, public transport, school places and GP services. With regard to transport, there was support for more integration between trains, buses, cycling and walking to reduce the pressure on roads. It was suggested that more lobbying of Government was required to deliver improvements to the transport network.

During the consultation period, the Government published a white paper on housing ("Fixing our broken housing market", February 2017), which added another layer to the consultation. The Government continues to make clear that Local Authorities should seek to meet their objectively assessed needs for development through the preparation for a Local Plan however, it believes that a more standardised methodology for assessing development needs is required. The Government considers this would provide consistency among Local Authorities when assessing needs and deliver the transparency needed for local people to recognise the requirement for new homes in their area. Consultation on this new methodology standard is expected in the summer of 2017, with adoption into national policy expected April 2018.

Information regarding what the Government considers to be the exceptional circumstances that would justify amendments to Green Belt boundaries were also included in the Housing White Paper.

Councillor Karen Randolph, Portfolio Holder for Planning commented on the implications of the number of responses on the Local Plan schedule;

"As we've seen during the consultation period, this is a very emotional and complicated subject and we want to ensure that our residents are heard and their views considered properly. With tens of thousands of comments to consider, plus potential changes set out in the Housing White Paper we have had to delay our timetable accordingly. It now seems more likely that a further consultation on a more detailed Preferred Approach to Local Plan will take place in early 2018."

Councillor Stuart Selleck, Leader of Elmbridge Borough Council says it is important to protect the character of Elmbridge;

“Seven months ago, I asked the residents of Elmbridge to take part in the Local Plan consultation and they did so in their thousands. I thank everyone for taking the time to respond. Our job is now to review and consider those comments, in conjunction with the Government’s housing white paper, and to come back to the residents with a preferred approach to meet the challenges we as a Borough face. We will work hard to ensure we balance our development needs with our determination to protect the character of the Borough.”

Ends