
Shaping Elmbridge

A New Local Plan



Local Plan Mythbusters

Myth: We don't need a new plan

Fact: The Local Plan is a statutory requirement and the Government has made it clear that all local authorities must have an up-to-date plan.

Failure to do so could lead to intervention whereby the Government writes our Local Plan and policies. Without a new plan we could find ourselves unable to resist unacceptable development or refused applications being allowed on appeal. This could result in unplanned development in unsustainable locations.

Myth: We will be able to defend all speculative development schemes

Fact: So far, we have been successful in defending inappropriate developments in the Green Belt. However, the longer we are without an up-to-date plan, the greater the risk that ad-hoc development will be allowed on appeal in an unplanned way and in unsustainable locations.

Myth: We won the Drake's Park appeal so this site cannot be considered in the preparation of the new Local Plan

Fact: The Drake's Park application and appeal were considered against the current Core Strategy policies and national policy relating to proposed development in the Green Belt.

Notwithstanding this, the site is being promoted for development and removal from the Green Belt by the land owner through the Local Plan. This is different from a planning application and the council is required to include the site in its technical assessments and consideration of the options.

The identification of the site as part of option 3 as a potential location does not guarantee that the site will be taken through to the final plan or that planning permission will be granted in the future.

Myth: There was public objection to the three Key Strategic Areas, so they should not be included as an option

Fact: We have listened to all the feedback. However, the Local Plan evidence base continues to indicate that these three areas remain a valid option when considering how we can respond to housing need.

Myth: Planning permission will be granted on the sites shown in the option maps

Fact: The sites shown on the maps are potential locations for development which have been identified through high-level technical work. The identification of a site in any option does not guarantee that it will be taken through to the final plan or that planning permission will be granted in the future. Detailed technical work would need to be completed to support any site in the final plan.

Myth: We can challenge the housing numbers

Fact: The number of new homes that we need is determined by a set calculation, known as the 'standard methodology'. This is based on nationally-published population and household projections. Although the Council objected to the introduction of this method in the past, the Government expects us to prepare our plan to meet this housing requirement in full.

Myth: We don't have to do what the Government wants or the Planning Inspector

Fact: We can only adopt a new Local Plan if it is deemed to be 'sound' by the Planning Inspector. The plan must be consistent with national policy (set by the Government) to be considered 'sound'. The longer we are without an up-to-date Local Plan the greater the risk that the Government intervenes and writes our plan for us.

Myth: There is plenty of brownfield land in our urban areas

Fact: As well as setting a new housing target and policies to deliver new homes, we must ensure we have enough sites for the next 5, 10 and 15 years. Although development will not happen all at once, if we cannot demonstrate an on-going 5-year supply of housing sites, or the number of new homes built does not meet the target, the plan becomes out of date.

A detailed search for potential land has increased our estimated supply of housing land to 5,300 new homes over the next 15 years. However, the amount of brownfield land is different across the borough and in total there is not enough to meet need and there would be a shortfall of nearly 4,000 new homes.

Myth: The Green Belt is sacrosanct

Fact: The Green Belt is not sacrosanct. However, it is heavily protected from development, except in very special circumstances, by national and local planning policies.

Myth: The Green Belt can't be amended

Fact: National policy states that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in **exceptional circumstances**, as part of a Local Plan. These have been defined by national policy and 3 nearby Surrey authorities have recently concluded that there were exceptional circumstances to justify amendments to their boundaries. As we don't have enough land in our urban area for all the homes needed, we are required to review the potential of land in the Green Belt. This enables us to demonstrate that all available options have been properly assessed. We need to decide if there are exceptional circumstances, as set out by national planning policy to amend the boundaries in Elmbridge.

Myth: The Government said we don't have to build on the Green Belt

Fact: In the past there has been a number of political statements made by MPs. However, national policy sets out the exceptional circumstances to justify amending Green Belt boundaries through the Local Plan.

Myth: High density and smaller homes will ruin the character of my area

Fact: The character of an area relates to matters such as building size, scale and distances between buildings and boundaries. It does not relate to the number of bedrooms a property has or indeed the number of homes in a building. New development schemes will need to be innovative and utilise higher densities while respecting the local character.

Myth: We won't be able to protect our valued open space

Fact: A new Local Plan will provide opportunity to place strong protection on our important and valued open spaces, these would be called Local Green Spaces. This high level of protection means that there is a strong presumption against development. You have already told us which spaces are important to you and we have been able to identify spaces which would be suitable for this status.

Myth: There are never any affordable homes built in Elmbridge

Fact: There is a huge shortage of affordable homes. They are being built and priority is given to households who live and work in the borough, but the number built each year is not keeping up with need.

The council has established a housing company, EBC Homes with the aim of providing our own affordable homes in the future. Currently affordable homes are mainly built as part of private developments. Where private developers make planning contributions towards meeting the need for affordable housing locally, these are preferred on site.

In simple terms, the more new market homes are built the more affordable homes will be delivered. Just building more housing is unlikely to significantly bring down open market house prices, as this is influenced by factors beyond simple supply and demand. However, building homes of a size that we need will create more choice with smaller homes, ultimately commanding lower purchase or rental prices than larger homes.

Myth: The council will make lots of money from new homes

Fact: There is potentially an increase in the overall tax and CIL collections from more homes and more residents, but that also brings extra costs for us and Surrey County Council from more bin collections, roads to maintain and public services to provide. Any homes built by the council will be to increase local affordable housing and not for profit.

Myth: Elmbridge Borough Council controls the amount and level of infrastructure provision in the borough.

Fact: The council works closely with infrastructure providers on roads, health, education, utilities and emergency services. The plan must be prepared in consultation with providers and in a joined-up way to ensure the right type and levels of infrastructure are provided.

However, it is the infrastructure providers themselves who decide what infrastructure requires improvement or additions based on their own service level agreements with the Government.

To understand what infrastructure currently exists and what improvements the providers are planning, the council has produced the Infrastructure Delivery Plan. This living document will pull together the infrastructure needs for the plan period. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan will be used to inform a programme for the delivery of infrastructure projects to be funded by development through the Community Infrastructure Levy Tax.

To date we have asked providers and agencies to consider the impact of meeting housing need evenly across the borough. Once we have determined which sites could be carried forward into the draft Local Plan we will go back to the providers and agencies to understand the local impact in each area of the borough. Their response will influence, where and when development could come forward in the borough.

Myth: The options are fixed and whichever one is picked will become the Local Plan.

Fact: The options and the potential locations for development have been formed by using the technical assessments which have been applied across the borough. However, they are not fixed and are not a draft plan in disguise.

Given that there are such distinct differences in the areas of our borough, it is likely that no sole option can be applied universally across the borough sustainably. That is why we are asking you what option would be best for your area and why. We also want to know what makes your area special and how you would like to see it grow in the next 15 years. This will enable us to tailor a bespoke plan for Elmbridge that focuses on place making but also responds to our housing challenges.

Myth: The option which residents are most in favour will be taken forward

Fact: The consultation is not a vote or referendum. In the next stage of the plan preparation, the council will need to marry up as best it can our residents' visions for their area and views on how the borough should grow over the next 15 years to meet the Government's requirements for the Local Plan.

Myth: Our views won't be listened to

Fact: We take all peoples views into account. Responding to your comments and feedback has enabled us to look at our options again and add to them.

Last updated: 19 August 2019