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# Shaping Elmbridge A New Local Plan

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## Topic Paper 1 - How the Spatial Strategy was formed

June 2022



**Elmbridge**  
Borough Council

*... bridging the communities ...*

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# Executive Summary

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The Council is preparing a new Local Plan for Elmbridge Borough which will set out how our communities and places will develop over the next 15 years.

The draft Local Plan (June 2022) sets out the vision for the borough to shape how the borough will evolve and seek to meet the key challenges facing the borough and our communities up to 2037. The shaping of place and the response to the climate change emergency are at the heart of the plan and the policies have been written to enable careful management of the borough's unique places and to ensure its resilience and adaptation to a changing climate, as well as a reduction in carbon emissions.

The draft plan includes three strategic policies and a range of development management policies and site allocations. Together these will support the implementation of the Council's vision for the borough and its preferred approach for growth, referred to as the spatial strategy.

As part of the preparation of the draft Local Plan, the Council has tested a wide range of spatial options and has explored their implications across a range of sustainability objectives. This has been supported by an extensive evidence base and Regulation 18 consultations with our communities and other stakeholders. The Council has also undertaken considerable engagement and shared its evidence base with key stakeholders throughout the process of developing its position on the level and distribution of growth. This process has been reinforced and informed by its collaborative working with key bodies on strategic matters under the Duty to Cooperate.

This paper explains how the Council has developed its recommended preferred strategy; using a range of factors to inform the development and consideration of reasonable options and, how these were narrowed down prior to the selecting of a preferred option that was agreed by the Council at a Special Council meeting on 13 June 2022.

The Council has sought to recommend a sustainable approach to development despite the challenges of the levels of growth the borough is facing, and the extensive constraints faced by the borough. In principle, the recommended spatial strategy within the draft Local Plan provides for a significant step-change in its housing target in comparison to those previously set and, seeks to provide new homes in the right places through a logical and evidence based spatial strategy that promotes sustainable patterns of development in accordance with the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2021).

The recommended spatial strategy will concentrate growth within urban areas, optimising the development potential of each site with a key focus on our high streets and other retail centres as their evolution into community hubs is supported. It will seek to increase the level of housing over the lifetime of the plan including, the delivery of affordable homes, supported by the necessary infrastructure.

The Council, whilst recognising that this efficient use of land will help to respond to demand, it will not meet all of it. The Council considers however, it has struck the correct balance in terms of meeting its housing, economic and other development needs in sustainable locations, whilst balancing this with the need to continue to conserve and enhance the qualities and characteristics that make our existing communities attractive places to live, work and spend leisure time. This includes the Green Belt, for which the Government attached great importance, and our open spaces, as well as safeguarding other areas of recognised importance such as ancient woodland, habitat sites and heritage assets of international and national importance and avoiding areas unsuitable for new development for example, where they are at high risk from flooding.

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# 1. Introduction

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## A new Local Plan

- 1.1 The Council is preparing a new Local Plan which will set out how our communities and places within the borough will develop over the next 15 years. The Local Plan is a statutory requirement (Section 62(1) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) and the Government has made it clear that all local authorities must have an up-to-date Local Plan by 2023. The Council's current plan was adopted in 2011, and although many aspects of this plan are still effective in assisting to bring forward sustainable development in the borough, a fundamental issue with the current plan is that the housing target in that plan is out of date.
- 1.2 The draft Local Plan sets out the vision for the borough to shape how the borough will evolve to meet the needs of its residents and business. The shaping of place and the response to the climate change emergency are at the heart of the plan and the policies have been written to enable careful management of the borough's unique places and to ensure its resilience and adaptation to a changing climate, as well as a reduction in carbon emissions.
- 1.3 The plan includes three strategic policies and a range of development management policies and site allocations. Together these will support the implementation of the Council's preferred approach for growth, referred to as the spatial strategy.
- 1.4 Once adopted, the new Local Plan will be the local development plan for the area covered by Elmbridge for the period until 2037. It will replace the existing Core Strategy (adopted in 2011) and the Development Management Plan (adopted in 2015), both of which will be revoked on adoption of the new Plan.

## The purpose of this paper

- 1.5 The purpose of this paper is to provide the background to the preparation of the draft Local Plan and highlight the key influencers that have shaped and informed the spatial strategy put forward in the draft Local Plan as agreed by the Council at a Special Council on 13 June 2022. It explains the factors taken into account in recommending the spatial strategy in the draft Local Plan, and how the Council has narrowed down reasonable policy options in terms of:
  - national policy and guidance, case law and other relevant policies and strategies;
  - the Local Plan evidence base;

- feedback from the Issues and Options (Regulation 18) consultations;
- ongoing engagement with key stakeholders and meeting its obligations under the Duty to Cooperate; and
- testing of options through the Sustainability Appraisal (SA), incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).

1.6 In some areas this paper acts as an overview, and therefore offers the reader signposts to where further detail and information relating to a matter can be found. This may take the form of Council reports, consultation documents, technical evidence base and supporting documents as well as national legislation, policy and guidance.

1.7 In support of the draft Local Plan, the Council has prepared a series of topic papers that set out how the Council has developed various policy approaches within the draft Local Plan. This topic paper focuses on plan preparation and the spatial strategy and does not seek to repeat the detail contained within other topic papers.

1.8 This paper does not assess or form a view as to compliance with national planning policy or the soundness of the draft Local Plan.

## **Structure of this paper**

1.9 The structure of this paper is as follows:

- Section 2 - sets out the legislative, national and local policy context for plan preparation and the spatial strategy.
- Section 3 - provides an overview of the strategic context and geography of Elmbridge and the key challenges that the Local Plan seeks to address.
- Section 4 - provides a high-level summary of the key factors influencing the development of the spatial strategy.
- Section 5 - sets out, as part of the preparation of the draft Local Plan, the options that have evolved which could form the basis for the preferred development strategy for the borough e.g. the spatial strategy. This includes the evidence base informing them and the stages of consultation and the comments received on the options. The Section concludes by setting out the three-remaining options for the spatial strategy.
- Section 6 - sets out the justification for the Council discounting two of the remaining options on the basis of national policy and guidance, case law,

the evidence base including the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and any other considerations.

- Section 7 - sets out the preferred spatial strategy, as agreed by the Council at a Special Council meeting on 13 June 2022, for the new Local Plan and the justification for this.
- Section 8 – sets out a conclusion to this paper.



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## 2. The shaping of the draft Local Plan and its preparation – an overview

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- 2.1 This section provides an overview of the elements that have shaped the preparation of the draft Local Plan and have informed and guided each stage of the plan-making process including the consideration of options for the spatial strategy. This section also sets out the governance and decision-making process in place that has overseen our process to date and will continue up until the publication of the draft Local Plan.
- 2.2 More in depth information regarding the elements that have shaped the preparation of the draft Local Plan, including the options, and the recommendations made by the Local Plan Working Group (LPWG) and, decisions of the Council where appropriate, are set out throughout this document.

### What has shaped the draft Local Plan?

- 2.3 A Local Plan must be positively prepared, and each stage of the plan-making process must be informed, shaped and guided by several elements. As set out in Figure 1, this includes our residents' and stakeholder views as set out in the responses to consultations; the Local Plan evidence base; and the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). It must also respond to national policy, guidance and legislation requirements on matters such as employment, the environment, heritage, infrastructure as well as housing. The Local Plan must also sit alongside other borough and county-wide strategies as it will help to deliver some elements of these.
- 2.4 In determining the spatial strategy for the draft Local Plan, the Council must balance these sometimes-conflicting elements to ensure it produces a draft local plan that it believes is sound to be tested by an independent Planning Inspector.

### National Planning Policy & Guidance and Legislative Requirements

- 2.5 The Local Plan must respond to and be consistent with relevant Government legislation, planning policies and guidance when it comes to the plan-making process and the content of the plan. Since the adoption of our current planning policies in 2011 and 2015 (the Core Strategy and Development Management Plan respectively), there have been significant changes in these areas.

2.6 The draft Local Plan needs to respond to these changes and will need to take into account the policies set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2021) and the technical guidance on how to apply these found in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).



**Figure 1: The elements that have informed, shaped and guided the draft Local Plan**

2.7 Throughout the preparation of the draft Local Plan, changes to national policy and guidance have continued which the Council has needed to consider and respond to in terms of how each may affect the emerging spatial strategy and other plan policies. Key Government consultations that have occurred whilst preparing the draft Local Plan are:

- Housing White Paper: Fixing our Broken Housing Market (February 2017)
- Planning for the Right Homes in the Right Places (September 2017)
- Proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (March 2018)
- Changes to the current planning system (August 2020)
- White Paper: Planning for the Future (August 2020)
- Draft revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (January 2021)
- White Paper: Levelling Up the United Kingdom (February 2022)

2.8 In the latter stages of plan preparation i.e. formalising the draft Local Plan, the Council has been particularly mindful of the potential changes to the planning system and the ambitions of the Government when it comes to plan-making.

## Duty to Cooperate

- 2.9 In order to address strategic issues relevant to their area, the Localism Act 2011<sup>1</sup> places a statutory duty (the ‘duty to cooperate’) on and requires local planning authorities to work constructively with the neighbouring authorities and other prescribed bodies in preparing their development plan documents.
- 2.10 The duty has required the Council to engage with our neighbouring local authorities, partners and infrastructure providers “constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis” on strategic issues in plan-making.
- 2.11 The duty covers issues such as housing, employment, transport and infrastructure. The Council has been working closely with others to ensure we have a better understanding of strategic issues and to ensure they are fully considered in our plan-making, especially in relation to the spatial strategy and infrastructure. The Council has also taken account of relevant planning policies and proposals in adjoining areas, and further afield that may affect, or be affected by the new Local Plan policies and proposals.
- 2.12 The duty to cooperate is not a duty to agree, but local planning authorities are required to make every effort to secure the necessary cooperation on strategic cross-boundary matters before submitting their Local Plans for examination. At examination, local planning authorities must demonstrate how they have complied with the duty. If a local planning authority cannot demonstrate that it has been complied with, then the Local Plan will not be able to proceed further in the examination process.
- 2.13 A written record of the process and outcomes of engagement with our neighbours, partners and infrastructure providers has been detailed in a Duty to Cooperate Compliance Statement which will be supported by a series of agreed Statements of Common Ground (SoCG) to demonstrate that the draft Local Plan is based on effective joint working on cross-boundary matters as required by the Act and the NPPF.

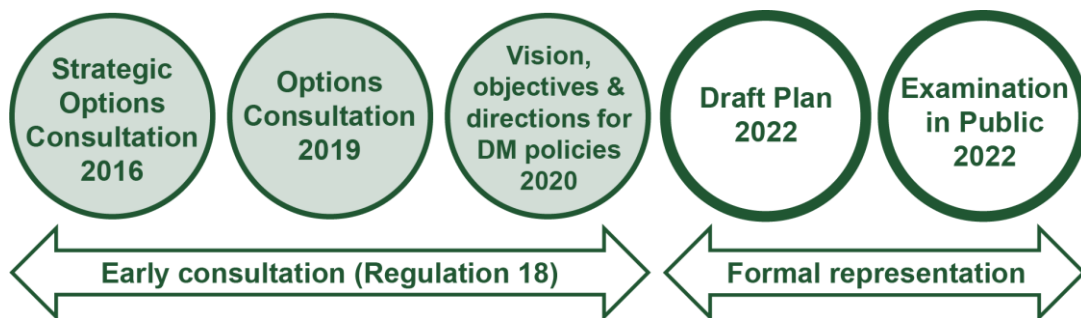
## Feedback from residents and stakeholders

- 2.14 Consultation has been an important part of the plan-making process. The consultations throughout the process have provided a real opportunity to gain views on what the new Local Plan should include. Responses have been considered at each stage of the plan preparation process and have been used to inform further consultations and then the draft Local Plan itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Localism Act 2011, Part 6 Chapter 1 Section 110 – duty to cooperate in relation to planning of Sustainable development - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/section/110/enacted>

- 2.15 More information on each consultation undertaken can be found in the relevant Consultation Statements published following consideration of the comments / representations made at each stage. An overview of the consultation undertaken, and how the comments received have shaped the preparation of the draft Local Plan, can also be found in Section 5 of this paper.
- 2.16 In total there will be five opportunities for residents and stakeholders to make comments during the preparation of the Local Plan, this is set out in Figure 2.
- 2.17 Early consultation had focussed on what our new Local Plan should contain and the key issues it should address and the options for doing so. These consultations were more informal and included events such as public meetings, drop-in sessions and workshops with key community groups and resident associations.



**Figure 2: Opportunities to comment / make representations in the Local Plan process**

- 2.18 The latter two are representation stages focusing on the ‘preferred approach’ set out in the draft Local Plan. They centre around ‘soundness’ and the legal compliance of the draft Local Plan. Stakeholders will be asked for their view on the draft Local Plan before it is submitted to an independent Planning Inspector for examination. In accordance with the Local Development Scheme (2022 – 2025) the Regulation 19 representation is due to take place in June to July 2022 with the submission anticipated Autumn 2022.
- 2.19 The Planning Inspector will consider the representations during the examination of the draft Local Plan. Those that made a representation will also be given the opportunity to make their case through written representations and / or at hearing sessions during the examination.
- 2.20 It should be noted that further formal representation periods may be required during the examination if main and / or minor modification to the draft Local Plan are deemed necessary.

## The role of the evidence base

- 2.21 Local Plans must be informed by evidence and over the past six years the Council, and its appointed consultants, has been preparing a series of technical documents on a wide range of topics to help understand what new development is needed, how it could be plan for and how it will be delivered. Together, these are known as the '[Local Plan Evidence Base](#)'.
- 2.22 The technical documents use a variety of facts, figures and data. Some elements require judgements and reasonable assumptions to be made. The Council has used its knowledge of the borough to inform this work. All our assessments follow national and European guidance and requirements as well as standard industry best practice.
- 2.23 The findings of each technical document are carefully considered against the results of other technical work, national planning policy, guidance and other legislation. The evidence base should be read 'as a whole', as many technical documents are interlinked.
- 2.24 There have also been several supporting documents produced to inform the plan as it is being prepared to ensure compliance with national planning policy, guidance and legislation. Several assessments need to be undertaken throughout the plan-making process to ensure important environmental, sustainability and equality matters have been properly considered. This includes the Sustainability Appraisal which assesses the social, environmental and economic effects of the plan from the outset. It guides and informs the plan preparation to help ensure that it contributes to achieving sustainable development. This is especially important where there are conflicting views or information.
- 2.25 As part of the supporting documents officers will produce a series of background documents called 'topic papers' to set out how the policy approaches within the draft Local Plan have been formed. Each topic paper will look at the relevant national and local guidance that informs the draft Local Plan and explain how the strategy to address the issues has developed. The topic papers will also highlight the information, evidence and feedback that has informed the choices made in formulating the draft policies.
- 2.26 As part of the Regulation 19 representation period, a series of compliance and conformity assessments will be published. These will assess the legal compliance of the draft Local Plan if it meets the Duty to Co-operate and is consistent with national policy, which is known as the test of 'soundness' (see paragraph 3.17 for further details). The assessments will be submitted to the independent Planning Inspector alongside the draft Local Plan and all the representations received.

- 2.27 All supporting documents and the evidence base have been updated and added to throughout the plan-making process. All technical documents that form the evidence base and supporting documents can be found the Council's [website](#).

#### Other borough and county-wide strategies

- 2.28 The draft Local Plan does not sit in isolation and across the borough and the county there are wider strategies which have shaped the direction for plan as well as the plan acting as a delivery mechanism for other strategies. These include strategies relating to the economy, transport, housing, culture, open and green spaces and health.

- 2.29 A comprehensive list of other policies, plans, programs and strategies that have been reviewed and informed the preparation of the draft Local Plan is included in the Sustainability Appraisal 2020.

### **Governance and decision-making throughout the plan-making process**

- 2.30 The governance and decision-making arrangements for Local Plan documents are set out in the Council's Local Development Scheme (LDS) 2022-2025 and have been summarised in Tables 1 and 2. These arrangements have been established since the interim LDS 2014-2017 was approved by Full Council in October 2014.
- 2.31 To oversee the production of the new Local Plan and promote cross-party engagement, a small non-executive Members (Councillors) Working Group known as the Local Plan Working Group (LPWG) has been established. The group reports to the Cabinet and makes recommendations on draft documents prior to consultation and adoption. The group comprises of representatives from the Planning Committee and Planning Sub Committees. The Portfolio Holder for Planning also attends meetings of the group. Minutes of meetings are reported to the Planning Committee.
- 2.32 Responsibility for some Cabinet functions is exercised by Individual Cabinet Members and planning policy lies with the Portfolio Holder for Planning. The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee can call in decisions of the Cabinet and its individual Members for consideration.
- 2.33 In order to ensure that decision-making processes support the timetable for producing Local Plan documents, the facility for calling special meetings of the Cabinet, Planning Committee and Local Plan Working Group may need to be invoked. All Members of the Council are notified electronically when an

agenda for the Local Plan Working Group is sent out.

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Member input</b>	<b>Approving body</b>
Agreement of Local Development Scheme	Consideration by Local Plan Working Group with other members informed.	Cabinet

**Table 1: Governance and decision-making for Local Development Scheme (LDS)**

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Member input</b>	<b>Approving body</b>
Early community engagement, preparation of evidence base, generation of issues and options and initial draft document for formal consultation (may be more than one stage of consultation).	Main consideration by Local Plan Working Group prior to submission of consultation documents to Cabinet.	Cabinet
Draft Plan published for final representation period, followed by Submission of draft Plan to Secretary of State.	Opportunity for any further updates/ responses to modifications after representation period and / or the Examination in Public to be considered by Local Plan Working Group and referred to Cabinet and Council again if necessary.	Cabinet and Council
Adoption of Local Plan document following Inspector's ruling on soundness.	None – the Council has to adopt in accordance with Inspector's ruling.	Cabinet and Council

**Table 2: Governance and decision-making for Local Plan**

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## 3. Policy Context

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- 3.1 As set out in Section 2, the draft Elmbridge Local Plan (2037) and the spatial strategy for the borough has been prepared in the context of a broad national, strategic and local policy framework. The policies set out below are of particular importance in the context of the spatial strategy.

### National Planning Policy

- 3.2 The [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF, 2021\)](#) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. It also provides a framework within which locally prepared plans for housing and other development can be produced.
- 3.3 At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. The framework states in paragraph 11, "for plan-making this means that:
- a) all plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to: meet the development needs of their area; align growth and infrastructure; improve the environment; mitigate climate change (including by making effective use of land in urban areas) and adapt to its effects;
  - b) strategic policies should, as a minimum, provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses, as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas [6], unless:
    - i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area [7]; or
    - ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole".
- 3.4 Footnote 6 of the NPPF states 'as established through statements of common ground'. Footnote 7 of the NPPF states that those policies referred to are those in this Framework (rather than those in development plans) relating to: habitats sites (and those sites listed in paragraph 181) and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a National Park (or within the Broads Authority) or defined as Heritage Coast; irreplaceable



habitats; designated heritage assets (and other heritage assets of archaeological interest referred to in footnote 68); and areas at risk of flooding or coastal change.

- 3.5 Regarding plan-making, Section 3 of the NPPF (paragraph 15) states that “the planning system should be genuinely plan-led. Succinct and up-to-date plans should provide a positive vision for the future of each area; a framework for addressing housing needs and other economic, social and environmental priorities; and a platform for local people to shape their surroundings”.
- 3.6 In paragraph 16, the framework states that “plans should:
- a) be prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development [11];
  - b) be prepared positively, in a way that is aspirational but deliverable;
  - c) be shaped by early, proportionate and effective engagement between plan-makers and communities, local organisations, businesses, infrastructure providers and operators and statutory consultees;
  - d) contain policies that are clearly written and unambiguous, so it is evident how a decision maker should react to development proposals;
  - e) be accessible through the use of digital tools to assist public involvement and policy presentation; and
  - f) serve a clear purpose, avoiding unnecessary duplication of policies that apply to a particular area (including policies in this Framework, where relevant)”.
- 3.7 Footnote 11 of the NPPF sets out that the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development is a legal requirement of local planning authorities exercising their plan-making functions (section 39(2) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).
- 3.8 Paragraph 17 of the NPPF, states that “the development plan must include strategic policies to address each local planning authority’s priorities for the development and use of land in its areas [12]”. Footnote 12 provides a cross-reference to Section 19(1B-1E) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Insofar as Elmbridge Borough, this reconfirms the requirement for the Council to identify the strategic priorities for the development and use of land in the authority’s area (Section 19(1B)) and states that policies to addresses those priorities must be set out in the Council’s development plan documents (taken as a whole) (Section 19(1C)).
- 3.9 Set out in paragraph 20 of the NPPF, is the requirement for “strategic policies to set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places, and make sufficient provision [13] for:

- a) housing (including affordable housing), employment, retail, leisure and other commercial development;
  - b) infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, security, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and coastal change management, and the provision of minerals and energy (including heat);
  - c) community facilities (such as health, education and cultural infrastructure); and
  - d) conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation”.
- 3.10 Footnote 13 of the NPPF states, “in line with the presumption in favour of sustainable development”.
- 3.11 The NPPF requires plans to make it explicit which policies are strategic policies (paragraph 21) and in footnote 14 states, “where a single local plan is prepared the non-strategic policies should be clearly distinguished from the strategic policies”. Paragraph 14 continues that strategic policies should be limited to those necessary to address the strategic priorities of the area (and any relevant cross-boundary issues), to provide a clear starting point for any non-strategic policies that are needed. Strategic policies should not extend to detailed matters that are more appropriately dealt with through neighbourhood plans or other non-strategic policies.
- 3.12 Paragraph 22 of the NPPF requires that strategic policies should look ahead over a minimum 15-year period from adoption, to anticipate and respond to long-term requirements and opportunities, such as those arising from major improvements in infrastructure.
- 3.13 Paragraph 23 of the NPPF states, “broad locations for development should be indicated on a key diagram, and land-use designations and allocations identified on a policies map. Strategic policies should provide a clear strategy for bringing sufficient land forward, and at a sufficient rate, to address objectively assessed needs over the plan period, in line with the presumption in favour of sustainable development. This should include planning for and allocating sufficient sites to deliver the strategic priorities of the area (except insofar as these needs can be demonstrated to be met more appropriately through other mechanisms, such as brownfield registers or nonstrategic policies)”.
- 3.14 Green Belt policies which are relevant to the formulation of the spatial strategy are set out in detail below.

## The Duty to Cooperate

- 3.15 The NPPF reinforces the Localism Act 2011 and emphasises the importance of local planning authorities fulfilling their requirements under the Duty to Cooperate and undertaking effective engagement on strategic matters, especially where they relate to cross-boundary development needs and infrastructure issues, with a range of relevant bodies.
- 3.16 The NPPF states in paragraph 26 that, “that effective on-going joint working between strategic policy-making authorities and relevant bodies is integral to the production of a positively prepared and justified strategy. In particular, joint working should help to determine where additional infrastructure is necessary, and whether development needs that cannot be met wholly within a particular plan area could be met elsewhere”.

## Examining plans

- 3.17 Paragraph 35 of the NPPF outlines the tests of soundness that the draft Local Plan will be assessed against. Paragraph 35 states “Plans are ‘sound’ if they are:
- a) **Positively prepared** – providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area’s objectively assessed needs [21]; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;
  - b) **Justified** – an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;
  - c) **Effective** – deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and
  - d) **Consistent with national policy** – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in this Framework and other statements of national planning policy, where relevant”.
- 3.18 Footnote 21 in relation to providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area’s objectively assessed needs states that where this relates to housing, such needs should be assessed using a clear and justified method, as set out in paragraph 61 of this Framework.

## Objectively assessed needs

- 3.19 The NPPF (paragraph 60) sets out the Government's objective to significantly boost the supply of homes in England and the importance of a sufficient amount and variety of land coming forward where it is needed, that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed and that land with permission is developed without unnecessary delay.
- 3.20 The achievement of this objective, requires that as a minimum, Local Plans should provide for an area's objectively assessed housing and other development needs, as well as any that cannot be met within neighbouring areas unless either (i) or (ii) are met (paragraph 11(b) of the NPPF).
- 3.21 In paragraph 61 of the NPPF, the Government is clear that local planning authorities should follow the standard method set out in guidance for the assessment of local housing need – unless exceptional circumstances justify an alternative approach which also reflects current and future demographic trends and market signals.
- 3.22 The standard method uses a formula to identify the minimum number of homes expected to be planned for, in a way which addresses projected household growth, historic under-supply and affordability. The calculation for Elmbridge is 647 new homes per annum (9,705 homes over the 15-year plan period).
- 3.23 Throughout the preparation of the draft Local Plan the figures behind the Standard Methodology have been updated e.g. the affordability ratio is updated every two-years and the base line for the household projections moves forward each year. When appropriate, the Council has 're-run' the calculation and updated the figure accordingly. As such, some evidence base documents that were prepared earlier in the process of preparing the Local Plan will refer to a different figure than 647 homes per annum. The variation in the local housing need figure is minimal e.g. is no more than 23 dwellings per annum different, reflecting the first Standard Methodology calculation of 623 dwellings per annum. Therefore, in accordance with national planning policy and guidance advocating a proportionate and pragmatic approach to the preparation of the evidence base, the Council has not, in all occasions, amended its evidence.
- 3.24 Paragraph 66 of the NPPF states that "strategic policy-making authorities should establish a housing requirement figure for their whole area, which shows the extent to which their identified housing need (and any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas) can be met over the plan period".
- 3.25 Providing policy on identifying land for homes, paragraph 68 of the NPPF

states, “strategic policy-making authorities should have a clear understanding of the land available in their area through the preparation of a strategic housing land availability assessment. From this, planning policies should identify a sufficient supply and mix of sites, taking into account their availability, suitability and likely economic viability. Planning policies should identify a supply of:

- a) specific, deliverable sites for years one to five of the plan period [34]; and
- b) specific, developable sites or broad locations for growth, for years 6-10 and, where possible, for years 11-15 of the plan”.

3.26 Footnote 34 of the NPPF requires that specific, deliverable sites for years one to five of the plan period are identified with an appropriate buffer as set out in paragraph 74 of the NPPF.

3.27 The Government recognises the important contribution that small and medium sites play in meeting the housing requirement of an area, and are often built-out relatively quickly. Paragraph 69 of the NPPF states, “to promote the development of a good mix of sites local planning authorities should:

- a) identify, through the development plan and brownfield registers, land to accommodate at least 10% of their housing requirement on sites no larger than one hectare; unless it can be shown, through the preparation of relevant plan policies, that there are strong reasons why this 10% target cannot be achieved;

- b) use tools such as area-wide design assessments and Local Development Orders to help bring small and medium sized sites forward;

- c) support the development of windfall sites through their policies and decisions – giving great weight to the benefits of using suitable sites within existing settlements for homes; and

- d) work with developers to encourage the sub-division of large sites where this could help to speed up the delivery of homes”.

3.28 In regard to larger-scale developments, paragraph 73 recognises that the supply of a large number of new homes can often be best achieved through this means, such as new settlement or significant extensions to existing villages and towns, provided they are well located and designed, and supported by the necessary infrastructure and facilities (including a genuine choice of transport modes). Paragraph 73 continues that, “working with the support of their communities, and with other authorities if appropriate, strategic policy-making authorities should identify suitable locations for such

development where this can help to meet identified needs in a sustainable way. In doing so, they should:

- a) consider the opportunities presented by existing or planned investment in infrastructure, the area's economic potential and the scope for net environmental gains;
- b) ensure that their size and location will support a sustainable community, with sufficient access to services and employment opportunities within the development itself (without expecting an unrealistic level of self-containment), or in larger towns to which there is good access;
- c) set clear expectations for the quality of the places to be created and how this can be maintained (such as by following Garden City principles); and ensure that appropriate tools such as masterplans and design guides or codes are used to secure a variety of well-designed and beautiful homes to meet the needs of different groups in the community;
- d) make a realistic assessment of likely rates of delivery, given the lead-in times for large scale sites, and identify opportunities for supporting rapid implementation (such as through joint ventures or locally-led development corporations) [37]; and
- e) consider whether it is appropriate to establish Green Belt around or adjoining new developments of significant size”.

- 3.29 Footnote 37 states, “the delivery of large-scale developments may need to extend beyond an individual plan period, and the associated infrastructure requirements may not be capable of being identified fully at the outset. Anticipated rates of delivery and infrastructure requirements should, therefore, be kept under review and reflected as policies are updated”.
- 3.30 Regarding the maintenance of supply and delivery, paragraph 74 of the NPPF states, “Strategic policies should include a trajectory illustrating the expected rate of housing delivery over the plan period, and all plans should consider whether it is appropriate to set out the anticipated rate of development for specific sites. Local planning authorities should identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide a minimum of five years' worth of housing against their housing requirement set out in adopted strategic policies [38], or against their local housing need where the strategic policies are more than five years old [39]. The supply of specific deliverable sites should in addition include a buffer (moved forward from later in the plan period) of:

- a) 5% to ensure choice and competition in the market for land; or
  - b) 10% where the local planning authority wishes to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable sites through an annual position statement or recently adopted plan [40], to account for any fluctuations in the market during that year; or
  - c) 20% where there has been significant under delivery of housing over the previous three years, to improve the prospect of achieving the planned supply [41]”.
- 3.31 Footnote 38 of the NPPF states, “that for the avoidance of doubt, a five-year supply of deliverable sites for travellers – as defined in Annex 1 to Planning Policy for Traveller Sites – should be assessed separately, in line with the policy in that document.
- 3.32 Footnote 39 of the NPPF states, “unless these strategic policies have been reviewed and found not to require updating. Where local housing need is used as the basis for assessing whether a five-year supply of specific deliverable sites exists, it should be calculated using the standard method set out in national planning guidance”.
- 3.33 Footnote 40 of the NPPF states, “for the purposes of paragraphs 74b and 75 a plan adopted between 1 May and 31 October will be considered ‘recently adopted’ until 31 October of the following year; and a plan adopted between 1 November and 30 April will be considered recently adopted until 31 October in the same year”.
- 3.34 Footnote 41 of the NPPF states, “this will be measured against the Housing Delivery Test, where this indicates that delivery was below 85% of the housing requirement”.

## **Planning Practice Guidance**

- 3.35 [National Planning Practice Guidance](#) (PPG) supports the implementation of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), giving further guidance and details of the requirements both in terms of plan preparation and the content of a Local Plan.
- 3.36 PPG advises that local planning authorities “preparing local plans should assess future needs and opportunities for their area, explore and identify options for addressing these, and then set out a preferred approach”. This involves gathering evidence, carrying out a Sustainability Appraisal to inform the preparation of local plans and effective engagement and consultation with local communities, businesses and other interested parties (Paragraph: 034

Reference ID: 61-034-20190315).

- 3.37 Guidance also advises that a local plan may also require a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) if it is considered likely to have significant effects on habitats sites or species located in the local planning authority's area or in its vicinity, as set out in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (037 Reference ID: 61-037-20190315).
- 3.38 Regarding the content of a Local Plan, PPG states they must set out a vision and a framework for the future development of the area, addressing needs and opportunities in relation to housing, the economy, community facilities and infrastructure. This includes conserving and enhancing the environment, mitigating and adapting to climate change, and achieving well designed places.
- 3.39 The guidance states "there is considerable flexibility open to local planning authorities in how they carry out the initial stages of local plan production, provided they comply with the specific requirements in [regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#), ('the Local Plan Regulations') on consultation, and within the commitments in their Statement of Community Involvement (Paragraph: 034 Reference ID: 61-034-20190315).
- 3.40 It also advises that "it is important to make clear how any consultation fits within the wider local plan process". (Paragraph: 034 Reference ID: 61-034-2019031).
- 3.41 Building on the duty to cooperate, PPG provides guidance on the preparation of a Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) and makes clear that the Planning Inspector will first assess whether a local planning authority has complied with the duty and other legal requirements using all available evidence.

## Local context

- 3.42 As set out in Section 2, the draft Local Plan does not sit in isolation and across the borough, county and region, there are wider strategies which shape the direction for plan as well as the plan acting as a delivery mechanism for other strategies. These include strategies relating to the economy, transport, housing, culture, open and green spaces and health and includes for example, the Surrey 2050 Place Ambition (draft); emerging Surrey Local Transport Plan 4; the Council Plan 2021/22 and Surrey's Greener Futures Climate Change Strategy (2020-2050) and Climate Change Delivery Plan (2021).
- 3.43 A comprehensive list of policies, plans, programs and strategies that have



been reviewed and informed the preparation of the draft Local Plan is included in the Sustainability Appraisal.

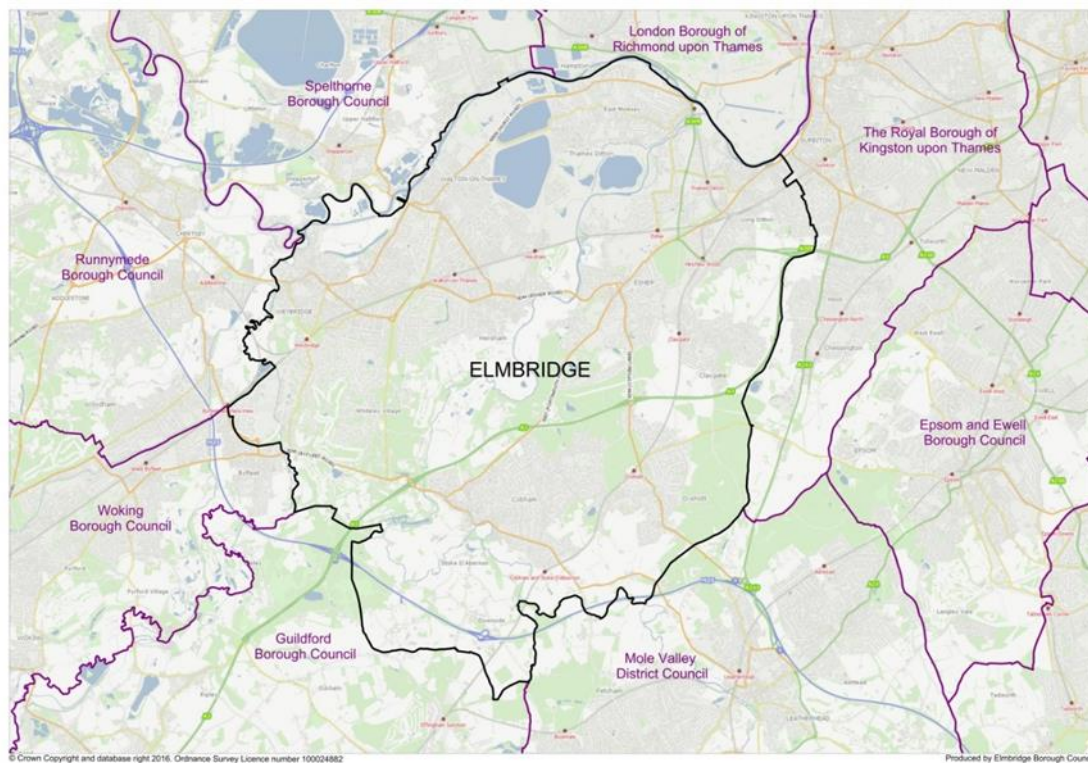
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## 4. Local Context & Key Challenges

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### Elmbridge Borough

- 4.1 Elmbridge is a Surrey borough located in the South East region, approximately 17 miles south west of Central London. Located almost entirely within the bounds of the M25 motorway, the River Thames forms the northern boundary of the borough separating Elmbridge from the London Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames. To the east is the Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames. The remainder of the borough's boundary is shared with the Surrey boroughs of Guildford, Runnymede, Spelthorne and Woking and the district of Mole Valley.

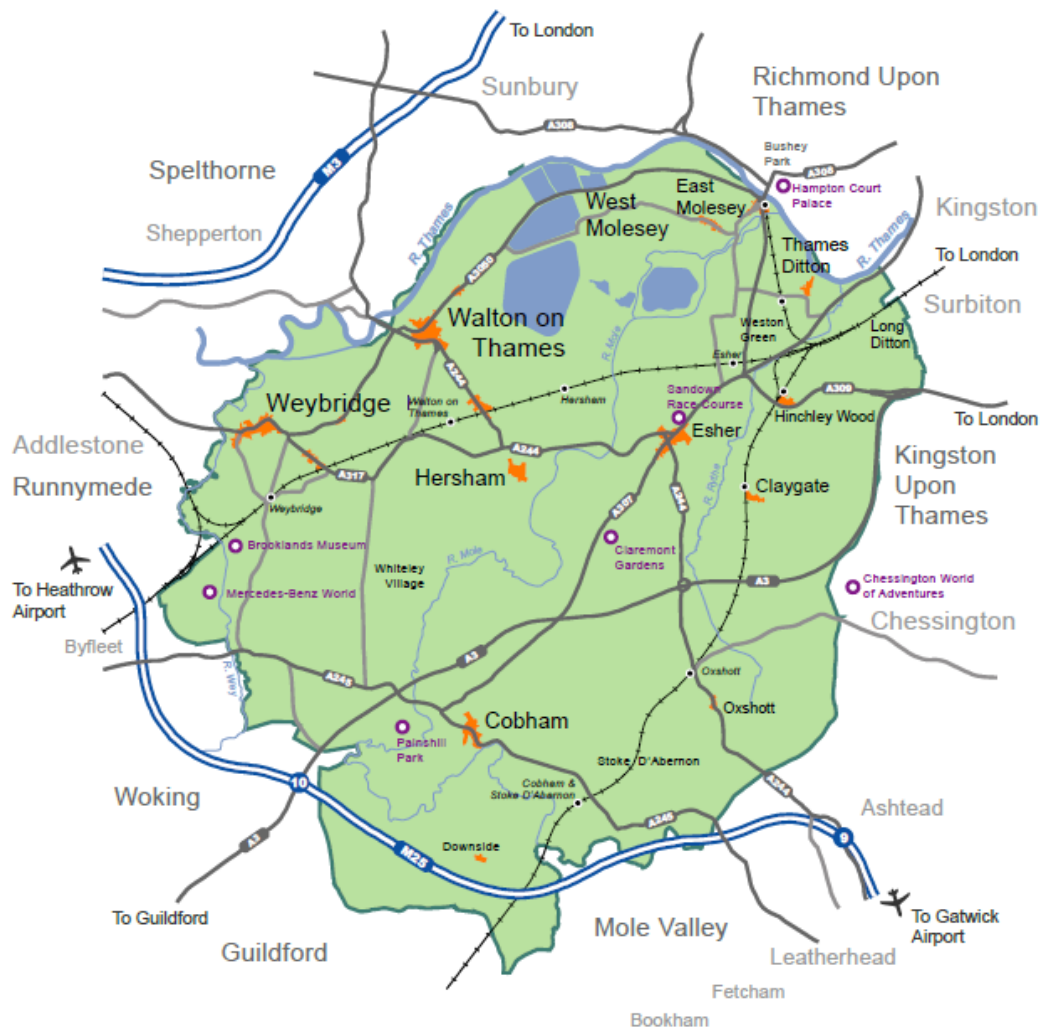


**Figure 3: Elmbridge Borough and neighbouring boroughs and districts**

- 4.2 Covering just over 9,634 hectares (37.2 square miles) and home to approximately 130,000 residents, Elmbridge is a highly desirable area due to its location and high-quality environment and unique character, in part, owing to the River Thames forming its northern boundary and its extensive green areas including, 57% of our green areas being designated as Green Belt.
- 4.3 However, as with any borough, Elmbridge is not a single homogenous place. Rather, it is a collection of separate and distinctive places and local communities each with its own unique local identity, historic assets and attractive green and natural environment which are highly valued by our

communities.

- 4.4 The borough, as a whole, benefits from good accessibility by rail and road to Central London and is within easy reach of Heathrow and Gatwick Airports, the M25 and the M3. The borough regularly features in best places to live and best quality of life polls.



**Figure 4: Elmbridge Borough**

- 4.5 However, that success brings consequences. The carbon footprint of the borough is one of the highest in the region and must be addressed to improve the borough’s resilience to climate change as well as improve biodiversity and issues of air quality and road congestion.
- 4.6 The borough has high-quality green and blue infrastructure that weaves its way through the urban areas and provides invaluable open spaces, highly treasured by local residents. Our urban open spaces play an important role within our green assets/natural capital. However, we must continue to protect and

enhance these spaces and work to improve accessibility and strengthen connectivity between them as movement corridors for the benefit of wildlife, climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as for the enjoyment and health and wellbeing of our residents and visitors.

- 4.7 Elmbridge has a rich historic environment that has evolved around historic estates, towns and villages and this helps to create the borough's local character and distinctiveness. This extensive historic environment and heritage provides a cultural reference to the past and has an important role in place-making and supporting health and wellbeing. These assets provide economic benefits as they bring visitors and provide jobs. The council must support and make the most of these valued assets and carefully balance the need to preserve and enhance our historic environment with the need to deliver good growth.
- 4.8 The borough is one of the most expensive areas in the country to live, with high land values and intense pressure for new development. As a result, too many young people and families are moving out of the borough to have a realistic prospect of owning or renting their own home. Older residents are struggling to affordably downsize in a way that will enable them to continue to live independently or with care packages and remain in their local community. The cost of housing and reliance on people travelling into the borough is also making it difficult for local businesses and valued services to attract and retain employees, this includes essential key workers, such as teachers and health care providers.
- 4.9 The needs of businesses are also changing, as well as how people shop and spend their leisure time. The borough's high streets need support to help them adapt to the changing retail market and become distinctive hubs for socialisation, community support, leisure and culture.

## **The Key Challenges**

- 4.10 The draft Local Plan seeks to positively respond to these issues and changes whilst protecting and enhancing the qualities and features that not only make Elmbridge a sought-after place to live, work and visit but also sustainable and fit for the future.
- 4.11 Thus, the key challenges over the plan-period, that the draft Local Plan seeks to address include:
- Tackling climate change and moving towards a low / zero carbon economy;
  - Protecting and enhancing the natural environment;

- Managing a step-change in providing an increase in homes supported by the necessary infrastructure;
- Delivering more affordable homes;
- Supporting local recovery from Covid-19; and
- Supporting our town, local and district centres and employment areas.

## Supporting ‘Good Growth’

4.12 In seeking to address these challenges, the Local Plan enables the Council to plan for and proactively manage these issues and achieve ‘good growth’, that benefits our existing and future residents and builds on the prosperity of the borough.

4.13 Good growth within Elmbridge (as defined in the emerging Surrey 2050 Place Ambition is):

- Is proportionate and sustainable, focusing on the places where people both live and work.
- Supports overall improvements to the physical and mental health and well-being of our residents.
- Is supported by the necessary infrastructure investment - including green infrastructure.
- Delivers high quality design in our buildings and public realm.
- Increases resilience and flexibility in the local economy.
- Delivers buildings and infrastructure ready for a zero-carbon future and builds resilience to the impacts of climate change and flooding.
- Is planned and delivered at a local level while recognising that this will inevitably extend at times across administrative boundaries.

## Responding to the climate emergency

4.14 Responding to the climate emergency is a key challenge for the Council and its communities and the Local Plan will need to play a central role in addressing the climate emergency by reducing carbon dioxide emissions and supporting the transition to a low carbon future. As well as delivering improvements to flood risk, air quality, recycling and waste management.

4.15 Our climate is changing as a result of human activity and this will have substantial implications for society and our environment if we do not act. The Council is committed to responding to climate change and has declared a climate change emergency in July 2019, announcing its pledge to make the borough council carbon neutral by 2030, taking into account both production and consumption emissions. Working with other Surrey districts and boroughs, and Surrey County Council, Surrey’s Greener Futures Climate Change Strategy

(2020-2050) and Climate Change Delivery Plan (2021) have been produced. The Local Plan will play a central role in delivering a number of aims set out in both. A central thread of the Local Plan will be to plan for a low-carbon future in which carbon emissions and other greenhouse gases are reduced and we tackle and adapt to the new climatic norms.

- 4.16 The Council is seeking to take a proactive approach to mitigating the effects of, and adapting to, climate change to ensure the future resilience of both communities and infrastructure. This will need to include locating new development in locations that reduces reliance on private motor vehicles as well as being designed and constructed in a way to achieve low or zero carbon buildings and facilitates more sustainable lifestyles including supporting the ability to work flexibly.
- 4.17 Some of the necessary actions for tackling climate change, such as improving energy efficiency and the provision of green infrastructure, could have direct benefits for biodiversity and residents, businesses and visitors by reducing energy bills and providing a higher quality environment.
- 4.18 New development will need to positively respond to the climate emergency and deliver a comprehensive and integrated approach to addressing the challenges of climate change.

### **Presumption of sustainable place-making**

- 4.19 At the heart of national planning policy is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. This informs both plan-making and decision-taking. National policy provides a guide to what sustainable development is at a national level, but what does this mean for Elmbridge?
- 4.20 In applying the presumption in favour of sustainable development required by national policy, the Local Plan needs to seek opportunities to meet the development needs of Elmbridge in a positive way and build into the policies sufficient flexibility to adapt and respond to change.
- 4.21 National policy requires our plan, as a minimum, to provide for the housing and other needs of Elmbridge, balancing this with other national policies that protect areas and assets of particular importance.
- 4.22 As with any borough, Elmbridge is not a single homogenous place. Rather, it is a collection of separate and distinct places or neighbourhoods some of which have grown together over time to create larger urban areas. It will be important that new development builds on the success of our existing communities and places and responds to their individual identities and development needs.

4.23 The Local Plan will set out what is meant by sustainable place-making development in Elmbridge.

### **The spatial strategy**

4.24 As part of the process of identifying a preferred spatial strategy, it will be important that the Council's commitment to respond to the climate emergency and sustainable place-making is reflected.



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## 5. How the options evolved

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- 5.1 This section of the paper explains how the options for the spatial strategy have evolved over time and the key factors that influenced their development.

### Early evidence base: 2015/16

- 5.2 As set out in Section 4, one of the key challenges for the Council is managing a step-change in providing an increase in homes (supported by the necessary infrastructure) but, in particular, balancing this with protecting and enhancing our natural environment.
- 5.3 As part of its early evidence base work undertaken in 2015 / 16, the Council prepared and published several documents that established the objectively assessed housing need (OAHN) of the borough and options that the Council and its communities needed to consider as to how and where housing growth and other new development could be delivered.
- 5.4 Throughout this section, several references are made to previous versions of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) e.g. 2012, 2018 and 2019, as published at the time of the preparation of the evidence base and the development of the options.

### Strategic Housing Market Assessment – Objectively Assessed Housing Need

- 5.5 As set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) the starting point for the preparation of a Local Plan in regard to housing, is the assessment of how many new homes are required in area over a set period of time followed by a spatial strategy for how the level of need identified will be met.
- 5.6 Since the start of the Council's evidence base preparation in 2015 / 16, the mechanism for calculating housing needs has changed. Under the NPPF (2012) local authorities were required to prepare a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) for the Housing Market Assessment (HMA) area in which they were located. The outcome of this being the provision of an 'Objectively Assessed Housing Need' (OAHN) figure.
- 5.7 Prior to the Government's announcement regarding the Standardised Methodology and, in accordance with the NPPF (2012), the Council commissioned a joint [Strategic Housing Market Assessment \(SHMA\) \(2016\)](#) for Kingston upon Thames and the North East Surrey Authorities (Elmbridge, Epsom & Ewell and Mole Valley). The SHMA identified the scale and mix of



housing and the range of tenures that the local population was likely to need over the plan-period which:

- met household and population projections, taking account of migration and demographic change;
- addressed the need for all types of housing, including affordable housing and the needs of different groups in the community; and
- catered for housing demand and the scale of housing supply necessary to meet this demand.

5.8 The assessment set out housing need over a 15-year time horizon; which would be used to support planning and housing policy within each commissioning authority. It suggested an OAHN of 40,005 dwellings over the 2015-2035 period, or 2,000 dwellings per annum across the HMA. Kingston had the largest need (717 dwellings per annum), followed by Elmbridge (474), Epsom and Ewell, (418) and Mole Valley (391). This needs figure was significantly greater than the Council's annualised housing target (225) set out in the adopted Elmbridge Core Strategy 2011.

#### Settlement Assessment (2015)

5.9 The Settlement Assessment examined the economic, social and environment role of each of the eight settlement areas in Elmbridge. The purpose of the Settlement Assessment was to help understand each settlement's current 'sustainability'; potential for future development; and how new development could build on the success of our existing communities and places and respond to their individual identities and development needs.

5.10 The conclusion of the Settlement Assessment was that each of the eight settlements has comparable content, with common strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. For example, despite different population sizes and areas in hectares, Elmbridge's settlements are very similar in their role and function. They are mainly residential in use and have some form of shopping facility whether this is the town centre in Walton; district centres in Weybridge, Esher, Molesey and Hersham; or local centres in the Dittons, Cobham and Claygate.

5.11 From the Settlement Assessment the conclusion was drawn that future development can be located in any of the settlements of Elmbridge as they are all considered sustainable.

#### Land Availability Assessment (2016)

5.12 In seeking to meet our development needs, the Council is required by

Government policy to prepare a Land Availability Assessment (LAA). This evidence base document has the key role of identifying sites that have the potential to come forward for development in the future / over the plan-period. The document considers the capacity of sites and when they could potentially be developed.

- 5.13 Throughout the preparation of the draft Local Plan, the Council has prepared a LAA and updated the document to support each Regulation 18 Consultation and the current draft Local Plan.
- 5.14 The LAA published in 2016 identified sites within the existing urban area which had the potential capacity to deliver approximately 3,793 new homes. This consisted of sites with planning permission, dwellings under construction, and sites which had been promoted to the Council for future development as part of the preparation of the Local Plan and previous iterations of the LAA.
- 5.15 The outcomes of the SHMA 2016 were cross-referenced with the LAA 2016 to determine whether there was sufficient housing land supply within the built-up areas of the borough to meet the identified need. It was concluded that the future supply of sites within the built-up areas would not meet the OAHN figure of 474 homes per annum and there would be a shortfall of over 5,000 units. Furthermore, the Council was unable to demonstrate a 5-year forward supply of deliverable housing sites equal to the 474 needs figure; a key requirement of the NPPF<sup>2</sup>.
- 5.16 Paragraph 49 of the 2012 NPPF stated that 'relevant policies for the supply of housing should not be considered up-to-date if the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites'.
- 5.17 At this stage, it was concluded that housing need could not be met through its existing spatial strategy and housing supply policies as set out in the Elmbridge Core Strategy (2011) and that a new Local Plan was required that considered alternative development options to meet housing need for the period 2015-2035. This position was agreed by the Council at a Cabinet meeting on 16 November 2016.

#### Alternative Development Options (2016)

- 5.18 In light of the outcomes of the LAA 2016 and the potential shortfall in the borough's housing land supply to meet housing need (against the SHMA figure of 474 dpa), the Council prepared a paper 'Alternative Development Options 2016' to outline the alternative options that it could be considered to how and where housing growth and new development could be delivered

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<sup>2</sup> In accordance with the requirements of paragraph 47 (bullet point 2) and 48 of the NPPF (2012).

within the borough.

- 5.19 The paper utilised information from other evidence base documents available at the time the including the [Land Availability Assessment \(LAA\), Employment Land Review \(ELR\), Retail Assessment, and Open Space & Recreation Assessment \(OSRA\)](#).
- 5.20 As set out in the paper, in exploring alternative options for how the Council and its communities could seek to meet development needs, several options were considered. These were whether our housing need could be addressed by:
- authorities outside of the borough e.g. in neighbouring boroughs and districts through the duty to co-operate;
  - increasing residential densities;
  - intensification and more mixed-use in our retail centres and around our transport hubs;
  - sub-division of existing housing and by bringing vacant dwellings back into use;
  - conversion of office and commercial buildings;
  - re-allocation of employment land;
  - development and re-provision of Strategic Open Urban Land (SOUL); and
  - reviewing / developing the Council's own landholdings.
- 5.21 Based upon the evidence available at the time, the conclusion of the paper was that the housing need figure (as identified in the SHMA) could, with far reaching policy interventions, be met within the urban areas through the above options or via a combination of them.
- 5.22 However, this approach of continuing to channel development towards the existing urban areas was considered to have detrimental consequences for the borough and its residents and businesses. For example, significant urbanisation and intensification of the existing settlement areas, completely changing the character of the borough. Land-swapping between open spaces and employment areas was also deemed to have significant implications for the local economy, wildlife and character of the area.
- 5.23 In terms of whether housing need could be met by Housing Market Area (HMA) partners and neighbouring local authorities, at this time, it was considered highly improbable that surplus land would be identified within neighbouring local authority areas as each faced their own challenges in terms of seeking to meet increases in housing numbers coupled with constraints to development such as Green Belt.
- 5.24 The next step was therefore to consider options for delivering housing to meet

the residual housing need of the borough outside the existing built-up areas. The paper therefore also set out options for meeting housing need through new settlements, major urban extension, and smaller urban extensions e.g. amendments to the Green Belt boundary (subject to the consideration of exceptional circumstances) and other detailed assessments.

- 5.25 Exploring the option for releasing land from the Green Belt to assist in meeting housing need, the Council commissioned Ove Arup and Partners (ARUP) to prepare a Green Belt Boundary Review (GBBR) (2016). Further information on this evidence base document is set out below.
- 5.26 Based upon the evidence available at the time, the conclusion of the paper was that due to the tightly drawn Green Belt boundary and extent of environmental constraints (see paragraphs 5.31 – 5.37), the ability to identify sufficient land required to support a new settlement or a Major Urban Extension (MUE) was limited. This option would lead to the location of development on land strongly performing in terms of the purposes of Green Belt (as set out in the NPPF) and would demonstrably undermine the overall integrity and function of the wider Metropolitan Green Belt.
- 5.27 However, at this stage, and based on the evidence base available at the time, it was considered that a number of Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUE) on the edge of the urban area on unconstrained and weakly performing Green Belt areas could deliver a significant number and range of new homes.

### Green Belt Boundary Review (2016)

- 5.28 The Green Belt Boundary Review 2016 (GBBR) considered how the Green Belt in Elmbridge Borough performs against the relevant purposes set out within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)<sup>3</sup> at two scales:
- Strategic Green Belt Area Assessment, which focused on the role of the Green Belt in Elmbridge Borough within the wider sub-regional context of the Metropolitan Green Belt and the different functional areas of Green Belt within the Borough; and
  - Local Green Belt Area Assessment, which assessed 78 'Local Areas' and two non-Green Belt Areas identified on the basis of the presence of permanent and defensible boundaries.

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<sup>3</sup> These purposes are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (para. 138) and are: a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another; c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

- 5.29 One of the outputs of this work was the identification of a series of Local Areas that performed less strongly against the NPPF purposes. This output was utilised by the Council to consider areas of land that may be suitable for release from the Green Belt subject to more detailed assessment and consideration of exceptional circumstances, (if such an approach was deemed necessary to meet identified development needs).
- 5.30 In total 13 Local Areas were identified as weakly performing in Green Belt terms, these were then assessed for their development potential. This included a comprehensive review of the 'absolute' constraints (see paragraph 5.31 below).

#### Review of Absolute Constraints (2016)

- 5.31 National planning policy states that local plans should meet objectively assessed needs, with sufficient flexibility to adapt to rapid change, unless; there is any adverse impact of doing so that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefit, when assessed against the policies within NPPF or where specific policies in the Framework indicate development should be restricted (paragraph 11 of the NPPF).
- 5.32 The national Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) makes it clear that whilst the establishment of development needs should be unbiased, relevant constraints, including environmental constraints need to be addressed when bringing evidence bases together and formulating policies.
- 5.33 To ensure that the Council took necessary account of this and, could demonstrate that an appraisal of the constraints relevant to the borough had been undertaken when arriving at its preferred strategy, it undertook a 'Review of Absolute Constraints' (RAC).
- 5.34 This identified the 'absolute' constraints to be those that would prevent development from taking place and where it would not be possible to mitigate impacts. In accordance with Government policy, the absolute constraints utilised for this study were: Flood Zone 3b (1 in 20-year flood outline – undeveloped land; Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs); Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar Sites; Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG); Registered Parks and Gardens; Ancient Woodlands; and Registered Commons & Village Greens).
- 5.35 As part of the RAC, the Council comprehensively assessed the Local Areas land parcels as identified in the GBBR 2016 and identified those areas of land entirely or partially affected by 'absolute' constraints that would prevent development taking place and where it would not be possible to mitigate impacts.

- 5.36 Since the completion of the RAC in September 2016, the Government has published a revised NPPF (March 2018). As a result, Aged and Veteran Trees are now identified as constraints that would restrict development. The Council has therefore undertaken a review of this work to include Aged and Veteran Trees as an 'absolute' constraint.
- 5.37 The 'Review of Absolute Constraints' identified three Local Areas from the GBBR 2016 which were not affected by absolute constraints or were only partial affected and which were considered to have potential for strategic (large-scale) development. These were termed as being potential Key Strategic Areas (KSAs). The total area of the three KSAs within Elmbridge Borough was approximately 188 hectares (approximately 3% of the Green Belt in the Borough) of which, approximately 156 ha was not affected by absolute constraints.

#### Exceptional Circumstances Case (2016)

- 5.38 This document set out the factors that the Council could consider capable of amounting to 'exceptional circumstances' and that could be recommended to an Inspector to justify amendments to the borough's Green Belt boundary, in accordance with the NPPF.
- 5.39 At this stage in the preparation of the new Local Plan, the Council set out several strategic factors that could be considered capable of amounting to exceptional circumstances. This included for example:
- Affordability – the Borough is the 4th most difficult place to get onto the property ladder across the UK and 1st across the UK excluding London.
  - Smaller Units – the housing market is driven towards the provision of larger, detached properties (4+ bedrooms) however, the need is for smaller units (1-3 bedrooms). Nevertheless, developable land within the Borough is characterised by smaller sites providing between 1 and 4 net units which tends to limit high density developments / the provision of smaller units. Within Elmbridge Borough, developers tend to also lean towards building larger residential properties with higher profit margins.
- 5.40 The document considered that these factors needed to be balanced against the Council's inability to meet development needs within its existing built-up areas due to the lack of available sites within the borough and across the HMA and other neighbouring Boroughs and Districts; changes in Government Policy; and the development economics of the housing industry.

## Pulling the initial evidence base together

- 5.41 Within the framework of national planning policy and guided by the evidence on development needs and land supply, the Council formulated the Strategic Options for a new spatial strategy for the Borough. These were subject to the first Regulation 18 consultation - Local Plan Strategic Options Consultation (2016 / 17).

## **Regulation 18 – Elmbridge Local Plan: Strategic Options Consultation (2016/17)**

- 5.42 Following a process of initial evidence gathering, the first key stage of the plan preparation process was to identify the strategic issues to be addressed by the Local Plan and the options for doing so, before then seeking the views of the public on these matters. This was done in the paper entitled ‘Elmbridge Local Plan: Strategic Options Consultation (Regulation 18) (December 2016)’ which drew upon the evidence base prepared. The consultation took place between 16 December 2016 and February 24 February 2017. The consultation sought the views of members of the public and other stakeholders on the options for meeting development needs as part of the preparation of a new Local Plan to replace the Core Strategy.
- 5.43 Alongside the Strategic Options Consultation, several evidence base studies (those referred to in paragraphs 5.5 – 5.40) as well as a Policy Topic Paper (December 2016) were prepared to inform and support the consultation. The purpose of the Topic Paper was to explain how the Council had arrived at the three strategic options and why a preferred option had been identified including a number of Key Strategic Areas.
- 5.44 As set out in the Policy Topic Paper (December 2016) the three strategic options were informed by national planning policy which was extant at that time, and the evidence on development needs and land supply which was extant at that time. One of the key points made in the Policy Topic Paper, was that in developing the options to be consulted on the Council not only established the development needs for the borough but also reviewed all the existing constraints that, at the time, restricted development to establish the degree to which these constraints may be amended / mitigated to deliver development and the degree to which need could then be met.
- 5.45 The three strategic options which were considered at that time were:
- (i) Strategic Option 1: Maintain existing Green Belt boundaries and deliver all development needs in full by concentrating development within the urban area by:



- a) significantly increasing densities on all sites in the urban areas;
- b) identifying open spaces, such as allotments and playing fields, for redevelopment and relocating these uses within the existing Green Belt; and
- c) using the duty to co-operate to enquire as to whether other authorities have the potential to meet some of our need.

This option would seek to deliver all of our development need of 9,480 new homes (on the basis of the SHMA) within the urban area on identified sites. Set within the context of the NPPF (2012), this option sought to significantly boost housing supply by maximising the use of previously developed land and by increasing densities in all locations. It also sought opportunities for identifying open spaces within the urban area for redevelopment and relocating these uses within the existing Green Belt. Such uses are appropriate within the Green Belt, makes the Green Belt more accessible and work harder, and also protects the Green Belt from inappropriate development such as new homes. The option also sought to utilise the duty to cooperate if development needs cannot be met.

This option therefore placed a higher degree of weight on meeting development needs and protecting the Green Belt from inappropriate development.

The **benefits** of this option were considered to be:

- Seeks to meet needs in full
- Protects Green Belt by preserving current settlement boundaries
- Makes Green Belt work harder
- High density development would deliver smaller, potentially cheaper, market housing

The **disadvantages** of this option were considered to be:

- Limited number of appropriate sites in the urban area creates a significant risk as to the deliverability of housing need
- Changing character due to increased urbanisation of residential areas as a result of high-density development
- Loss of open space in the urban area
- Reduces accessibility of open space to most urban parts of the borough
- Could affect development viability and the delivery of affordable housing due to the increasing costs associated with high density development
- Difficulties in delivering infrastructure alongside development
- Places pressure on those areas that have historically taken most development



- Will not deliver the desired mix of houses and flats
- (ii) Strategic Option 2: As far as possible meet development needs whilst maintaining development at appropriate densities in the urban area by:
- a) increasing densities on sites in the urban area only where it is considered appropriate and does not impact significantly on character;
  - b) amending Green Belt boundaries where:
    - (1) the designation is at its weakest;
    - (2) the areas are in sustainable locations; and
    - (3) the areas are not, or are only partially, affected by absolute constraints.

Within these areas, opportunities for accommodating our development needs will be explored taking into account site constraints, land ownership, the need to support sustainable development, and compliance with other planning policies; and

- c) using the duty to co-operate to enquire as to whether other authorities have the potential to meet some of our need.

Option 2 sought to balance the needs for housing whilst recognising there are constraints on development within the borough. This option sought to boost housing supply by continuing to focus development on previously developed land in the urban areas and by increasing densities in sustainable locations. Option 2 also looked to maintain the green spaces within our urban areas.

However, this option recognised that there are parcels of land currently designated as Green Belt that were not performing against the purposes of Green Belt as strongly as other and that it may be considered that amongst other considerations, exceptional circumstances exist to justify potential alternations to the Green Belt. As such, it was proposed under this option that there were opportunities for these parcels to be developed; enabling the Council to meet more of its housing needs whilst maintaining the character of its towns and villages. The option also seeks to utilise the duty to cooperate if development needs cannot be met.

The **benefits** of this option were considered to be:

- Protects the character of the urban area
- Protects 97% of the Green Belt ensuring boundaries can endure beyond the plan period
- Maintains existing settlement pattern

- Delivers an increase in housing provision over previous Core Strategy
- Larger sites enable infrastructure to be delivered alongside new development
- Increase in the delivery of affordable housing and smaller units compared to previous Core Strategy
- Potential opportunity to identify land for self / custom-housebuilding

The **disadvantages** of this option were considered to be:

- Will not meet housing needs in full
- Some loss of Green Belt
- Development may be in less sustainable locations on the edge of urban areas
- Increased pressure on highways
- Reliance on other Local Planning Authorities to meet residual needs

(iii) Strategic Option 3: Deliver development needs of the Borough in full and explore opportunities to meet needs of other Boroughs and Districts in the HMA by:

- a) increasing densities only on sites in the urban area only where it is considered appropriate and does not impact on character; and
- b) amending Green Belt boundaries regardless of the strength of Green Belt and allocating sites in these areas for development.

The final option considered was to meet needs in full by amending Green Belt boundaries regardless of the strength with which it was delivering against the purposes of Green Belt. Whilst such an approach would meet needs and deliver a significant amount of affordable housing it would fundamentally alter the character of our towns and villages through coalescence, urban sprawl and encroachment of new development into the countryside.

The **benefits** of this option were considered to be:

- Protects the character of the urban area
- Meets housing needs in full
- Seeks to meet the needs of the wider Housing Market Area
- Larger sites enable infrastructure to be delivered alongside new development
- Increase in the delivery of affordable housing compared to previous Core Strategy
- Potential opportunity to identify land for self / custom-housebuilding

The **disadvantages** of this option were considered to be:

- The loss of a significant amount of Green Belt

- Significantly increases the risk of settlement coalescence, encroachment into countryside and excessive sprawl
  - Fundamental changes to the nature of the borough and its settlement patterns
  - Massive pressure on infrastructure in particular highways
- 5.46 All of the options included a ‘brownfield first’ approach and would increase densities on sites in the urban area. However, Options 2 and 3 also included changing Green Belt boundaries to meet need and provide a mix of housing.
- 5.47 As set out in the Policy Topic Paper (December 2016), when examining these options with a view to selecting an initial preferred option, the Council noted the Government’s position at that time, reflected both in national policy and in the decisions of the Secretary of State on appeal, about the importance of the Green Belt. The Council also noted, however, the Government’s expectation that plan-making authorities should seek to meet housing need in full, through the plan-making process, and further noted that this may require the amendment of Green Belt boundaries, but only if there were exceptional circumstances.
- 5.48 Within this in mind and having considered the evidence base and the sustainability of the options (see paragraphs 5.51 – 5.55), the Council considered that Option 2 was to be preferred. This initial preferred option was considered to strike a reasonable balance between development needs and land constraints; however, this was not based on a completed evidence base.
- 5.49 Option 2 stated that Green Belt boundaries should be amended where the designation is at its weakest; the areas are in sustainable locations; and the areas are not, or are only partially, affected by absolute constraints. Following these principles, the Council considered there to be three Key Strategic Areas within the Green Belt where the designation could be removed.
- 5.50 The Key Strategic Areas within the Green Belt were:
- (i) Land north of Blundel Lane including Knowle Hill Park and Fairmile Park, Cobham (Local Area 14);
  - (ii) Land south of the A3 including Chippings Farm and The Fairmile, Cobham (Local Area 20); and
  - (iii) Land north of the A309 and east of Woodstock Lane North, Long Ditton (Local Area 58).







### Sustainability Appraisal of the Options (2016)

- 5.51 The positives and negatives associated with each option was assessed through a Sustainability Appraisal. The Preferred Option was assessed to be

the most sustainable (see Table 3). The detailed sustainability appraisals for each option is available to view in Section 7 of the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report and Initial Assessment 2016.

- 5.52 Although Strategic Option 1 scored positively in terms of making best use of previously developed land, reducing land contamination and supporting sustainable economic growth, it resulted in five major and five minor negative environmental impacts. This was particularly relevant to the historic environment, flooding and pollution due to development being maximised in the borough's town and village settings. Even though this option would meet the housing need figure in full, it would not necessarily be able to provide the full range of housing types needed: the lack of large sites that could accommodate affordable housing, specialist housing, small family homes and Gypsy and Traveller pitches would be limited in the urban area and therefore a minor negative impact was expected for homes.
- 5.53 Strategic Option 2 aimed to meet the housing need, including types of homes. It included three key strategic areas in the Green Belt that were large enough to provide for a mix of housing, therefore a minor positive 29 impact was expected for housing. Although it did score four minor negatives in terms of the environment, it was expected to have positive social and economic impacts which meant that this option was considered the most sustainable overall.
- 5.54 Strategic Option 3 had the most significant negative impacts due to the distribution of development across the whole of the borough including urban and Green Belt land. However, significant positive impacts were expected for homes as this option would deliver all the need and be able to deliver affordable housing, small family homes and traveller pitches.
- 5.55 Having considered the evidence base and the sustainability of the options above, Option 2 was the council's preferred option. It was considered to balance the Government's ambition to increase the levels of development in the borough whilst recognising that there are constraints on the amount of developable land which could prevent meeting development needs in full.

	Strategic Option 1: Intensify urban area	Strategic Option 2: Optimise urban area and 3 areas of Green Belt release	Strategic Option 3: Optimise urban area and large Green Belt release
Homes	-	+	++
Health	0	++	+
Heritage	--	+	-
Accessibility	0	+	--
PDL	+	+	+
Economic growth	+	+	+
Employment	--	?	?
Energy Use	--	-	--
Natural Resources	-	-	--
Climate Change	-	+	+
Flooding	--	-	-
Water	?	?	?
Land	+	?	--
Pollution	--	-	--
Landscape	-	+	--
Biodiversity	-	+	--

Score	Description	Symbol
Significant positive impact	Significant positive contribution towards sustainability	
Minor positive impact	Minor positive contribution towards sustainability	
Neutral	The option contributes neither positively nor negatively towards the SA Objective	
Minor negative impact	Minor negative contribution towards sustainability	
Significant negative impact	Significant negative contribution towards sustainability	
Uncertain	It is unclear whether there is the potential for a negative or positive effect on the SA Objective	

**Table 3: Sustainability Appraisal of the 2016 Options & Scoring Mechanism**

### Comments received to the Strategic Options 2016 Consultation

5.56 The strategic options including an initial preferred option were presented to communities through a formal consultation document. The Strategic Options consultation was open from Friday 16 December 2016 until Friday 24 February 2017. Full details of the Council's consultation activities can be found in the Summary of Consultation Responses Document 2017.

- 5.57 During the Strategic Options consultation the Government published the Housing White Paper “Fixing our broken housing market” (HWP) (February 2017). This set out proposals to change national planning policy in areas that could affect the approach taken by the Council in preparing its new Local Plan. In particular, the proposed changes to assessing housing needs and the introduction of tests as to when there are exceptional circumstances to amend Green Belt boundaries.
- 5.58 Over the 10-week consultation period, circ. 50,000 comments from 3,750 respondents were received. A summary of the key responses received in regard to the Strategic Options is set out below. A comprehensive [Summary of Consultation Responses](#) reporting on all the key issues raised was reported to Councillors and published on the Council’s website. A [Position Statement \(July 2017\)](#) was also published on the Council’s website. This document explained the current planning policy context and evaluated the impact of the delay on the preparation of a new Local Plan.
- 5.59 The key issues identified by the Council from the consultation responses relating to the issue of housing need and how this could be met were:

#### Strategic Development Options

The vast majority of responses opposed any amendment to the Green Belt boundaries in order to meet housing needs. Responses considered Green Belt to be sacrosanct and that there were no exceptional circumstances under which it should be amended. It was stated that Green Belt was being targeted as an ‘easy-option’ and that amending the boundary now would lead to further amendments in the future i.e. the thin end of the wedge.

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 opposing the release of Green Belt suggested that the Council had not done enough to find sites in the urban areas and that it must seek to deliver much higher densities in our existing town and district centres. However, in contrast to these comments many residents who live in more densely developed areas opposed the further intensification of their areas.

The Green Belt Boundary Review completed by ARUP was considered by many to be fundamentally flawed due to inconsistencies and the subjective nature of the assessment and, as such, could not be used to justify the Council’s preferred option. Such comments came from both those opposing the release of Green Belt but also from those supporting more widespread amendments to Green Belt boundaries. A significant number of responses suggested alternative options should have been considered.

Options put forward included:

- Undertaking further work to identify surplus land in other local authority's areas to meet Elmbridge's housing needs;
- Building a new town or village; and
- Doing nothing and maintaining the Council's existing strategy and housing target.

Whilst in a minority, there were responses submitted that supported the Council's preferred approach recognising that there needed to be a balanced between protecting Green Belt whilst also seeking to meet housing need. There were also responses that suggested the Council released more land from the Green Belt in order to meet housing needs and that it should do more to increase the supply of affordable housing. A number of sites were put forward in both the urban area and Green Belt where such development could take place.

### Key Strategic Areas

The majority of responses did not support amendments to Green Belt boundaries in any of the three areas set out in the Consultation. Many considered these areas to be strongly performing against at least one of the purposes of Green Belt and that the Green Belt Boundary Review was fundamentally flawed. Each of these areas was also considered to offer opportunities for recreation and were considered to be an important part of the overall character of the area. A number of site-specific issues were raised with regard to the potential loss of important habitats, protected species, increased flood risk and the impact on local infrastructure.

There was some support for removing these areas entirely or partially from the Green Belt. Some responses highlighted whether the entire parcel had to be removed from Green Belt or whether development could be restricted to specific areas. Responses were also received outlining what land was, and was not, available for development within each of these areas.

### Character of the Area

Whilst many respondents supported the increased densification of the urban area in order to safeguard the Green Belt, there were equal concerns regarding the impact of more infill development at higher densities on the character of existing communities and in particular the loss of open spaces within settlements. Many respondents also expressed fears that amending Green Belt as set out in the Preferred Option would lead to coalescence and loss of countryside which would fundamentally change the character of those areas.

## Housing White Paper

During the Strategic Options Consultation the Government published a white paper on housing entitled “Fixing our broken housing market” (February 2017). A large number of responses referred to the white paper and the Government’s announcements that it was not weakening its policy on Green Belt.

- 5.60 In light of the consultation responses received; the publication of the Housing White Paper in 2017; the publication of the revised National Planning Policy Framework in 2018; and the publication of updates to the Planning Practice Guidance (in particular the introduction of the new Standard Methodology for calculating housing need), the Council considered it appropriate to review the options previously considered in the Strategic Options Consultation and to prepare additional studies to consider and address the issues identified. In particular, additional evidence on the Green Belt was commissioned to look at whether the Local Areas (‘parcels’) including the three Key Strategic Areas could be sub-divided into smaller parcels.
- 5.61 In light of the response to the Strategic Options Consultation 2016; the publication of a revised NPPF in 2018 and updates to Planning Practice Guidance, the Council considered it appropriate to review and re-evaluate the housing growth options previously put forward.
- 5.62 The review and re-evaluation included additional technical work and led to the identification of five options as to how the Council could respond to its development needs, as set out in Options Consultation document (referenced below). This included the original three options (Options 1,2 and 3) of the Strategic Options Consultation which have evolved and two new options (Options 4 and 5).
- 5.63 Outlined below is a summary of the additional evidence base that was undertaken and key to informing the evolution and formation of the 5 options. These options are also summarised. Fuller details are provided in the Useful Summary: Shaping the options (July 2019) paper that was published alongside the second Regulation 18 Options Consultation undertaken in July 2019.

## Changes in National Planning Policy & Guidance: 2018/19

- 5.64 Changes to the NPPF (first published in 2012 and revised in 2018 and updated in 2019) emphasised the drive to deliver more homes faster, as well as achieving the effective use of development land. The NPPF 2019 supported this approach, as it placed emphasis on effective and optimal use of land, particularly brownfield land as well as promoting the use of minimum



density policies, upward extensions, conversions and reallocation of sites in other uses to deliver housing.

- 5.65 Specifically, paragraph 122 (of the 2019 NPPF) stated that planning policies should support development that makes efficient use of land and paragraph 123 stated that it important that planning policies avoid homes being built at low densities and ensure that developments make optimal use of the potential of each site.
- 5.66 Paragraph 123 of the NPPF 2019, also stated that “where there is an existing or anticipated shortage of land for meeting identified housing needs, it is especially important that planning policies and decisions avoid homes being built at low densities, and ensure that developments make optimal use of the potential of each site. In these circumstances:
- a) plans should contain policies to optimise the use of land in their area and meet as much of the identified need for housing as possible. This will be tested robustly at examination, and should include the use of minimum density standards for city and town centres and other locations that are well served by public transport. These standards should seek a significant uplift in the average density of residential development within these areas, unless it can be shown that there are strong reasons why this would be inappropriate;
  - b) the use of minimum density standards should also be considered for other parts of the plan area. It may be appropriate to set out a range of densities that reflect the accessibility and potential of different areas, rather than one broad density range; and
  - c) local planning authorities should refuse applications which they consider fail to make efficient use of land, taking into account the policies in this Framework. In this context, when considering applications for housing, authorities should take a flexible approach in applying policies or guidance relating to daylight and sunlight, where they would otherwise inhibit making efficient use of a site (as long as the resulting scheme would provide acceptable living standards)”.
- 5.67 Regarding the Green Belt, the NPPF (2019) confirmed the Government’s strong protection for the Green Belt and provided clarification of the circumstances in which local authorities may consider amendments to Green Belt boundaries.
- 5.68 Specifically paragraphs 136-137 of the NPPF (2019) implemented the Housing White Paper proposals to establish criteria that local planning authorities should consider before concluding whether exceptional

circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries.

5.69 Paragraph 137 of the NPPF (2019) stated that:

“Before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries, the strategic policy-making authority should be able to demonstrate that it has examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development. This will be assessed through the examination of its strategic policies, which will take into account the preceding paragraph, and whether the strategy:

a) makes as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land;

b) optimises the density of development in line with the policies in chapter 11 of this Framework, including whether policies promote a significant uplift in minimum density standards in town and city centres and other locations well served by public transport; and

c) has been informed by discussions with neighbouring authorities about whether they could accommodate some of the identified need for development, as demonstrated through the statement of common ground”.

5.70 Paragraphs 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138 and 139 of the NPPF (2019) set out the policies which needed to be considered if a Local Planning Authority was to amend or review their Green Belt boundaries. Paragraph 136 made clear that boundaries could only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan, whilst paragraph 138 set out the need to promote sustainable patterns of development.

5.71 The NPPF (2019) required that when drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries, the need to promote sustainable patterns of development should be considered (paragraph 138). Furthermore, the paragraph stated that ‘where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously-developed and / or is well-served by public transport’.

5.72 Finally, paragraph 140 of the NPPF 2019, stated that once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.

### *Local housing need figure*

- 5.73 In July 2018, the Government introduced the Standard Methodology. Government policy, as set out in paragraph 60 of the NPPF (2018) stated, “to determine the minimum number of homes needed, strategic policies should be informed by a local housing need assessment, conducted using the standard method in national planning guidance – unless exceptional circumstances justify an alternative approach which also reflects current and future demographic trends and market signals. In addition to the local housing need figure, any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas should also be taken into account in establishing the amount of housing to be planned for”.
- 5.74 The number of new homes the Council was expected to plan for, as set by the Standard Methodology, was 623 new homes per year. Prior to the introduction of the Standard Methodology the Council’s own technical work (the SHMA 2016/17), indicated that 474 new homes per year were need.
- 5.75 The requirement to plan for 623 new homes, was three times higher than what the Council had previously been planning for in its Core Strategy 2011 and, at the time, there was on average 282 new homes built in Elmbridge each year.

### *Further evidence base gathering: 2017 - 2019*

#### *Borough-wide density study (2019)*

- 5.76 The purpose of this Study was to identify existing dwelling densities across the borough and where and how it may be appropriate to optimise density in order to help meet the Council’s housing need in the exiting urban areas.
- 5.77 The Study found that across the built-up areas average density was very low (below 30 dwellings per hectare). However, there were many instances where new development (and permissions) was exceeding existing densities with the highest being achieved in and around our town and district centres and railway station locations. The Study also identified opportunities for higher density development across all the Settlement Areas, recommending that higher densities should continue to be encouraged.
- 5.78 These findings were used to inform the Urban Capacity Study and Land Availability Assessment.

#### *Urban Capacity Study (2018)*

- 5.79 The Council appointed Troy Planning and Design to prepare an Urban Capacity Study (2018). The Study was specifically commissioned to identify

potential development sites within the existing urban areas that had not been identified through one of the bullet points identified in paragraph 5.20 of this paper, and to respond to criticism received during the Regulation 18 Consultation (Strategic Options Consultation - 2016/17) that the Council had not done enough to find sites in the urban areas. For example, the council actively looking for potential sites itself and 'playing the role of the developer'.

- 5.80 In addition to the more traditional methods of identifying potential sites e.g. call for sites and a review of existing information, the consultants preparing the Study undertook a review (map-based and through site visits) of all land in our town, district and local centres and train stations and within a set catchment of these. The methodology of the Study was to identify sustainable locations and taking a 'policy-off' approach in the early stages to capture as many opportunities as possible. The Study looked at the potential offered by land which is currently underused, including surplus public-sector land where appropriate. Furthermore, it provided input from the development industry to help inform viability and site delivery assumptions.
- 5.81 The outcome of the Study was the identification of a potential supply of circ. 5,500 homes over a 15-year period. However, this required further detailed assessment through the LAA process. In particular, an assessment of the availability of these sites for development. The outcome of these enquiries therefore fed into an update LAA 2018 alongside the latest data and information on the local housing need figure and the position insofar as outstanding planning permission and dwellings under construction.

#### *Land Availability Assessment (2018)*

- 5.82 Utilising the data and information from the borough-wide Density Study and Urban Capacity Study, the Council updated the LAA and republished this alongside the Options Consultation.
- 5.83 The LAA (2018) showed that approximately 5,300 homes could be provided over a 15 -year period in the urban area. Thus, there remains a shortfall of circa. 4,000 homes across the plan period.

#### *Update of Absolute Constraints (2018)*

- 5.84 Following the revised NPPF (2018), the Council updated the Review of Absolute Constraints document considering Aged and Veteran Trees as constraints that would restrict development.

#### *Green Belt Boundary Review – Supplementary Work (2018)*

- 5.85 In response to the Strategic Options Consultation in 2018, number of

comments were received stating that the three Key Strategic Areas identified through the Green Belt Boundary Review (GBBR) 2016 were too large and that further work should be undertaken to determine whether there were smaller local areas of Green Belt that could be released to seek to meet the development needs of the borough.

- 5.86 As such, the Council commissioned Arup to undertake a finer grained review to identify smaller sub-areas across the borough's Green Belt that could be assessed against Green Belt purposes. The intention of this assessment was to supplement and complement the findings of the 2016 GBBR, and to ensure that the Council has made every effort to identify appropriate land to meet identified development needs.
- 5.87 The findings of the supplementary GBBR work identified in total 94 potential Sub-Division Areas (SAs) defined by defensible boundaries<sup>4</sup>. As part of the Supplementary Work, consideration was given as to whether sub-divisions within the weakly performing areas, including the three Key Strategic Areas, should be explored. Following discussions with the consultants, it was concluded that this would not be appropriate as the conclusion would remain the same. For example, a smaller area within a weakly performing Local Area would still be judged to be performing weakly. This contrasts with the possibility of a smaller area within a moderately or strongly performing Local Area, being assessed as performing differently in terms of the purpose of Green Belt.
- 5.88 All the SAs were appraised for their performance against the relevant purposes of Green Belt as well as their role and importance in terms of the function of the wider Green Belt and its integrity.
- 5.89 The GBBR recommended 48 SAs (some in part) for further consideration. The supplementary work did not recommend the release of land from the Green Belt as the Council would need to weigh up the outcomes from these assessments against other matters, including the findings of other evidence base documents such as this accessibility assessment, to determine the appropriateness, suitability and feasibility of any adjustments to the Green Belt.

#### *Green Belt Boundary Review - Weakly Performing Local Areas (2018)*

- 5.90 The GBBR 2016 identified 13 Local Areas as weakly performing in Green Belt terms. These were then assessed for their development potential. This included a comprehensive review of the 'absolute' constraints with an initial assessment identifying three Local Areas which were not affected by absolute

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<sup>4</sup> In accordance with the requirements of paragraph 85 of the National Planning Policy Framework

constraints or were only partial affected and which were considered to have potential for strategic (large scale) development. Termed Key Strategic Areas (KSAs) the three areas were taking forward through the Strategic Options Consultation.

- 5.91 At the Strategic Options Consultation stage, the remaining 10 weakly performing Local Areas were 'set-aside' for further consideration as the potential number of homes that they could deliver, taking into consideration the presence of 'absolute constraints', was not considered sufficient enough to include them within the Strategic Options document as potential strategic sites.
- 5.92 As outlined above, during consultation of the Strategic Options Consultation several comments were received stating that the KSAs were too large and that further work should be undertaken to identify small areas of Green Belt land that may be suitable for release. It was in parallel with the Sub-Divisions work that the remaining weakly performing Local Areas were revisited.
- 5.93 The GBBR- Weakly Performing Local Areas 2018 therefore assessed the development potential of each of these areas. This new assessment concluded that out of the 13 weakly performing Local Area three had the potential to accommodate large scale development, these had been previously identified as the KSAs. However, of the remaining 10 Local Areas (nine Green Belt and one greenfield area), six had the potential to accommodate small scale development and four had no opportunity to accommodate development.

#### *Green Belt Boundary Review - Minor Amendments (2018)*

- 5.94 This assessment involved a detailed review of the whole of the Green Belt within the borough where it adjoins the existing built-up area to consider (and if necessary, make) minor amendments to the boundary line.
- 5.95 With the passage of time and the availability of more accurate electronic mapping, combined with the fact that the Council is currently preparing a new Local Plan, it was considered an appropriate time to review the current Green Belt boundary and propose minor amendments that may be required to make the boundary more logical or defensible in accordance with the guiding principles of the NPPF.
- 5.96 In total this review recommended 83 minor amendments of which 58 propose to remove land from the Green Belt, with 25 amendments proposing to add land to it. If implemented, these proposed amendments would result in 32.42ha of land being removed from the Green Belt and 3.83ha of land that is

proposed to be added to it (a net decrease of 28.59 ha; 0.52 % of Green Belt land in the Borough).

#### *Green Belt - Previously Developed Land (2018)*

- 5.97 National planning policy stated that when drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries, the need to promote sustainable patterns of development should be considered (NPPF 2018, paragraph 137). Furthermore, the paragraph stated that 'where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously-developed and / or is well-served by public transport'.
- 5.98 Therefore, this assessment sought to identify Previously Developed Land (PDL) as defined by the NPPF within the Green Belt weakly performing Local Areas including the three KSA and all the Sub Areas (SAs) identified through the GBBR 2016 and the GBBR Supplementary Work 2018 respectively.
- 5.99 This assessment also identified a select number of previously developed sites within the Green Belt but not within the weakly performing Local Areas or Sub Areas. The sites were in locations which had not been identified as being potentially suitable for release from the Green Belt (as their removal would lead to a hole in the Green Belt). However, due the scale and extent of existing development in accordance with the NPPF, there may be a case for Very Special Circumstances to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt to enable redevelopment. The Council was aware of the availability of these sites for redevelopment and each was of a scale that could positively contribute the Council's housing land supply and, as such, it was important to consider them further as part of this work.
- 5.100 The conclusion of the assessment was that approximately 70 of the areas examined were considered to have an element of PDL. The assessment also identified four sizeable sites / areas within the borough which contained PDL and could offer opportunities for further development subject to the demonstration of Very Special Circumstances. These were: Brooklands College; Brooklands; Sandown Park; and Whiteley Village.

#### *Green Belt - Accessibility Assessment (2018)*

- 5.101 National planning policy aims to promote patterns of development which make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling and which can minimise the need to travel. The NPPF 2018 continued to require that when drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries, the need to promote sustainable patterns of development should be considered (paragraph 137). Furthermore, the paragraph stated that 'where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously-developed and / or is well-



served by public transport’.

- 5.102 In response to the NPPF, this assessment considered the accessibility of the Green Belt weakly performing Local Areas including the three KSA and all the Sub Areas (SAs) (referred to as “the areas”) identified through the GBBR 2016 and the GBBR Supplementary Work 2018 respectively, to major service and employment centres as well as range of more local services and facilities.
- 5.103 The overall accessibility score for each area was reached by considering access to all facilities and services, this also included proximity to employment centres within and outside of the borough. The findings showed that there are a limited number of areas that perform good or above in accessibility terms. However, this is reflective of the spatial distribution of many of the existing facilities and infrastructure across the borough. Therefore, it was not considered unusual for an area to have a lower overall accessibility score whilst being located close to a railway station and vice-versa.
- 5.104 Notwithstanding this, the assessment did identify the walkability of each area to the nearest railway station and the proximity to a bus stop with a ‘good’ or better bus service which in accordance the requirements of paragraph 137 of the NPPF (2018) provided an indication to whether the area was ‘well served by public transport’.

#### Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) (2018)

- 5.105 The purpose of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) was to provide background evidence as to the key elements of physical and social infrastructure likely to be needed in the borough up to 2036 to support delivery of the emerging Elmbridge Local Plan.
- 5.106 The IDP (December 2018) identified the current baseline in relation to existing infrastructure in the borough. It also identified main areas of responsibilities and where possible, details of planned provision and potential provision required as a result of the Local Plan.
- 5.107 The IDP was prepared with the involvement of relevant stakeholders and based on information that the Council managed to obtain from a range of sources including meetings with stakeholders, feedback received during previous consultations (pre-2018) and through direct stakeholder consultation during May – October 2018.
- 5.108 The IDP set out the likely infrastructure needs / requirements based on the provision of 612 dwellings being delivered per annum during the plan-period.



## Habitats Regulation Assessment of the Local Plan Options Document (July 2019)

- 5.109 The EC Habitats Directive 1992 and Wilds Birds Directive 2009 as transposed into UK law by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017) require a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of land use plans such as a Local Plan to establish whether the plan, alone, or in combination with other plans or projects, is likely to have a significant effect on an international nature conservation sites (Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) or Ramsar sites). These are also known as Natura 2000 sites.
- 5.110 In preparing the new Local Plan, the assessment is carried out in an iterative process as the HRA is, in turn used to inform the development of the spatial strategy and planning policies.
- 5.111 The Council appointed AECOM to assess the five consultation options (see paragraph 5.116). The objective of this exercise was to identify any aspects of these options that might be screened in for Appropriate Assessment and may lead to adverse effects on the integrity of Natura 2000 sites (hereafter referred to as European sites), including Special Areas of Conservations (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Ramsar sites. Furthermore, this screening exercise was also meant to facilitate the selection of a Preferred Option for the Regulation 19 stage (draft Local Plan).
- 5.112 The HRA which supported the Options Consultation (2019) concluded that due to the broad nature of the Regulation 18 options at this stage, it is not possible to rule out Likely Significant Effects (LSEs) on the European sites at this stage.
- 5.113 Regarding Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), the Assessment also set out for each option, the amount of additional SANG that would be required in order to mitigate the potential increase in dwellings.

## Regulation 18 – Options Consultation 2019

- 5.114 As referred to above, in forming the five options that featured in the Options Consultation, the Council took into account amendments to national planning policy and guidance, responses to the Strategic Options Consultation 2016 and the emerging evidence from a number of thematic Local Plan evidence base documents prepared.
- 5.115 This period of review and re-valuation led to the identification of five options as to how the Council could respond to its development needs. This included the original three options (Options 1,2 and 3) of the Strategic Options Consultation which have evolved and two new options (Options 4 and 5).

5.116 The five options which were considered at that time were:

### **Option 1 – intensify urban areas**

This option would deliver all the new homes needed in our borough over the next 15 years by:

- Significantly increasing densities on all sites across the urban area; and
- Identifying open spaces, such as allotments and playing fields for redevelopment and relocating these uses within the existing Green Belt.

Option 1 was initially presented in the Strategic Options Consultation (SOC) 2016 and it had evolved following the new evidence and findings in the technical documents. In particular the Land Availability Assessment 2018 identified those urban sites that are considered deliverable or developable over the plan-period and these totals are used across the five options.

This option would rely on the intensification of all urban sites which would mean an approach that maximised the number of homes a development site could accommodate with little regard for or weight to the existing character of the area across the borough.

The **benefits** of this option were considered to be:

- It will deliver all the homes we need.
- It will continue to direct development to urban areas to protect all of the existing Green Belt and preserve current boundaries.
- The relocation of open space and recreational facilities could mean greater use of the Green Belt by residents.
- Intensification of sites is likely to provide smaller homes with a smaller floor space which could potentially lower the average price of a new home.

The **disadvantages** of this option were considered to be:

- This option would lead to much higher density new developments and tall buildings across the Borough, this could fundamentally change the character of many areas of the Borough.
- This option would continue to place development pressure on those parts of the Borough that have in the past seen more development.
- It is likely the through intensification, new residential development will likely be flats and there wouldn't be a mix of housing types, including family homes.
- The option would rely on all potential sites being developed to their maximum potential, if they fail to, the new plan quickly becomes out-of-date as the number of new homes would not keep up with the Local

Plan's target and this would be monitored through the Government's annual Housing Delivery Test.

- The loss of open space in the urban area would affect character but also the character of the environment and new locations may not be as accessible. This could mean residents having to take transport to enable them to access or alternatively it may prevent or deter them from using such facilities in the first place. This could lead to wider effects on resident's health and wellbeing.
- In general, taller buildings (especially those beyond the height already within the Borough) can have higher build costs which could mean prices for new homes remain high and / or affordable housing is deemed economically unviable. Meaning it would not leave enough profit for the development to occur.
- Congestion on the highway network is primarily at pinch points across the Borough at peak times. The introduction of housing is likely to led to increased pressure on the highway network at peak times.

## **Option 2 - optimise urban area and 3 areas of Green Belt release**

This option would not meet housing need in full but would deliver new homes over the next 15 years by:

- Optimising densities and ensuring effective use of land across the urban area and that new homes are of the right type to meet local needs.
- Create areas for new homes by removing land from the Green Belt where;
  - It is weakly performing the purpose(s) of Green Belt policy;
  - It is in a sustainable location for new homes; and it is not, or only partially, affected by absolute constraints which prevent development coming forward
- Using the Duty to Co-operate to see if other authorities can meet some of our need.

Option 2 was initially presented in the Strategic Options Consultation 2016 and it has evolved following the new evidence and findings in the technical documents. In particular the Land Availability Assessment 2018 identified those urban sites that are considered deliverable or developable over the plan period and these totals are used across the five options. In addition, the option continues to utilise the findings of the Green Belt Boundary Review 2016.

Option 2 would deliver approximately 6,800 new homes across the existing urban area and within three Key Strategic Areas which could be released from the Green Belt.

The Key Strategic Areas were identified from the technical work in 2016, which indicated that they were weakly performing areas of Green Belt that had potential to accommodate a large housing site within it. Not all of the land contained within the Key Strategic Areas is suitable or available for development. The extent of the potential housing site took into consideration other constraints which would prevent development coming forward. In total the three sites could deliver approximately 1,400 homes.

The **benefits** of this option were considered to be:

- Option 2 would protect the urban area from significant change in character as the approach to optimising urban land would give weight to the existing character of each area of the borough.
- The option would continue to direct development to the urban area and uses urban land more efficiently.
- This option would seek to provide the right type of homes to meet need and therefore would provide smaller sized homes that meet local need.
- The development of larger sites as part of the Key Strategic Area could deliver new infrastructure and facilities on site as they would have the critical mass and land space to enable its delivery.
- The option is likely to lead to a higher number of new affordable homes on larger sites. This because, typically, smaller, brownfield sites cost more to redevelop and often squeeze profitability, limiting the amount of affordable housing that can be provided by a developer. In contrast greenfield sites unlike brownfield sites have no demolition or clean-up costs enabling the developer to provide more affordable housing.

The **disadvantages** of this option were considered to be:

- Option 2 fails to plan for all the homes needed.
- Other authorities already indicated they cannot take our need and there would remain a shortfall in unmet housing need.
- The release of the three Key Strategic Areas would result in a 3% loss of Green Belt land.
- Congestion on the highway network is primarily at pinch points across the Borough at peak times. The introduction of housing is likely to led to increased pressure on the highway network at peak times.

### **Option 3 - optimise urban area and large Green Belt release**

Option 3 would deliver all the new homes needed in our borough over the next 15 years and would be able to help other boroughs and districts meet their housing need by:

- Optimising densities and ensuring effective use of land across the urban area and that new homes are of the right type to meet local needs.
- Creating areas for new homes by removing land from the Green Belt where:
  - It is weakly performing, or it is not essential for the Green Belt policy to work properly,
  - It is being put forward for development by the landowner regardless of strength or importance; and
  - It is not, or only partially, affected by absolute constraints which prevent development coming forward.

Option 3 was initially presented in the Strategic Options Consultation 2016 and it has evolved following the new evidence and findings in the technical documents. In particular the Land Availability Assessment 2018 identified those urban sites that are considered deliverable or developable over the plan period and these totals are used across the five options. In addition, the option utilises the findings of the Green Belt Boundary Review 2016 and Green Belt Boundary Review- Sub-Division Work 2018 as well as sites promoted for development in the Green Belt.

Option 3 could deliver approximately 16,300 new homes across the existing urban area and 618 hectares of land to be removed from the Green Belt. If the Green Belts sites within Option 3, were released in their entirety this would equate to a decrease of approximately 11% of the Elmbridge Green Belt.

The **benefits** of this option were considered to be:

- Delivers all the homes we need and could help meet the housing needs of neighbouring boroughs and districts.
- This option would seek to provide the right type of homes to meet need and therefore would provide smaller sized homes that meet local need.
- Exceeding the Local Housing Need Figure and introducing a higher number of new homes into the local market can improve the affordability of housing.
- The option is likely to lead to a higher number of new affordable homes on larger sites. This because, typically, smaller, brownfield sites cost more to redevelop and often squeeze profitability, limiting the amount of affordable housing that can be provided by a developer. In contrast greenfield sites unlike brownfield sites have no demolition or clean-up costs enabling the developer to provide more affordable housing.
- The spatial distribution of the sites under this option would lead to a more even spread of where new homes will be located across the Borough.
- Option 3 would protect the urban area from significant change in character

as the approach to optimising urban land would give weight to the existing character of each area of the Borough.

- The development of larger sites could deliver new infrastructure and facilities on site as they would have the critical mass and land space to enable its delivery.

The **disadvantages** of this option were considered to be:

- The release of all the Green Belt sites would result in a 11% loss of Green Belt land.
- The option would extend urban areas potentially joining up previously separated towns and villages.
- If all the Green Belt sites were released, the resultant new Green Belt boundaries may not function properly. This is because some of the Green Belt sites promoted by landowners maybe strongly performing or essential for Green Belt policy to work properly.
- This option would not direct all new development to the most sustainable locations in the Borough.
- Congestion on the highway network is primarily at pinch points across the Borough at peak times. The introduction of housing is likely to led to increased pressure on the highway network at peak times.

#### **Option 4 - optimise urban area**

Option 4 utilises the findings from the Land Availability Assessment 2018.

Option 4 would not meet housing need but would deliver new homes over the next 15 years by:

- Optimising densities and ensuring effective use of land across the urban area and that new homes are of the right type to meet local needs.
- Using the Duty to Co-operate to see if other authorities can meet some of our need.

Option 4 was a new option which has been formed following the new evidence and findings in the technical documents. In particular the Land Availability Assessment 2018 identified those urban sites that are considered deliverable or developable over the plan period and these totals are used across the five options.

Option 4 would deliver approximately 5,300 new homes over the next 15 years. The Option would need to continue to promote the use of good design to ensure the most effective use of all brownfield and urban land within the borough.

The **benefits** of this option were considered to be:

- Option 4 would protect the urban area from significant change in character as the approach to optimising urban land would give weight to the existing character of each area of the borough.
- This option would seek to provide the right type of homes to meet need and therefore would provide smaller sized homes that meet local need
- This option maintains existing Green Belt boundaries.
- The option would continue to direct development to the urban area and uses urban land more efficiently.

The **disadvantages** of this option were considered to be:

- Option 4 fails to plan for all the homes needed.
- Other authorities already indicated they cannot take our need and there would remain a shortfall in unmet housing need.
- There would be fewer new affordable homes built on smaller brownfield sites, this is because, typically smaller, brownfield sites cost more to redevelop and often squeeze profitability, limiting the amount of affordable housing that can be provided by a developer.
- The option would rely on all potential sites being developed to their optimal potential, if they fail to, the new plan quickly becomes out-of-date as the number of new homes would not keep up with the Local Plan's target and this would be monitored through the Government's annual Housing Delivery Test.
- Congestion on the highway network is primarily at pinch points across the Borough at peak times. The introduction of housing

### **Option 5 - optimise urban area and small areas of Green Belt release**

Option 5 utilises the findings from the Land Availability Assessment 2018 and the Green Belt Boundary Review 2016 and 2018.

Option 5 would deliver all the new homes needed in our borough over the next 15 years by;

- Optimising densities and ensuring effective use of land across the urban area and that new homes are of the right type to meet local needs.
- Creating areas for new homes by removing smaller sub-divided parcels of land from the Green Belt where:
  - It is weakly performing, or it is not essential for the Green Belt policy to work properly; and
  - It is not, or only partially, affected by absolute constraints which

prevent development coming forward

Option 5 was a new option which has been formed following the new evidence and findings in the technical documents. In particular the Land Availability Assessment 2018 identified those urban sites that are considered deliverable or developable over the plan period and these totals are used across the five options. In addition, the option utilises the findings of the Green Belt Boundary Review 2016 and Green Belt Boundary Review- Sub-Division Work 2018.

The Land Availability Assessment identifies that there is an estimated land supply in the urban areas to accommodate approximately 5,300 new homes. If all 33 small areas of Green Belt identified in this option were included in the final plan along with the urban sites, Option 5 could deliver approximately 9,400 new homes over the next 15 years, across the existing urban area and within 338 hectares of land removed from the Green Belt.

The **benefits** of this option were considered to be:

- Delivers all the homes needed.
- Can improve affordability of housing.
- Provides smaller sized homes that meet local need.
- Smaller areas for development but more evenly spread across the borough.
- Enables delivery of a higher number of new affordable homes on larger sites. This is because typically, smaller, brownfield sites cost more to redevelop and often squeeze profitability, limiting the amount of affordable housing that can be provided by a developer. Greenfield sites unlike brownfield sites have no demolition or clean-up costs enabling the developer to provide more affordable housing.
- Protects the urban area from significant change in character.
- New Green Belt boundaries would function properly.
- Larger sites will deliver local highway improvements and new infrastructure on site.

The **disadvantages** of this option were considered to be:

- The release of all 33 sites would result in the loss of 6% of Green Belt land.
- Option 5 would result in the extension of urban areas around the edges.
- Congestion on the highway network is primarily at pinch points across the Borough at peak times. The introduction of housing is likely to lead to increased pressure on the highway network at peak times.
- Smaller sites might not have the critical mass to provide significant



amounts of affordable homes and infrastructure on site.

### Sustainability Appraisal of the Options (2019)

- 5.117 The Sustainability Appraisal 2019 provided an understanding of the possible positive and negative impacts of each option in terms of its social, economic and environmental effects throughout the plan period. The options were appraised against the 16 sustainability objectives derived from the Scoping Report 2016. This information is summarised below (see Table 4).
- 5.118 Although Option 1 had positive impacts in terms of making best use of previously developed land, reducing land contamination and supporting sustainable economic growth, it had a number of major and minor negative impacts in relation to the environment. This is particularly applicable when considering its impacts on historic and cultural assets, flooding and pollution.
- 5.119 Although Option 2 had several minor negative impacts in terms of the environment, it did have positive social and economic impacts which meant that this option was considered the most sustainable for the Strategic Options Consultation undertaken in 2016/17.
- 5.120 Option 3 had the most significant negative impacts of all the options presented. This was largely due to the impact of distributing development widely across the borough.
- 5.121 Option 4 had a significant positive impact on protecting and enhancing the landscape character of the borough and has other minor positive impacts on the environment in terms of reducing the need to travel, making best use of previously developed land, reducing land contamination and conserving biodiversity. However, it had a significant negative impact on flood risk and minor negative impacts on reducing greenhouse gases, using natural resources, improving water quality and adapting to climate change.
- 5.122 Option 5 scored significant positive impacts in terms of meeting the local housing need in full, which in turn facilitates the improved health and wellbeing of the whole population. It scored minor positive results across six environmental objectives and all economic objectives. However, it received significant negative impacts in terms of energy use and scores minor negative results for the use of natural resources, reducing flood risk, air quality/pollution and conserving biodiversity.

SA Objective	Option 1: Intensify urban area  <b>9,345 homes</b>	Option 2: Optimise urban area and 3 areas of Green Belt release  <b>6,800 homes</b>	Option 3: Optimise urban area and large Green Belt release  <b>16,300 homes</b>	Option 4: Optimise urban area  <b>5,300 homes</b>	Option 5: Optimise urban area and small areas of Green Belt release  <b>9,400 homes</b>
1. Homes	-	-	++	-	++
2. Health	0	+	+	?	++
3. Heritage	--	+	-	0	+
4. Accessibility	0	+	--	+	+
5. PDL	+	+	+	+	+
6. Economic growth	+	+	+	+	+
7. Employment	--	?	?	-	+
8. Energy Use	--	-	--	-	--
9. Natural Resources	-	-	--	-	-
10. Climate Change	-	+	+	-	+
11. Flooding	--	-	-	--	-
12. Water	?	?	?	?	?
13. Land	+	?	--	+	?
14. Pollution	--	-	--	-	-
15. Landscape	-	+	--	++	+
16. Biodiversity	-	+	--	+	-
<b>Overall sustainability</b>	-	+	--	+	+

**Table 4: The Sustainability Appraisal of the Options (2019)**

#### Comments received to the Options 2019 Consultation

5.123 Consultation on this document took place between 19 August 2019 and 30 September 2019. The consultation sought the views of members of the public and other stakeholders on the spatial strategy options. The paper set out the five strategic options: options one to three evolutions of the options presented in the Strategic Options Consultation (2016); options four and five were new. The Council did not indicate a preferred option.

5.124 Over the consultation period, 6,554 representations were received. Full details of the Council's consultation activities can be found in the Summary of Consultation Responses Document 2019.

5.125 In response to the consultation, 2% of responders (142 people / organisations) stated a preference for Option 1 (Intensify the urban areas). In

choosing this option many respondents considered that any future housing should be delivered on brownfield land within the urban areas, and not on green spaces, protecting the Green Belt and other green spaces such as allotments.

- 5.126 Intensifying development within the urban areas was considered by respondents to have the benefit of being near to infrastructure such as stations, shops, schools and GPs, and therefore having the least impact. This was also considered to preserve the low-density wealthy areas while developing others.
- 5.127 Building on the Green Belt was considered by respondents to spoil the villages and contribute to urban sprawl, with areas such as car parks being built on before the Green Belt.
- 5.128 Respondents also considered that this option was the most environmentally friendly, maintaining green spaces that are important for the well-being of residents and as a habitat for wildlife. For many, it is the presence of these green spaces that are the main reason why they chose to live in this borough.
- 5.129 In response to the consultation, 2% of responders (151 people / organisations) stated a preference for Option 2 (Optimise the urban areas all three areas of Green Belt release). Some respondents choosing Option 2 considered that this option provides a fairer distribution of development across the borough, with one commenting that this option was a “sensible balanced option”, rather than overcrowding urban areas such as Walton.
- 5.130 Comments received supporting this option felt that areas of the borough should release their Green Belt and take more development, protecting existing urban areas from significant change in character, releasing the pressure from urban flatted developments and on areas such as Walton which were considered by some respondents to have already taken their fair share of development.
- 5.131 Option 2 was considered in some comments to be the best compromise of all the options, with the least impact whilst also providing housing. Any release of the Green Belt should be supported with the appropriate infrastructure and affordable housing. Larger areas of Green Belt release were considered the best option for achieving the balance of housing and infrastructure needs.
- 5.132 In response to the consultation, 1% of responders (61 people / organisations) stated a preference for Option 3 (Optimise the urban areas and large Green Belt release).
- 5.133 In supporting this option respondents considered that this option fully met the

housing needs of the borough and was the most long-term sustainable option, releasing Green Belt would provide the land needed for new infrastructure to support new housing. The release of poor-quality Green Belt could be used for high quality housing and be linked to environmental improvements. A respondent also commented that this option will assist in meeting years of under delivery that has made housing so expensive in the borough. Respondents felt that Option 5 would avoid overcrowding in areas like Walton and protect areas like Molesey which have already reached saturation point.

- 5.134 This option was also considered to be the best way to deliver affordable housing which is considered to be in need in the borough. This option was also considered by one respondent to be an opportunity to provide family housing, close to infrastructure, but that wasn't too dense with gardens and off-street parking provided for dwellings. Another respondent felt that Option 3 caused the least disturbance to the borough, it would protect character and identity whereas urbanisation would have a significant negative impact.
- 5.135 One respondent felt that the creation of a new village in the Stoke D'Abernon was a good idea. Whilst another respondent felt that Option 3 with careful design, could create new homes for people in beautiful surroundings.
- 5.136 In response to the consultation, 85% of responders (5567 people / organisations) stated a preference for Option 4 (Optimise the urban area). Respondents comments on Option 4 focused on preserving the Green Belt which would protect green spaces, areas for wildlife and the environment, and open spaces for health and well-being, and maintains and 'green lungs' of the area. Many respondents commented that the Green Belt is sacrosanct and should not be released for development.
- 5.137 Many comments received considered that this option provided the least impact on the borough, congestion, infrastructure and services due to the lower densities and housing numbers. Other comments were in relation to limiting housing increased through this option and the ability therefore to protect and retain the character of the borough, and maintain space between the villages, limiting and preventing urban sprawl. One respondent commented that developments should be pushed further out, and an already pressured environment should not be over developed.
- 5.138 Respondents felt that this option made the most of urban brownfield land and that this was the more appropriate option. A variety of reasons were given including access to existing amenities and infrastructure within urban areas; that it will not spoil the countryside as much as other options; it would be in keeping with the area; that the area cannot sustain large scale development; and more affordable housing can be delivered through this option, allowing the affordability issue to be addressed. Achieving affordable housing was

considered by some to be best achieved through high density urban development.

- 5.139 In terms of the design of urban developments some respondents commented that this should not be at the expense of the loss trees, lack of parking and the replacement of gardens.
- 5.140 When compared to the other options, it was felt Option 4 had a good balance between urban development and open space, would not be at such high densities. This is the only real solution for the borough without destroying its semi-rural character, and any new building should not be to the detriment of existing residents and they should not lose their privilege. Respondents commented on the villages in the borough and the possibility of coalescing where the borough would just become part of London. Other respondents felt the area should stay the same
- 5.141 Other respondents felt that it was irresponsible to build on the Green Belt with the current pressures on the environment and climate change, and that green spaces, such as the Green Belt, contribute to health and well-being and help to combat pollution.
- 5.142 Some specific areas and sites were mentioned in response to this question, particularly Cobham, Stoke D'Abernon and Oxshott where some respondents felt that before any building traffic needed to be restricted through Oxshott and that this area specifically could not cope with a large influx of people. Sites such as car parks and council owned land were also included in areas to be built on, as well as considering taller buildings and repurposing commercial spaces.
- 5.143 Some respondents felt that the council should be pushing back on the housing numbers and look for capacity in other boroughs.
- 5.144 In response to the consultation, 5% of responders (353 people / organisations) stated a preference for Option 5 (Optimise the urban area and small areas of Green Belt release).
- 5.145 One of the main themes of respondents to this option was they felt it provided a good balance, it would meet housing need whilst also preserving the overall feel and character of the borough. One respondent commented that the village feel of the area would largely be maintained by choosing this option, and another felt that the borough is well served by open space and that this option felt that the loss of some would still preserve the overall feel, whilst others supported this option because it would avoid overdevelopment with high rise buildings while supplying housing to meet need. Another respondent felt option 5 was best because it means we would be contributing towards resolving the country's housing crisis.

- 5.146 Other comments considered that this option was fairer through spreading the burden of development over the entire borough, sharing the impact. Responses also considered that this would be achieved through making the best use of the urban areas with small amounts of Green Belt release. This option would only mean releasing small amount of Green Belt and would retaining the strategic gaps between settlements.
- 5.147 Others felt that this option provided the opportunity for infrastructure to be planned, for green space to be incorporated into development, and one respondent felt there would be an opportunity to provide space for the development of community hubs to build social cohesion.
- 5.148 One respondent commented that the other options do not meet the housing target and are therefore pointless and likely to be thrown out by an Inspector.
- 5.149 There were a range of other comments received in relation to a preferred development strategy for the borough. Some respondents felt that none of the options were considered suitable for Elmbridge, and that the current service pressure needed to be addressed before building more new housing. One respondent commented that it was unfair to existing residents. One comment did not favour intense urban development or the large- scale release of Green Belt.
- 5.150 Respondents felt that the options did not address current issues and that existing amenities and infrastructure could not cope with further development and would impact on the environment.
- 5.151 There were also comments received that felt that the target should be 5300 homes with the release of 3 Green belt areas providing 1400 homes and the remaining 3900 being built in the urban areas, with respondents commenting that this is a mix of Options 2 and 4.
- 5.152 In terms of land use, comments received considered that there needs to be a balance between urban and rural land, with mixed views on urban intensification and Green Belt release. Some respondents commented that there should be no Green Belt release and development should be on brownfield land.
- 5.153 One respondent commented that planning needs to be more equitable across the borough, and specifically that Walton cannot take anymore high rise, high density developments. Some respondents commented that they did not accept the government housing target, and one respondent felt that all the options were bad and that this was not a housing crisis but a housing finance crisis, and that this is all about housing desire in nice areas.

## **Regulation 18 – Vision, objectives and direction for the development management policies consultation (2020)**

### *Developing the consultation*

- 5.154 The purpose of this consultation was to seek views on what the vision and objectives for the borough should be and the direction for our development management policies.
- 5.155 Initially, when the decision was taken by the Council in 2016 to review the Core Strategy, it was not intended to review the Development Management Plan (DMP) (2015) as part of the preparation of the new Local Plan as, at that time, it was considered that the policies were not directly affected by strategic policies on the location and scale of development. In addition, the DMP had been recently adopted and was compliant with the most up to date NPPF applicable at the time. It was anticipated that a review would be undertaken post adoption of the new Local Plan.
- 5.156 However, as the preparation stage of the Local Plan extended and importantly the NPPF had been revised and in July 2018 and updated in February 2019, it was considered an appropriate time to take stock of the performance of the DMP policies and undertake a review to ensure they are fit for purpose and capable of supporting the strategic policies. This also provided an opportunity to assimilate the policies into the new Local Plan to create one document containing all policies, allocations and designations.
- 5.157 A high-level a Draft Initial Review of the Development Management policies was undertaken. It was considered that the majority of the DMP policies were working well and would be unlikely to require significant amendments regardless of the option chosen as to the preferred development strategy.
- 5.158 However, it was considered that a number of DMP policies would require significant amendments and that there was a lot of repetition within the policies in the Core Strategy and the DMP which could be confusing for those applying for planning permission. It was also clear that there were insufficient day-to-day policies on environmental issues, such as renewable energy and the sustainability of new buildings.
- 5.159 At the time of the Options Consultation in 2019, there was not enough detail on the Draft Initial Review of the Development Management Policies to include in the consultation document to fully meet the requirements of a Regulation 18 consultation. However, it was considered that including the introduction to the DM policies review in the Options Consultation Document (2019) was logical as the strategic policies would influence the detailed policies to varying degrees. Furthermore, it provided an opportunity at this

early stage to ask residents and stakeholders if they were aware of any planning issues that needed to be addressed in the DM policies.

5.160 The consultation document set out the council's thoughts on what approaches future policies could take in relation to policy topics. The topics were split into three key themes:

- protecting and enhancing our natural environment,
- growing a prosperous economy; and
- ensuring health and wellbeing for all.

5.161 The themes overlapped in some places as many of the topics are cross-cutting and have relevance across all three themes.

5.162 To support the consultation a series of three '[Theme Summary Papers](#)' were produced. The purpose of each Theme Summary Paper was to provide more detail on the legislation; national policy and guidance; other wider strategies and policies; and the local plan evidence base that had informed the vision and objections for consultation and the proposed direction of the Development Management policies.

5.163 As set out in the '[Theme Summary Papers](#)', in addition to the relevant policies and guidance in the NPPF and PPG, the key legislative requirements and other wider strategies and policies, informing the consultation (as relevant at the time) were:

- Theme 1 – The Natural Environment
  - Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (Section 19)
  - Climate Change Act 2008
  - Renewable energy directive 2009
  - Energy Performance and Building Directive 2010
  - Planning & Energy Act 2008
  - Environment Bill
- Theme 2 – Growing a prosperous economy
  - National Industrial Strategy: Building a Britain fit for the future, November 2017
  - A Strategic Economic Plan for the Enterprise M3 Area 2018-2030
  - Local Industrial Strategy - Enterprise M3 – Local Enterprise Partnership
  - Surrey Hotel Futures Study 2015, Surrey County Council (by Hotel Solutions)
  - Elmbridge Economic Strategy 2019 - 2033



- Theme 3 – Ensuring health and wellbeing for all
  - National Design Guide, September 2019
  - Surrey Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019
  - Heritage Strategy 2015

5.164 The local plan evidence base, as prepared at the time, relevant to the three themes and the development management policies is summarised below.

*Updated and emerging evidence base*

5.165 To inform the Regulation 18 Vision, objectives and direction for the development management policies consultation (2020), the Council updated and prepared a number of evidence base documents. These evidence base documents have largely informed the detailed development management policies in the draft Local Plan and a summary of these documents is set out in Appendix A. Where an evidence base document was particularly relevant to the formation of the options, details are set out in the paragraphs below.

- Air Quality Assessment Phase 1 – 2019
- Air Quality Annual Status Report – 2019
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Level 1 – 2019
- Strategic Views Study – 2019
- Ancient & Veteran Trees – 2018
- Water Cycle Study – 2019
- Local Green Space Designations Study – 2016
- Elmbridge Open Space & Recreation Assessment – 2014
- Baseline & Functional Economic Area – 2016
- Elmbridge Retail Assessment – 2016
- Elmbridge Commercial Property Report – 2017
- Strategic Employment Land Review – 2019
- Local Market Appraisal – 2020
- Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) – 2017
- Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Site Assessment Study – 2018

Absolute Constraints Update Report (2019)

5.166 Since the completion of the Review of Absolute Constraints in 2016, the Government’s revisions to the NPPF (2018 and 2019) expanded the list of ‘national constraints’ to include Ancient and Veteran Trees which has been classified as an irreplaceable habitat.

5.167 To take account of the changes in national planning policy, the Council revisited the ‘absolute constraints’ to ensure that they align with the ‘national

constraints'. This included undertaking an Ancient and Veteran Tree Assessment 2018.

5.168 The Council had also prepared a new Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 2019, which provided updates of the flood risk zones across the borough including the extent of Flood Zone 3b.

5.169 These updates were incorporated into the Absolute Constraints Update Report 2019.

#### Landscape Sensitivity Study (2019)

5.170 The Landscape Sensitivity Study was undertaken by Arup in 2019 with the primary purpose of assessing the extent to which the character and quality of the landscape within the borough is sensitive to change for the introduction of a development scenario. For the purposes of the study this scenario was a large scale residential and mixed-use development.

5.171 The study looked at the whole borough and used the 2015 Surrey Landscape Character Assessment as a basis of the desktop study, as well as Natural England's National Character Areas, GIS data and the sub areas identified within the council's Green Belt Boundary Review (2018). This desktop analysis produced landscape units which were then assessed on value and susceptibility, and then sensitivity. Landscape susceptibility is the ability of a landscape to accommodate the development type without undue negative change to its character, and landscape value refers to the relative value that is attached to different landscapes by society, whether this be the landscape as a whole or individual element. The sensitivity of the landscape is then assessed based on a combination of the landscape value and susceptibility in each case.

5.172 The results of the study have to be considered at a strategic and borough-wide level. The study looked at 25 landscape units across the borough. The study indicated that those landscape units with high or moderate-high sensitivity tended to also have a higher landscape value rating, whether by virtue of the presence of national or international designations such as SSSI or RAMSAR status or due to their historic significance; such as at Painshill Park or Brooklands Motor Racing Circuit. Other areas of higher sensitivity include those landscape units which offer significant and valued recreation opportunities such as at Prince's Converts or Esher Common.

5.173 The report concluded that "Landscape units with lower sensitivity to large scale residential and mixed-use development were found to be those where urban influence from surrounding settlements had encroached to a greater degree upon the landscape, whether by virtue of less well-defined settlement

edges or by urban fringe development and land use. These lower sensitivity landscapes also tended to show erosion in terms of landscape pattern and/ or associated presence of large-scale landscape change.

#### Infrastructure Delivery Plan (2019)

5.174 The Council updated and published the IDP in August 2019. In updating the IDP, the Council asked infrastructure providers to consider the impact of delivering 623 every year during the plan period.

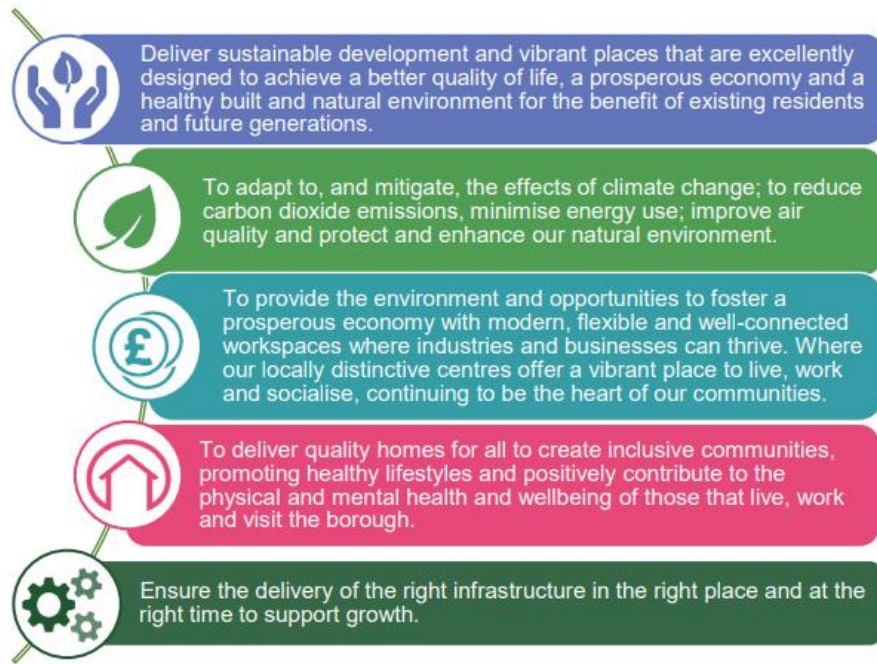
#### Sustainability Appraisal of the objectives and main policy themes (2020)

5.175 Unlike the previous two regulation 18 consultations which presented options, the third regulation 18 document discussed the vision, objectives and policy directions. Therefore, the sustainable appraisal presented an assessment of the potential sustainability effects of the key objectives, as relevant at the time (see Figure 5) and policy directions (the three themes as set out in paragraph 5.163) for the Local Plan.

5.176 As set out in Figure 6, Objective 1 included many neutral results that contribute neither positively or negatively towards many of the environmental, economic and social SA objectives. This was due to the broad nature of this first policy objective. There were also several unknown results due to the limited information. This was common across all five objectives. The objective did score two minor positive results in terms of facilitating the improved health and well-being of the whole population and accessibility to services.

5.177 Objective 2 showed potential significant positive impacts across many of the environmental SA objectives particularly SA 8, 10 and 14. Minor negative impacts could affect SA objectives 1 and 7 as adapting and mitigating the effects of climate change could affect economic and housing growth.

5.178 It was shown that Objective 3 would have potential significant positive effects across the economic SA objectives particularly SA objective 6 and 7. Again, the objective scored many minor negative impacts across the social and environmental SA objectives as economic growth competes with those aims.



**Figure 5: Key objectives (as relevant at the time)**

Objectives	SA Objectives																
	Social		Environmental			Economic		Environmental									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
1	0	+	?	+	?	0	0	0	?	0	0	0	?	0	?	?	
2	-	+	?	+	?	0	?	-	++	?	++	+	0	?	++	?	?
3	?	-	+	?	++	?	++	++	?	-	?	?	-	?	-	?	?
4	++	++	?	+	?	0	?	-	?	-	?	?	-	?	-	?	?
5	+	+	?	+	?	+	+	?	?	?	?	-	?	?	-	?	?

**Figure 6: Potential significant sustainability effects of the key objectives (as relevant at the time) for the Local Plan**

5.179 Objective 4 was identified has having potential significant positive effects across the social objectives especially SA objectives 1 and 2 but this had potential negative impacts on many of the environmental SA objectives as housing growth will always impact on environmental objectives.

5.180 Objective 5 generally had potential positive impacts across the social economic and some environmental objectives. However, depending on the infrastructure proposed this could also result in minor negative impacts to the environment.

5.181 Regarding the policy directions ('themes'), all scored major and minor positive contributions to sustainability across all the social, economic and environmental objectives (see Figure 7).

5.182 There were limited minor and no major negative impacts. This was because all these policy themes are very positive in their aim to deliver sustainable development. It was noted however, that there are of course conflicts and competing needs in terms of development growth and protecting of the environment, but these can only really be addressed and mitigated when assessing the detail in the policy itself.

5.183 Many of the potential impacts were noted as still being uncertain because these policy directions are just directions at this stage in time and do not contain the detail needed to assess whether the policy will have short, medium- or long-term impacts and whether any negative impacts can be mitigated. In addition, the objectives and policy directions were very wide at this stage in plan-making process.

5.184 It was noted that once the draft policies are beginning to take shape, it would be easier to see how certain policies will mitigate any negative impacts on sustainability.

Policy Direction	SA Objectives																
	Social		Environmental			Economic		Environmental									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
1	-	+	0	+	+	0	0	+	+	++	++	?	?	++	?	+	
2	0	+	0	+	?	+	++	++	+	?	?	?	?	-	?	?	?
3	++	++	++	++	?	0	0	?	-	?	?	?	?	-	?	?	?

**Figure 7: Potential significant sustainability effects of the policy directions for the Local Plan.**

Comments received to the vision, objectives and direction for the development management policies consultation (2020)

5.185 Comments were invited on the third Regulation 18 Consultation document between 27 January and 9 March 2020. Full details of the Council's consultation activities can be found in the Summary of Consultation Responses Document March 2020.

5.186 Over the consultation period, 657 completed questionnaires were received.

Overall, there was a general agreement with the identified key issues (as relevant at the time), the objectives, the themes and the direction for the DMP policies.

- 5.187 There were respondents that agreed that it was important to enhance and maintain the borough's attractiveness and distinctive identity and it was commented that there was a specific need to maintain separate communities and settlement areas. It was stated that the borough should not be treated as a single homogeneous area.
- 5.188 One of the most frequent responses related to the importance of the function and conservation of the existing Green Belt. There was a clear view that all development in the Green Belt should be opposed by the council as the Green Belt is integral to the success of the objectives around health, wellbeing, climate change and the natural environment.
- 5.189 The issue of affordability of homes was raised several times with respondents highlighting the high property prices within the borough and the need to focus on delivering affordable housing to offset this.
- 5.190 The need to resolve existing infrastructure deficits prior to planning for future growth was also mentioned as well as improving the availability of local school places, mobile phone signal, the condition of the borough's roads, tackling fly tipping and littering. Several respondents cited issues with the quantity and quality of educational facilities within the borough as well as health related infrastructure such as Dentists and GP Surgeries. These respondents added a concern that with the proposed increase in housing, a minimum of 623 per year (as relevant at the time), the pressure on these areas of infrastructure is likely to be increasingly acute.

## **Finalising alternative options (2020 – 2022)**

### Updating and finalising the evidence base

- 5.191 Having taken the representations made during each of the Regulation 18 consultations into account, the Council undertook further work on the evidence base and reviewed national planning policy in order to refine the options assessed so far and determine which options could be considered as options for the spatial strategy.
- 5.192 The evidence base documents set out in paragraphs 5.193 – 5.219 are those that were particularly relevant to the formation of the options. Those evidence base documents set out in the bullet points below, are those prepared, and which have principally informed the detailed development management policies in the draft Local Plan. A summary of the documents set out in the

bullet points below is set out in Appendix A.

- Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) – 2020
- Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Site Assessment Update – May 2021
- Boat Dwellers Accommodation Assessment (BDAA) – 2022
- Strategic Employment Land Review Addendum – 2021
- Local Green Space Study – 2021
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) (Addendum) – 2021
- Transport Assessment – 2022

#### Local Housing Need & Land Availability Assessment (2021 & 2022)

5.193 Applying the Government's standard methodology, the calculation of Elmbridge's housing need had increased to 647 dwellings per annum, or 9,705 over the plan period. This was on the basis of the 2014 household projections for the 10-year projection period of 2022 to 2032 and the 2021 affordability ratio (median house price to median gross annual workplace-based earnings) published in March 2022.

5.194 Further work on the Land Availability Assessment (LAA) previously published in 2018 was also undertaken and the Assessment updated in 2021 and 2022. The findings of the 2022 LAA resulted in a new total estimated capacity of 6,787 units. This comprised units under construction; sites with planning permission (minus a 10% non-implementation discount); the LAA sites (with a 15% non-implementation discount applied) and a windfall allowance of 987 units.

5.195 This showed a shortfall in meeting the local housing need figure of 2,918 units (30%) across the plan-period.

#### Local Housing Need Assessment (2020)

5.196 The Council commissioned a Local Housing Needs Assessment (2020) to provide a break-down of the types, sizes and tenures of homes required in the borough on the basis on the local housing need figure set by the Government's Standard Methodology e.g. of the number of homes the Council should be seeking to provide how many should be affordable, smaller homes, homes for the older population. At the time of the Assessment, the local housing need figure was 626 dwellings per annum.

5.197 The Assessment showed of the local housing need figure, 269 units should be affordable the majority of which were required as 2-bedroom (34%) and 4-bedroom (40%) homes. In regard to market housing, the need continued to be for smaller units (50% 2-bedrooms, 20% 1-bedroom and 20% 3-bedrooms).

5.198 In November 2021, an addendum was published clarifying the breakdown of affordable housing need for rented affordable tenures. The addendum clarified that the requirement was for 17% social rented.

#### Settlement Assessment (Update) 2020

5.199 The Settlement Assessment was updated from that previously published in 2015 to ensure that the data and information presented was up to date and that the conclusions of the Assessment remained. For example, taking account of the provision of new secondary schools within the borough and changes to other services and facilities including amended public transport services / timetables.

5.200 As with the 2015 version, the Update concluded that future development can be located in any of the settlements of Elmbridge as they are all considered sustainable.

#### Green Belt Site Assessment – Explanatory Notes & Assessments (2021)

5.201 The purpose the Explanatory Notes (prepared on a draft confidential basis to inform Councillors in the decision making process) was to set out the approach taken by officers to assessing the suitability of potential development sites within the Green Belt to inform the Council's consideration of the appropriateness of a potential spatial strategy for the borough that included, subject to the demonstration of exceptional circumstances, the release of Green Belt.

5.202 The Explanatory Note sets out that the approach to assessing sites had been developed using the advice within the NPPF and the National Planning Practice Guidance on Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessments, as well as best-practice examples from other local planning authorities.

5.203 Following the initial sieving exercise (as detailed in the Explanatory Notes), appropriate sites were assessed by officers against the criteria (as detailed in Stage 2 of the Explanatory Notes) and an assessment pro-forma produced making an officer recommendation as to whether a site should be allocated.

#### Exceptional Circumstances Case: Green Belt (January 2022)

5.204 This paper prepared (on a draft confidential basis) to assist Councillors in their consideration of the preferred development strategy for Elmbridge Borough to be set out in the draft Local Plan 2037.

5.205 Prepared by officers, the paper identified and considered whether exceptional



circumstances could be fully evidenced and justified to make amendments to the boundary of the Green Belt in accordance with national policy and guidance and case law.

5.206 The paper set out that, having considered the provisions of the NPPF; case law; the Local Plan evidence; and any other factor that Councillors consider relevant, that it was for them to exercise their planning judgement as reach a decision as to whether exceptional circumstances were fully evidenced and justified.

#### Viability Assessment including First Homes 2022

5.207 The purpose of undertaking this study was to assess the viability impacts of emerging planning policies, so as to inform their further development, and to assess the potential viability and deliverability of development allocations whilst taking account of emerging policies. Overall, the Council requires the assessment in order to demonstrate that the policies proposed do not undermine the deliverability of the Plan.

5.208 The assessment involved the review of financial viability using a site typologies approach (test scenarios representing a range of site types/development schemes likely to come forward through the emerging Local Plan) as well as a more specific review of proposed site allocations, where those are important in delivering the aims and objectives of the Plan overall.

5.209 A key area of the assessment was the viability of delivering affordable housing within the borough including, the implications of the introduction of the Government's policy on First Homes.

#### Duty to Cooperate

5.210 Throughout the plan preparation period, the Council has actively engaged with neighbouring authorities and those within the wider South East region, to see whether any other Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) could meet any of Elmbridge's potential unmet housing need. This forms part of the Council's duty to cooperate requirements and how the Council has discharged its duty is set out in the Duty to Cooperate Statement of Compliance (May 2022).

5.211 As part of the [Alternative Development Options \(2016\)](#) paper, the Council undertook an early assessment of whether our housing need could be addressed with the assistance of neighbouring authorities. This summarised the position of each LPA in Surrey and the two adjoining London Borough's Local Plan position; their current housing target; and emerging housing need figure. As part of this work, officers also looked at each authorities' most

recent assessment of land supply and whether they were also looking to or, had, undertaken a review of their Green Belt boundaries.

- 5.212 The conclusion of this work was that there appeared to be no opportunity for the adjoining and surrounding authorities, within the immediate or wider housing market area, which could assist in meeting our local housing need. It was stated however, that as part of the Council's duty to co-operate obligations, it would formally write to the adjoining and neighbouring authorities to enquire as to whether they have the ability to accommodate any unmet housing need.
- 5.213 As evidenced in the Duty to Co-operate Compliance Statement (2022), on-going engagement of other authorities with the aim of seeking to address any potential unmet housing need, has continued throughout the preparation of the Local Plan. As part of the Council's Regulation 18 consultation (2016/17 and 2019), options for how housing need could be met were presented. Both consultations included options that would require the Council to work with neighbouring authorities to address any unmet need.
- 5.214 Full details of the response received from local authorities in regard to the duty and unmet need are presented in the Compliance Statement however, in summary, all LPAs responses stated that their authorities were in similar positions in terms of facing significant challenges in seeking to meet development needs and were unlikely to do so and / or, were unlikely to be able to meet the unmet development needs of Elmbridge. All those meeting / planning to meet their development needs were having to amend Green Belt boundaries to do so.
- 5.215 As work of the Local Plan progressed and with on-going joint working with authorities in the Housing Market Area (HMA) and wider-Surrey area, the evidence continued to show that it was highly unlikely that other neighbouring and Surrey authorities could assist the Council in meeting its housing need. Therefore, in January 2020 officers wrote to all local authorities in the South East region under the duty to see if they could assist in accommodating our anticipated residual housing.
- 5.216 The area in which officers engaged other local authorities was extended to the South East following a meeting with officers from the then Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) as part of wider discussions with Elmbridge Officers and Councillors on housing numbers and the Green Belt. In discussing the challenge Elmbridge and other Surrey Authorities faced in balancing the requirement to meet our housing numbers and, protect the Green Belt, it was suggested that the Council look beyond County boundaries and engage across a wider area. Reference to the coast was made as well as the entirety of the South East forming part of the larger London Housing

Market Area (HMA).

- 5.217 The responses received are set out in detail in the Compliance Statement. However, the conclusion of this process was that no local authority in the South East consider themselves to be in a position to assist in meeting the potential unmet housing need of the borough (circ. 4,000 homes on the basis of not amending the Green Belt boundary and on the local Plan evidence base available at the time).
- 5.218 During October 2021, officers again wrote to the local planning authorities within Elmbridge's housing market area, and those with which there is a shared boundary, to ask whether they would be able to accommodate any of the borough's development needs. Officers also wrote to every other local planning authority within the South East of England, to invite them into discussions as to whether there would be a reasonable prospect for meeting Elmbridge's needs within their areas. Respondents all advised that there is no possibility of their areas accommodating Elmbridge's unmet needs.
- 5.219 From the process of actively engaging with neighbouring authorities and those within the wider South East region, it became apparent that due to their own constraints and / or their current plan position, no other local authority had the capacity available to meet any unmet housing need arising from Elmbridge.

## Refining the Options

- 5.220 As set out in paragraph 5.193, the housing need figure for the borough is 647 dwellings per annum; 9,705 dwellings over the plan period. This meant that Options 1 (intensify urban areas) and 5 (optimise urban area and small areas of Green Belt release) (as set out in the Option 2019 Consultation, see paragraph 5.116 for full details), which previously met housing need, no longer did. Only Option 3 (optimise urban area and large Green Belt release) would meet need in full.
- 5.221 However, Option 3 scored many significant negative impacts in its assessment within the sustainability work carried out and would undermine the aim and purposes of Green Belt. In addition, an initial assessment of the mitigation required was not considered to be deliverable. For these reasons, this option was not developed further as a reasonable alternative for the spatial strategy.
- 5.222 As set out in paragraphs 5.210 – 5.219, from the very beginning of the development of the draft Local Plan, and throughout all Regulation 18 consultations, the Council has actively engaged with neighbouring authorities and those within the wider South East region, to see whether any other LPA

could meet any of Elmbridge's potential unmet housing need. From these activities, it has become apparent that due to their own constraints including Green Belt and / or current plan position, no local authority has the spare capacity to meet Elmbridge's potential unmet housing need. Therefore, Options 2 (optimise urban area and 3 areas of Green Belt release) and 4 (optimise urban area) were no longer considered as options to be brought forward as both relied on the duty to provide for any unmet housing need.

5.223 Taking account of the above limitations across all the Options and having reviewed national planning policy and the findings of the evidence base work undertaken between 2020 and 2022, three new Options (4A, 5A and 6) were developed to inform the potential spatial strategy for the draft Local Plan.

5.224 An additional option was also considered at this stage which consisted of reallocating Strategic Employment Land (SEL) for residential use. This option was previously regarded as unreasonable in 2016 as it was considered a valuable use which was contributing to the local economy and protected by current planning policy. Further evidence work has been carried out and the 2020 Local Market Appraisal provided updated information about the demand for large office buildings as well as the need for warehousing and distribution uses. Although it was concluded that larger office units were in lesser demand and some were already being converted to residential use under permitted development rights, it was concluded that pursuing this option would reduce the opportunities for business to locate, continue to operate or expand in the borough. In addition, it was considered premature to undertake additional evidence-gathering work to inform this option until there is a period of stability following the Covid-19 pandemic and any resultant changes in work practices. For these reasons, this option remains discounted.

## The spatial strategy options

5.225 Following the above process of developing, assessing and considering potential development options to form the basis of the spatial strategy for the borough, the Council considered there to be three 'reasonable options' remaining at this stage of the local plan process. These are set out below.

**Option 4a - Optimisation** - Option 4 from the Options Consultation 2019 is no longer considered to be reasonable due to its reliance on neighbouring authorities to meet residual need. However, 85% of respondents from that consultation supported Option 4 as it would optimise densities, ensure effective use of the urban area and maintain existing Green Belt boundaries. Therefore, a new policy option based on Option 4 has been considered. Option 4a aims to deliver 70% of the borough's housing need on urban land only (6,787 new homes; an average of 452 homes per annum across the

plan-period). There is considered to be strong community support for this option, but it would not meet the borough's need for housing in full.

**Option 5a - Optimisation and small Green Belt release** - consists of the 6,787 units which could be identified on urban sites within the LAA, with an additional 2,395 units to be accommodated on 12 sites to be released from the Green Belt (with an additional two sites safeguarded to meet future development needs). The Green Belt sites were identified within Option 5 of the Options Consultation 2019 (which itself proposed 33 sites for release). Having conducted a review of Option 5, the number of sites was reduced. This option would provide a shortfall of 522 dwellings across that plan-period (35 dwellings per annum) which is considered to be negligible particularly as additional land has been identified to be safeguarded to meet development needs beyond the plan-period (in accordance with paragraph 143 of the NPPF, which seeks to ensure that boundaries to the Green Belt have a degree of permanence and are not continually amended) and could be bought forwarded earlier if necessary should housing delivery not meet expected levels.

**Option 6 - Optimisation and intensification in more sustainable locations** - This option includes the same sites within the urban area as Option 5a, but increases the development densities for those urban sites located in the town, district and local centres as well as any sites close to the borough's railway stations. This is in accordance with paragraph 130 of the NPPF, which aims to ensure that significant development is focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable. Though intensification was the basis of Option 1 presented in the Options Consultation 2019, Option 6 is different in that it does not include land swapping of urban green spaces and does not use a blanket density across all urban sites. The evidence supporting this option has found that 9,776 dwellings can be delivered, which would meet Elmbridge's housing need in full with a small amount of contingency.

5.226 At this stage of the process, Options 4a, 5a and 6 were identified as options to be further considered and a preferred option to be selected to inform the spatial strategy for the emerging draft Local Plan.

## Concluding commentary

5.227 During the preparation of the draft Local Plan, several options have evolved that could form the basis of the spatial strategy for the borough in the emerging Local Plan. These have evolved over the last seven years and have been informed by the relevant national planning policy and guidance at the time, the Local Plan evidence base including the Sustainability Appraisal as it has emerged, on-going discussions with neighbouring and other authorities as part of the duty-to-cooperate, and consultation with our residents and other interested stakeholders as part of the series of Regulation 18 consultations.

5.228 It has also been through this process and by collaborative working between officers, the LPWG and other Members that the options have evolved and been refined to the point where the Council considered there to be three options remaining prior to the Regulation 19 stage of the Local Plan process.

5.229 These three options are:

- Option 4a – Optimisation
- Option 5a – Optimisation and small Green Belt areas
- Option 6 – Optimisation and intensification in more sustainable locations

5.230 Over the 2021/22 period, these options were discussed in detail in order for the Council to determine its preferred spatial strategy option for the emerging Local Plan including, the justification for this, and the reasoning for discounting the alternations. An overview of this process is set out in Section 6.

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## 6. Considering the options for the spatial strategy

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- 6.1 One of the tests of “soundness” for Local Plans identified by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2021) (paragraph 35b)) is that it is “justified” - an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence.
- 6.2 As set out in Section 5 of this paper, the Council has considered several options regarding the spatial strategy to support the place-making vision for the borough / how development need could be addressed. These options have evolved over time in response to several factors including the wider planning context; the Local Plan evidence base as it is prepared / reviewed; consultation responses (received during the three Regulation 18 consultations); and from collaborative working with neighbouring authorities throughout the preparation of the draft Local Plan as part of the duty to cooperate.
- 6.3 As set out at the end of Section 5, in determining the preferred spatial strategy for the draft Local Plan, the options have evolved / been discounted in the process, so that there were 3 options that remained to be considered by the Council. These were:
- Option 4a – Optimisation
  - Option 5a – Optimisation and small Green Belt release
  - Option 6 – Optimisation and intensification in more sustainable locations
- 6.4 At a Special Council meeting on 13 June 2022, the Council agreed that the preferred spatial strategy for the borough, forming the basis of the new Local Plan was, Option 4a – Optimisation.
- 6.5 Therefore, this section of the paper sets out the Council’s reasoning for discounting Options 5a and 6. Section 7 of this paper sets out the Council’s reasoning for identifying Option 4a, as its preferred spatial strategy for the new Local Plan.

### **Option 5a – Optimisation and small Green Belt release**

- 6.6 Option 5a consists of the 6,787 units which could be identified on urban sites within the Land Availability Assessment (LAA) 2022, with an additional 2,395 units to be accommodated on 12 sites released from the Green Belt<sup>5</sup>. The 12

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<sup>5</sup> Later in the document, 15 Green Belt sites are referred to. This is because two additional sites within the Green Belt were proposed for release and safeguarding to meet future development needs as

Green Belt sites were identified within Option 5 of the Options Consultation 2019 (which itself proposed 33 sites for release). However, having conducted a review of Option 5 and on the basis of further evidence base gathered and an assessment of the sites suitability and deliverability only 12 sites were suitable for inclusion as allocated housing sites.

- 6.7 This option would provide a shortfall of 523 dwellings<sup>6</sup> across that plan-period (35 dwellings per annum) which is considered to be negligible particularly as additional land could be identified to be safeguarded to meet development needs beyond the plan-period (in accordance with paragraph 143 of the NPPF, which seeks to ensure that boundaries to the Green Belt have a degree of permanence and are not continually amended) and could be bought forwarded earlier if necessary, should housing delivery not meet expected levels.

### Relevant policy tests

- 6.8 Paragraph 11 of the NPPF states that, “plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For plan-making this means that:
- a) all plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to: meet the development needs of their area; align growth and infrastructure; improve the environment; mitigate climate change (including by making effective use of land in urban areas) and adapt to its effects
  - b) Strategic policies should, as a minimum, provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses, as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas, unless:
    - i) the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type and distribution of development in the plan area [footnote 6 sets out the national constraints which include Green Belt]; or
    - ii) any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this

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part of Option 5a. No capacities were assigned hence, they are not referred to here in terms of adding to the number of homes that can be delivered within the plan-period. Furthermore, one other sites was proposed under Option 5a for release from the Green Belt and allocation as a waste / employment site. Hence it is referred to later in the document but as it does not add to housing capacity, has not been referred to here.

<sup>6</sup> Based on the local housing need figure of 647 dwellings per annum; 9,705 dwellings across the plan-period up to 2037.



Framework taken as a whole.”

- 6.9 With paragraph 11 of the NPPF in mind, the Council must be satisfied that its draft Local Plan and preferred spatial strategy promotes a sustainable pattern of development for the borough that seeks to meet the development needs of the area (and the unmet needs of neighbouring authorities); that aligns growth and infrastructure; improves the environment; mitigates climate change (including making effective use of land in the urban area) and adapts to its effects.
- 6.10 It is not necessarily the case that a Plan which does not seek to meet needs in full will be found unsound. The NPPF provides for such a scenario by including the wording at paragraph 11b) which advises that strategic policies should meet objectively assessed needs in full “unless...”
- 6.11 In determining whether Option 5a is the Council’s preferred spatial strategy, the Council has to consider whether, in light of the evidence base and the scale of the need for development, the policies within the NPPF provide a strong reason for restricting development within Elmbridge (as per paragraph 11b)i)). The policies which may provide a strong reason for restricting development are listed at footnote 7, includes Green Belt.
- 6.12 In considering whether or not the policies which address land within the Green Belt provide a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development within Elmbridge, the Council has to consider in particular paragraphs 140, 141 and 142 of the NPPF.

Paragraph 140 advises that:

“Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans. Strategic policies should establish the need for any changes to Green Belt boundaries, having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so they can endure beyond the plan period...” (paragraph 140).

Paragraph 141 states:

“Before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries, the strategic policy-making authority should be able to demonstrate that it has examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development. This will be assessed through the examination of its strategic policies, which will take into account the preceding paragraph, and whether the strategy:

- a) makes as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land;
- b) optimises the density of development in line with the policies in chapter 11 of this Framework, including whether policies promote a significant uplift in minimum density standards in town and city centres and other locations well served by public transport; and
- c) has been informed by discussions with neighbouring authorities about whether they could accommodate some of the identified need for development, as demonstrated through the statement of common ground.”

Paragraph 142 states:

“When drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries, the need to promote sustainable patterns of development should be taken into account. Strategic policy-making authorities should consider the consequences for sustainable development of channeling development towards the urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary. Where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously developed and/or is well-served by public transport. They should also set out ways in which the impact of removing land from the Green Belt can be offset through compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land”.

- 6.13 The spatial strategy options that the Council has considered are set out in detail in Section 5 of the paper. Section 5 also includes the details of how these have been informed by the evidence base and the process undertaken to explore whether the borough’s housing need can be met through using suitable brownfield and under-utilised land; optimising densities; and through the through on-going discussions with other authorities as part of the duty to cooperate.
- 6.14 As set out in paragraph 5.225 of Section 5, whilst Options 4a and 5a seek to make as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites: wherever a brownfield site has been assessed to be suitable, available and achievable this land has been proposed for allocation in the draft Local Plan, sufficient land within the urban area has not been identified.
- 6.15 Furthermore, whilst Option 6 identifies that development needs could be met in the urban areas, this option is not considered appropriate by the Council

(see paragraphs 6.220 – 6.241).

- 6.16 Therefore, in considering whether Option 5a is appropriate, it has been necessary for the Council to consider whether there are any exceptional circumstances which would warrant the release of land from the Green Belt in order to meet the borough's full housing need, and potentially the unmet needs arising from neighbouring authorities.
- 6.17 Case law indicates that the question as to whether 'exceptional circumstances' exists involves an exercise of planning judgement, which will only be interfered with if it can be shown that the authority misdirected itself in law or acted irrationally (*Keep Bourne End Green v Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government* [2021] JPL 181, at para 153).
- 6.18 In *Calverton Parish Council v Nottingham City Council* [2015] EWHC 1078 (Admin), the court said that when making a planning judgement about 'exceptional circumstances' the following five factors should, at least initially, be identified and considered (at para 51):
- (i) the acuteness / intensity of the objectively assessed need within Elmbridge and neighbouring authorities (matters of degree may be important);
  - (ii) the inherent constraints on supply / availability of land prima facie suitable for sustainable development;
  - (iii) the consequent difficulties in achieving sustainable development without impinging on the Green Belt;
  - (iv) the nature and extent of the harm to this Green Belt (or those parts of it which would be lost if the boundaries were reviewed); and
  - (v) the extent to which the consequent impacts on the purposes of the Green Belt may be ameliorated or reduced to the lowest reasonably practicable extent.
- 6.19 In determining the preferred spatial strategy, the Council considered each of the above five points and ultimately, reached a conclusion that the exceptional circumstances required to amend the boundaries of the Green Belt through the preparation of the new Local Plan, are not fully evidenced and justified and (applying paragraph 11(b)(i) of the NPPF) that this provides a strong reason for restricting the scale and distribution of housing development in the borough.
- 6.20 In reaching this conclusion, the Council has considered the relevant policies within the NPPF and each of the points in the Calverton Case as set out below.

**(i) the acuteness / intensity of the objectively assessed need within Elmbridge and neighbouring authorities (matters of degree may be important)**

- 6.21 As part of the preparation of the new Local Plan, the Council is required by the NPPF to seek opportunities to meet the development needs of the area, as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas.
- 6.22 Regarding housing need, the NPPF (paragraph 61) states that to determine the minimum number of homes needed, strategic policies should be informed by a local housing need assessment, conducted using the Standard Method in national planning guidance. It continues that only in exceptional circumstances would an alternative approach which also reflects current and future demographic trends and markets signals, be justified. In addition to the local housing need figure, the NPPF also requires that any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas should also be taken into account in establishing the amount of housing to be planned for.
- 6.23 The Council has prepared a Topic Paper on how the Local Housing Need figure has been established including why it does not consider there are any exceptional circumstances that would justify the Council to deviate from the standard method. As such, applying the Standard Method (published December 2020) the local housing need for Elmbridge is 647 dwellings per annum (9,705 dwellings over a 15-year period (2022 – 2037))<sup>7</sup>.
- 6.24 The annual local housing need figure of 647 dwellings per annum is significantly higher than the existing target set within the adopted **Core Strategy (2011)** (225 dwellings per annum; 3,375 net dwellings across the Plan period between 2011 and 2026). As set out in Table 5, over the last 11-years, 3,627 net additional homes have been delivered, an average of 330 per annum. At no point in the last 11-years has the Council delivered below the housing target set out in the Core Strategy.
- 6.25 Furthermore, since 2018 the Council has facilitated a step-change in housing delivery with the drive towards making more efficient use of sites in accordance with the NPPF and, providing smaller units in accordance with our housing needs assessments. Table 5 shows, that during the monitoring period 2018/19 – 2021/22, 1,822 homes have been delivered (456 homes an average per annum). Table 5 also shows that in the last monitoring period (2021/22) the number of homes required (647 as set by the standard methodology) has been within the existing urban areas and via a strategy of

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<sup>7</sup> The Council's latest calculation of housing need is based on the household projections for the period 2022 – 2032 (from the 2014 projections) and applying the affordability ratio published 23 March 2022.

optimisation.

- 6.26 Regarding housing type, the Council's Authorities Monitoring Report (AMR) for 2020/21, show that the number of gross units being delivered as 4+ bedrooms for the period was, 30% of all completions. This percentage is in contrast to circ. 50% of all completions provided as 4+ bedrooms in the 2017/18 monitoring period. A 20% increase in the number of small units to meet need.

<b>Monitoring period</b>	<b>Number of homes delivered (net)</b>
2011/12	300
2012/13	264
2013/14	257
2014/15	273
2015/16	240
2016/17	267
2017/18	231
2018/19	353
2019/20	396
2020/21	302
2021/22	771
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,627</b>

**Table 5: Net number of homes delivered per monitoring period over the last 11 years**

- 6.27 Whilst the Council acknowledges that the local housing need is a challenge, it does not consider the acuteness / intensity of the objectively assessed need to be so much so that, this would justify amending the Green Belt. This is particularly given that approximately 70% (circ. 6,787 units) of the local housing need figure can be met within the urban areas.
- 6.28 Putting the borough's local housing need into context, the Council does not consider its local housing need any more intense / acute when compared to other neighbouring Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) and those in the wider-South East.
- 6.29 For example, of the LPAs in the South East including the two neighbouring London Boroughs of the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the London Borough of Richmond, Elmbridge has the 24<sup>th</sup> lowest local housing need figure. The average local housing need is 812 dwelling per annum.
- 6.30 In addition, when comparing the local housing need figure as a percentage of the population (as at 2022 using the 2014 population projections) and as a percentage of households (as at 2022 using the 2014 household projections), Elmbridge has the 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> lowest percentages respectively (0.56% and 1.14% respectively). Across the wider South East including the two

neighbouring London Boroughs, the average percentage is 0.55% and 1.32% respectively.

#### The need of neighbouring authorities

- 6.31 As part of the preparation of the new Local Plan, the Council is required by the NPPF (paragraph 11), to seek opportunities to meet the development needs of the area, 'as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas'.
- 6.32 Throughout the plan preparation period, the Council has engaged extensively with a range of partners under the duty to co-operate. This engagement has been comprehensively recorded in the Duty to Co-operate Statement of Compliance (May 2022). In relation to housing need, the Council has sought to understand whether any other authorities have unmet needs, in which case consideration must be given as to whether these needs could be met in Elmbridge.
- 6.33 It has already been set out in this paper (see Section 5) that neighbouring authorities are unable to assist the Council in meeting any of its potential unmet housing need. However, as part of the consideration of the whether exceptional circumstances can be evidenced and justified, and in accordance with the NPPF and the application of the Calverton case, the Council has also considered it important to assess the potential unmet need arising from neighbouring authorities.
- 6.34 The issue of objectively assessed housing need and unmet development needs arising from the Housing Market Area (HMA) and neighbouring local authority areas of Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, Mole Valley District Council, London Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames, Guildford Borough Council, Runnymede Borough Council, Spelthorne Borough Council and Woking Borough Council has therefore been considered. The information is presented in Appendix B and has been obtained from information in the public domain and / or from on-going discussions.
- 6.35 These authorities have reached varying stages in their Local Plan preparation process, but a best estimate is that there will be an unmet need of approximately 11,500 dwellings arising from neighbouring authorities, and those in the Housing Market Area (HMA), over a fifteen-year period.
- 6.36 In considering the spatial strategy set out within the draft Local Plan, the Council has considered whether any or all of this potential unmet need could be accommodated within Elmbridge and the weight applied to this point in considering whether exceptional circumstances are evidenced and justified to

amend the Green Belt boundary.

- 6.37 The Council acknowledges the potential level of unmet need but has weighed this against the potential impacts accommodating additional growth over and above its own local housing need figure could have.
- 6.38 In particular, the additional harm this would have on the Green Belt and increased pressure on both the Local and Strategic Road Networks. Meeting all or some of this potential unmet need would almost certainly require significant Green Belt release similar to that looked at under Option 3 from the Options Consultation 2019.
- 6.39 As set out in Section 5, Option 3 scored many significant negative impacts in its assessment within the sustainability work carried out and would undermine the aim and purposes of Green Belt. In addition, an initial assessment of the mitigation required was not considered to be deliverable. For these reasons, this option was not developed further as a reasonable alternative for the spatial strategy. The Council does not consider this to be desirable.

#### Affordable Housing

- 6.40 As set out in Section 4, one of the key challenges for the Council is the delivery of affordable homes. This is also one of the priorities set out in the Council Local Plan 2021/22.
- 6.41 The Council accept that Elmbridge one of the highest average house prices in the South East and that affordability levels are amongst the highest in Surrey. This is partly a consequence of the proximity to London, good communications to central London and the attractiveness of the Elmbridge's towns and open spaces, including the continual strength of the Green Belt. These factors are unlikely to change. In-migration pressures especially from London will continue with the result that house prices will likely continue to rise and so will, the Council believes, unaffordability levels.
- 6.42 Focusing on the Government's aim to boost significantly the supply of housing, the Council considers that the Government has incorrectly assumed that delivering more homes within the borough will improve affordability. The Council is mindful of the research undertaken for the former Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) by the University of Reading<sup>8</sup> which concluded:

'it may be difficult, or impossible, to achieve affordability targets at sub-

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<sup>8</sup> See A long-run model of housing affordability, by Geoffrey Mean, University of Reading, School of Economics, published by the Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011. ISBN: 978 1 4098 3174 7

regional levels. This is because local authorities, for example, may be close substitutes in terms of location for many households, so that increasing construction in a small number of areas generates strong population inflows, offsetting any improvement in affordability' (Meen, 2011, page 17).

- 6.43 The report further noted that even at a regional level, increases in construction produce only modest improvements in affordability and would need to be long-lasting. For an increase in housing supply to reduce prices, there would thus need to be a large uplift in supply rates across London and the South East.
- 6.44 The Council is therefore not convinced that building some 2,918 homes within the Green Belt over the latter phases of the plan-period will have any material effect on reducing either the average house price in the Borough or the unaffordability levels. Particularly, as this level of housing delivery, as set by the standard methodology, could not be maintained beyond the plan-period i.e. land is a finite resource.
- 6.45 In addition, with the Government's introduction of First Homes, the Council believes that new development will not provide the type of affordable homes most required within the borough. The Local Housing Needs Assessment (2020) and Addendum (2021) concluded that 71% of affordable housing need is for rented affordable tenures and 29% is for intermediate tenures which could include an element of home ownership e.g. First Homes.
- 6.46 The Government's policy on First Homes and how it should be implemented, as set out in the Government's Written Ministerial Statement (24 May 2021) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), requires that a minimum of 25% of all affordable housing secured through developer contributions e.g. on-site provision, must be First Homes. This appears to fit with the need for 29% of affordable housing to be in the form of intermediate tenures including First Homes. However, it is considered by the Council that other elements of the Government's policy will negatively impact in its ability to deliver the forms of affordable housing within the borough that are most needed.
- 6.47 For example, other requirements of the Government's policy are that First Homes must be sold at a minimum 30% discount from the open market valuation of the homes and the value of First Homes is capped at £250,000 after the discount is applied outside of London. Given the level of average house prices within the borough and the closing of the viability gap in recent years, the Council's evidence base shows that there will be limited opportunities to provide the remainder of the affordable housing required by its draft Local Plan policies.
- 6.48 In addition, the Local Plan Viability Assessment (2022) has shown that due to the cap applied, it will be extremely difficult to deliver any size of unit other



than a 1-bedroom property. This is particularly pertinent given that the Local Housing Needs Assessment (2020) identifies that 34% of affordable housing need is for 2-bedrooms, 11% 3-bedrooms and 40% for 4+ bedrooms. Only 15% of affordable housing need is for 1-bedroom properties. Even in terms of market supply, 80% of need is for properties of 2-bedrooms or more.

- 6.49 Furthermore, PPG (Paragraph: 011 Reference ID: 70-011-20210524) states that it is important that agreements to secure First Homes do not prevent homes from being sold for a long period and there may be circumstances where a suitable buyer for a First Homes cannot be found, even when the local restrictions have been lifted. Therefore, a local authority should include provisions in a section 106 agreement which allow a developer or First Homeowner to sell a First Home on the open market and remove the title restriction, as long as certain conditions are met.
- 6.50 Whilst PPG continues that in such circumstances it should be expected that the seller (either the developer or a future First Home owner) compensates the relevant Authority for the loss of the affordable housing unit, it is clear that there are circumstances whereby if a First Home is not sold within 6-months, it will revert to market housing.
- 6.51 As such the Council considers that with a First Home becoming available on the open market after 6-months if not sold, is in juxtaposition to the release of Green Belt to meet affordable housing need (both in terms of the types of homes required but also by being able to become market housing).

**ii) the inherent constraints on supply / availability of land prima facie suitable for sustainable development**

- 6.52 The evidence base prepared to inform the emerging draft Local Plan has shown that the supply of suitable, available and achievable sites in the existing urban areas is insufficient to meet the borough's local housing need. This is due to a number of factors including the inherent lack of a large supply of brownfield land and other physical and environmental constraints such as the borough's built, historic and natural environment.
- 6.53 As set out in Section 4, the borough is embedded in the Metropolitan Green Belt which permeates 57% of the borough. Green Belt has the highest policy protection and is identified as a constraint to development in the NPPF. Generally speaking, Green Belt policy operates to prevent built development in the Green Belt unless it falls into one of a small number of accepted categories or is justified (in a development management context) by "very special circumstances".
- 6.54 The Green Belt boundary is tightly drawn; with no land currently safeguarded

for future development. Also, the borough does not contain any land designated as Countryside. In addition to Green Belt, land in the borough<sup>9</sup> has a high nature conservation value and some has international importance too:

- 6.9% of the borough is within Flood Zone 3b (functional floodplain)
- 5.9% of the borough is land registered as Common or as a Village Green
- 4.7% of the borough is within a Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- 2.8% of the borough is designated as Ancient Woodland
- 1.8% of the borough is within a Registered Park or Garden
- 1.5% of the borough is within a Special Protection Area (SPA), or is designated as SANG (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace)

6.55 Due to the extent of coverage of the Green Belt (with no countryside beyond) and the environmental constraints on land within the borough, the Council does not consider it appropriate to accept development in less sustainable locations.

6.56 As set out in paragraphs 6.192 – 6.193, as a result of developing the sites under Option 5a, new residents would be located further from the facilities and services provided by the borough’s retail centres. In addition, the majority of sites are not located within a walkable distance (up to 800m) of key services and facilities including public transport nodes.

6.57 Thus, directing development towards the existing urban areas will avoid negative impacts on the sensitive designations highlighted above, and also these designations (in conjunction with the continued protection of the Green Belt) will in turn prevent development coming forward in less sustainable locations.

6.58 The Council considers this approach to be in accordance with paragraph 11(a) of the NPPF which states that all plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development.

**(iii) the consequent difficulties in achieving sustainable development without impinging on the Green Belt**

6.59 Section 39(2) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that local planning authorities must exercise their plan-making function “with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development”.

6.60 All of the potential strategies for growth have been considered within the

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<sup>9</sup> Some of these designations are on land designated as Green Belt others ‘additional’ constraints in terms of land mass i.e. cover land within the existing urban areas e.g. village greens and Flood Zone 3b functional flood plain.

Sustainability Assessment (SA) which supports the draft Local Plan. The assessment for Options 4a (no release of Green Belt) and 5a (small scale release of the Green Belt) are set out in Table 6.

- 6.61 The potential for meeting the local housing need in full by releasing some land from the Green Belt (Option 5a) scored a significant positive impact in relation to housing delivery. Minor positive impacts were noted in relation to all of the economic objectives, and across six of the environmental objectives. However, significant negative impacts were identified in relation to energy use. Minor negative impacts concerned the use of natural resources, flood risk, air quality and pollution, and biodiversity.
- 6.62 The potential for delivering some housing (though not the full local need) by optimising the urban areas and ensuring that efficient and effective use was made of the available land (Option 4a) was found to have a significant positive impact on preserving the borough's landscape character. Other positive impacts were on the environment, by reducing the need to travel, making use of previously developed land, reducing land contamination and conserving biodiversity. A significant negative impact was noted in relation to flood risk. Minor negative impacts related to the reduction in greenhouse gases, the use of natural resources, improvements to water quality and adaptations to the effects of climate change.

SA Objective	Option 4a: Urban area only	Option 5a: Urban area and 12 small parcels of G/B
	Using sites from LAA 2022 with non-implementation discount applied	Using sites from LAA 2022 with non-implementation discount applied and 12 sites from the Green Belt.
	<b>6787 homes</b>	<b>9182 homes</b>
1. Homes	--	-
2. Health	+	+
3. Heritage	?	?
4. Accessibility	+	+
5. Previously developed land	+	+
6. Economic growth	?	?
7. Employment	-	-
8. Energy Use	-	-
9. Natural Resources	-	-
10. Climate Change	-	+
11. Flooding	-	-
12. Water	-	-
13. Land	+	-
14. Pollution	-	-
15. Landscape	++	-
16. Biodiversity	+	-

**Table 6: The Sustainability Appraisal of Options 4a and 5a.**

- 6.63 Each of the options considered within the Sustainability Appraisal has some negative impacts – there was no one potential strategy which provided the clearest route to achieving the environmental, economic and social objectives set out in the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report 2020. As such, the Council has had to balance competing considerations. Notwithstanding this, the Council is satisfied that its recommended strategy for growth (Option 4a) positively contributes towards its place-making vision and the achievement of sustainable development (in accordance with paragraph 11(a) of the NPPF) and thus this can be achieved without impinging on the Green Belt.
- 6.64 In addition to assessing Option 5a against the sustainability objectives, each of the Green Belt sites forming part of the option were also assessed. The

details are set out in the Sustainability Appraisal for the draft Local Plan (June 2022).

**(iv) the nature and extent of the harm to this Green Belt (or those parts of it which would be lost if the boundaries were reviewed)**

6.65 Option 5a includes the release and allocation of 12 sites located in the Green Belt for housing development. Under this option, a further site would be released from the Green Belt for waste / employment uses in accordance with the Surrey Waste Local Plan 2019 and two sites released from the Green Belt and safeguarded to meet the borough's future development needs (housing).

6.66 As referred in other evidence base documents, these sites are:

- LA-58: Land north of A309, Long Ditton (part allocation / part safeguard)
- LA-70: Imber Court, Molesey (part allocation)
- SA-41: Loseberry Farm, Claygate (part allocation)
- SA-45: Land south of 77 Pleasant Place, Hersham (allocation)
- SA-47: Land at and south of Burhill School, Hersham (allocation)
- SA-50: Land at Moore Place Golf Club, Esher (allocation)
- SA-53: Land West of Slough Farm, Claygate (allocation)
- SA-54: Land south of Lammas Lane, Esher (allocation)
- SA-58: Land East of Telegraph Lane, Claygate (allocation)
- SA-59: Land east of Claygate House, Claygate (allocation)
- SA-68: Weylands Old Treatment works, Hersham (part allocation)
- SA-69: Land north of Café Rouge, Esher (allocation)
- GB51 / SA-66: Hersham Golf Club, Hersham (part allocation)
- LA-20: Chippings Farm & The Fairmile, Cobham (safeguard)

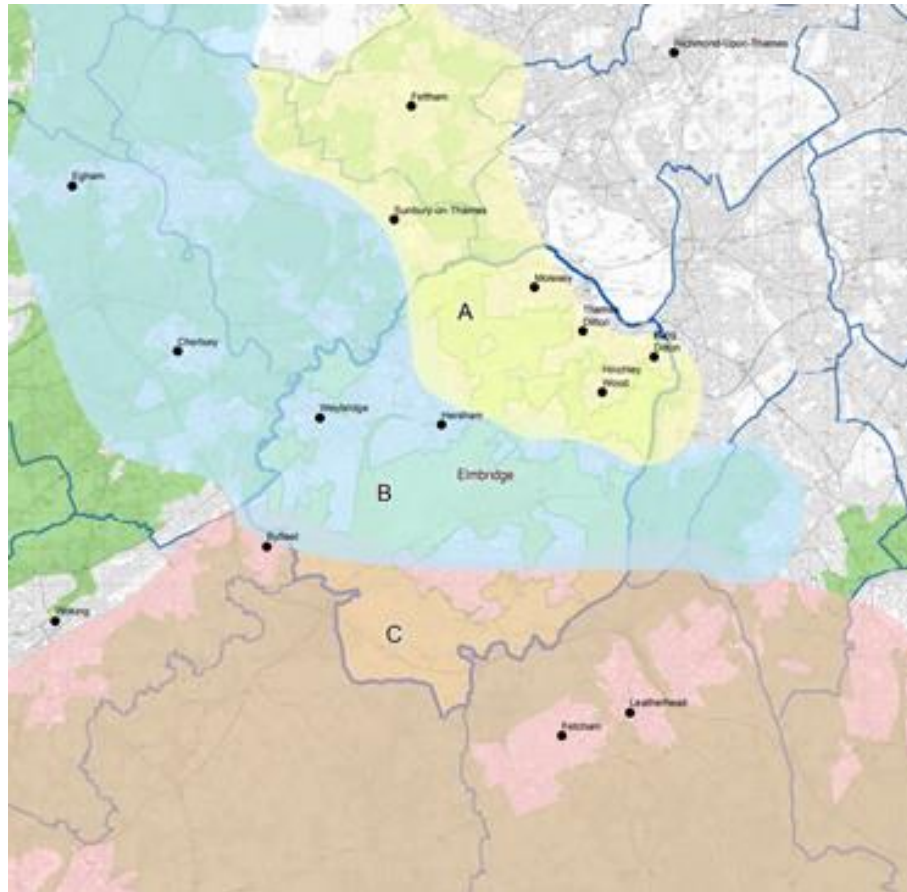
6.67 In considering the nature and harm to the Green Belt, the Council has considered this point at two levels: strategic and site specific.

6.68 In considering the harm to Green Belt, the Council has considered the purposes of Green Belt (set out in paragraph 138 of the NPPF, 2021) as relevant to Elmbridge borough; the Council's evidence base, in particular the Green Belt Boundary Reviews (2016 and 2018); the Planning Inspectors' Report into the examination of the Core Strategy; and Planning Inspectors' appeal decision in regard to large scale-development in the Green Belt within Elmbridge borough. Comments received during the Regulation 18 consultation regarding the harm to the Green Belt have also been considered.

The Evidence Base

6.69 As part of the Green Belt Boundary Review (GBBR, 2016) three Strategic

Green Belt Areas (Strategic Areas) were identified (see Figure 8). These areas were identified largely through commonalities in landscape character and natural constraints or barriers that distinguish between different parts of the Green Belt, and functional connections with the wider Metropolitan Green Belt.



**Figure 8: Strategic Areas of Green Belt**

- 6.70 The GBBR (2016) identifies Strategic Area A as forming part of a narrow and fragmented band of Green Belt which closely abuts the very edge of south-west London. It is identified as a ‘strategically important arc of Green Belt’ that can be traced from Heathrow Airport through to Epsom providing a narrow break between the built-form of outer London and several Surrey towns including for example, Walton-on-Thames / Hersham, Esher and Claygate (Elmbridge).
- 6.71 Within the Elmbridge context, the GBBR 2016, identifies Strategic Area A as forming a relatively narrow corridor of Green Belt in the north of the borough preventing further coalescence between the Greater London built-up area and settlements in the borough. It is identified that due to rapid suburbanization, the once small villages of Thames Ditton and Long Ditton were separated from Surbiton by sizeable swathes of open countryside, the settlements

coalesced and are now part of the wider, continuous built-up area of Greater London. The narrow strip of Green Belt lying to the south-west, is therefore particularly important; protecting Walton-on-Thames, Esher and Claygate from coalescence with the Greater London built-up area.

6.72 Regarding the purposes of Green Belt, the GBBR states that at a strategic level, Strategic Area A plays an important role in meeting the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy to prevent urban sprawl, in this case, the sprawl of London, by keeping land permanently open. The assessment of the Strategic Area against the relevant NPPF Purposes is as follows:

- Purpose 1 (to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas): meets the Purpose **very strongly** by acting as an important barrier to potential sprawl from the Greater London built-up area (including Molesey / Thames Ditton / and Long Ditton) and a number of large built-up areas within Surrey (for example Walton-on-Thames / Weybridge / Hersham, and Sunbury-on-Thames).
- Purpose 2 (to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another): meets the Purpose **very strongly** by establishing important gaps between a number of Surrey towns from merging into one another and the Greater London built-up area.
- Purpose 3 (to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment): meets the Purpose **weakly** due to the fragmented nature of the Green Belt and the prevalence of man-made/industrial uses, in particular in the western section of the Strategic Area.

6.73 The Council agrees with the assessment for Strategic Area A as set out above.

6.74 From the sites listed in paragraph 6.66, 8 are located in Strategic Area A (see Table 7).

6.75 In regard to the sensitivity of Strategic Area A to change, the GBBR 2016 states: “The importance of the Strategic Area as part of a wider Green Belt network must be acknowledged, yet there is a sense that, in some of the more fragmented and / or degraded parts of the Green Belt, change could be accommodated without causing any further harm to its integrity”.

Strategic Area	No. of sites in the Strategic Area	Site reference numbers
A	8	LA-58; LA-70; SA-66; SA-53; SA-58; SA-59; SA-68 and SA-69
B	6	LA-20; SA-41; SA-45; SA-47; SA-50; and SA-54
C	0	N/A

**Table 7: Option 5a sites by Strategic Area**

6.76 In terms of the 8 sites, whilst the Council notes that some contain previously developed land (PDL), they are **not** considered to be ‘degraded’. The areas in which the sites are located all continue to form a function in terms of the Green Belt purposes. In addition, SA-58 and SA-59 are open land and not previously developed land (PDL) and, whilst LA-58 and SA-66 / GB51, as a whole contain some elements of PDL, they are also largely open (see Table 8). For example, the area of LA-58 which is proposed for allocation is currently free from development and SA-66 / GB51 consists largely of the golf course as opposed to the existing built-form including for example the golf club and car park.

6.77 Furthermore, the Council considers that where the Green Belt is fragmented, this strengthens its importance in preventing the continued sprawl of Greater London and the coalescence of the borough’s existing communities. This approach is supported by the conclusions of the Core Strategy Inspectors who, on the 13 June 2011, published their report and in paragraph 26 stated:

“The balance struck by the Council in selecting the housing provision figure also reflects the weight it attaches to protecting land in the Green Belt, but as concluded above the plan’s approach on this matter is sound in principle. The borough which adjoins Greater London has a dispersed pattern of settlement and its urban areas are tightly bounded by the Green Belt. **Reflecting the urban morphology, the Green Belt is closely interwoven with the borough’s settlements and is generally fragmented. This renders it particularly vulnerable to erosion while it makes a significant contribution to environmental character as part of a green network. This is in addition to serving fundamental Green Belt purposes of preventing neighbouring towns from merging into one another and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment**”. (Council’s emphasis).

6.78 Paragraph 27 of the Inspectors’ Report continues:

**“In this context the impact of even small-scale deletions from the Green Belt would be likely to be harmful and undermine its longer-term protection.** The evidence does not demonstrate that exceptional



circumstances that might justify such deletions currently exist. And for the same reason I find no justification for recommending changes that would alter the level of protection for the Green Belt currently afforded by the saved local plan policies. The merits of particular cases can be considered through the development management process, and as the Council intends, policy guidance for major developed sites in the Green Belt will be provided in subsequent DPDs". (Council's emphasis).

- 6.79 The GBBR (2016) identifies Strategic Area B as forming part of a wide Green Belt buffer which broadly maintains separation between a series of distinct towns and villages in Surrey, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, as well as the outer-most fringes of London around Hillingdon. The coherence and continuity of the Green Belt is highly variable, with some fairly sizeable swathes of relatively open land (for example, between Weybridge in Elmbridge and Ashted in Mole Valley, and between Staines-upon-Thames in Spelthorne and Slough) but also significant fragmentation around settlements. In particular, this broad arc of Green Belt provides a series of narrow gaps between towns in Elmbridge, Spelthorne, Runnymede and Woking, as well as Mole Valley and Epsom and Ewell, thus maintaining the settlement pattern.
- 6.80 The GBBR 2016 continues, that this significant arc of Green Belt, is overall particularly important to NPPF Purpose 2 of Green Belt, preventing a series of neighbouring towns from merging. It also marks the transition from the semi-urban areas around Greater London to the wider open countryside and thus, to varying extents, is likely to serve Purpose 3.
- 6.81 Within the Elmbridge context, the GBBR 2016, identifies Strategic Area B as playing an important role in protecting the narrow gaps between the settlements of Walton-on-Thames / Weybridge / Hersham; Cobham / Oxshott; Esher; Claygate; and Field Common and the gaps at the fringes of the borough to settlements within Spelthorne, Runnymede and Woking in the north-west and west, as well as in Epsom and Ewell and Mole Valley in the east and south-east. It continues that Strategic Area B protects some particularly narrow gaps between settlements, in particular between Hersham and Esher (which have grown outwards towards each other) and between Weybridge and Byfleet (Woking), where industry has gradually developed on both sides of the former Brooklands racetrack and aerodrome.
- 6.82 Regarding the purposes of Green Belt, the GBBR states that at a strategic level, Strategic Area B maintains a series of narrow gaps between Elmbridge's towns, as well as settlements in adjacent boroughs and, on this axis, consists of the first sizeable swathe of countryside outside Greater London. It encompasses the relatively open and unspoilt Mole Valley, as well as significant areas of arable farmland around Claygate and a network of

densely wooded commons and heathlands which are of historic importance and provide recreational opportunities for local people. At the strategic level, the Strategic Area plays an important role in meeting the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy to prevent urban sprawl, in this case the sprawl of settlements in Surrey, by keeping land permanently open. Assessment of the Strategic Area against the relevant NPPF Purposes is as follows:

- Purpose 1 (to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas): meets the Purpose **strongly** by acting as an important barrier to potential sprawl from large built-up areas such as Walton-on-Thames / Weybridge / Hersham, Staines-upon-Thames, Egham / Englefield Green, Addlestone, Chertsey, and Woking / Byfleet / Woodham.
- Purpose 2 (to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another): meets the Purpose **strongly** by establishing important gaps between a number of Surrey towns from merging into one another.
- Purpose 3 (to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment): meets the Purpose **moderately** (there is some variation across the Strategic Area) by preventing encroachment into some relatively unspoilt areas of the countryside.

6.83 From the sites listed in paragraph 6.66, 6 are located in Strategic Area B (see Table 7).

6.84 In regard to the sensitivity of Strategic Area B to change, the GBBR 2016 states: "Given the Strategic Area protects a series of particularly narrow gaps between settlements, the character of the area could be altered significantly by alterations to Green Belt boundaries. Consideration should also be given to the area's particular sense of rurality. Some areas of Green Belt which already contain developments, such as St George's Hill, maybe less sensitive overall".

6.85 The Council agrees with the assessment for Strategic Area B as set out above.

6.86 Regarding to the individual sites listed in paragraph 6.66, the information from both the GBBR 2016 and 2018 is relevant in terms of identifying the harm to the Green Belt should they be allocated / safeguarded for development. This is also supported by Planning Inspectors' decisions.

6.87 Table 8 sets out how each site 'performs' against the Purpose of Green Belt and the overall integrity of the Green Belt as assessed by the appointed consulted Ove Arup<sup>10</sup>. However, in considering each site including, the details

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<sup>10</sup> Appendix C sets out a summary of the Assessment Criteria taken from the GBBR 2016.

of the GBBR documents and the Regulation 18 consultations responses, the Council in applying their own planning judgement has reached a different conclusion. Further details as to why the Council has reached a different conclusion are set out in paragraphs 6.88 – 6.155.

**LA-20: Chippings Farm & The Fairmile, Cobham (safeguard)**

- 6.88 Although the Council agrees with the overall Ove Arup assessment under their methodology for Purpose 1, the Council considers their assessment undervalues the importance of the Local Area in regard to Purposes 2 and 3.
- 6.89 The assessment criteria for Purpose 2 is that the Local Area prevents development that would result in the merging of or significant erosion of gaps between neighbouring settlements, including ribbon development along transport corridors that link settlements. It is the position of the Council, that Local Area 20 is part of a large open corridor of Green Belt that runs on one or both sides of the A3 all the way from north Cobham including Cobham Rugby Sports fields north, to Esher Commons finally ceasing only after Claremont Gardens. The Council considers the Local Area forms a vital component of this corridor that separates Cobham and Esher and that the gap, both actual and perceived, would be diminished if developed. Furthermore, the Council believes that the development of the Local Area would encapsulate the concept of 'ribbon development along transport corridors that link settlements'.
- 6.90 Purpose 3 is concerned with safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The GBBR 2016 has ranked the parcel as only a 2. The description at 6.1.4 states that the area is "heavily influenced by urban developments" and other uses. This concept is disputed by the Council as all parcels adjacent to an urban area have residential properties on their borders and it is not agreed / followed that this reduces the openness of the Green Belt parcel / Local Area itself. Furthermore, where the bulk of the development is proposed, the area is largely free from development and open.
- 6.91 Overall, the Council considers that the 'performance' of the Local Area is undervalued by the Ove Arup assessment.

**LA-58: Land north of A309, Long Ditton (part allocation / part safeguard)**

- 6.92 The Council disagrees with the Ove Arup assessment of Local Area 58 in regard to all the Purposes.
- 6.93 This area is considered by the Council to be the immediate "front line" in preventing London's sprawl continuing further south and adding to the urban feel of what would be a vastly solid urban grain from outer London beyond Long Ditton and into Hinchley Wood and Esher.

- 6.94 Emphasis on the A309 checking any further urban sprawl, in the assessment, is considered to be much exaggerated. It is considered that if the area to the north of the main road was removed from the Green Belt and built on there would be considerable pressure to develop for housing areas immediately to the south of the road in Local Area 34 between the development around Soprano Way and the development along Woodstock Lane South.
- 6.95 In regard to Purpose 2, the Council considers that the removal of the Local Area from the Green Belt and its development would eliminate the separation between the two distinct communities of Long Ditton and Hinchley Wood; leading to the coalescence of the communities and contrary to the Council's place-making ambition.
- 6.96 Furthermore, the whole Local Area is considered to perform a vital part of the "green lung" / separation between this part of Elmbridge from London where there is a marked change in urban character and communities of Surbiton and Long Ditton that is clearly seen when travelling through the built-up area and from the A3.
- 6.97 In regard to Purpose 3, the Council notes that 7.5% of the Local Area is covered by development. However, as set out in the Ove Arup assessment, the overall character of the Local Area is piecemeal, while a significant percentage of the Local Area remains open. In fact, the area proposed from allocation is free from development and its overall importance to the borough's network of green spaces reflected by the fact that the area around One Tree Hill, is proposed for designation as Local Green Space.
- 6.98 Whilst some of the land within the Local Area consists of pony paddocks and 'scrubland', and adjoins urban influences such as residential properties or the strategic road network, the Council disputes that this reduces the openness of the Green Belt parcel / Local Area itself.

**LA-70: Imber Court, Molesey (part allocation)**

- 6.99 The Council agrees with the assessment of LA-70 particularly as it is only the northern extent of the Local Area proposed for allocation under Option 5a.

**SA-41: Loseberry Farm, Claygate (part allocation)**

- 6.100 The sub-area is located to the south-east of Esher and to the south-west of Claygate. It is bounded by a small watercourse to the south, an unmade farm track to the west and directly adjoins Claygate to the north and east.
- 6.101 The Council agrees that is not at the edge of a distinct large built-up area, in physical or perceptual terms as defined by the GBBR methodology. However,

the Council considers that the sub-area meets Purpose 2 **strongly** as opposed to moderately (as judged by Ove Arup). The Council notes and agrees with the GBBR 2018 in that the sub-area forms part of the **essential** gap between Esher and Claygate, as well as a smaller part of the essential gap between Claygate and Cobham / Oxshott / Stoke D'Abernon.

- 6.102 The Council also agrees that Esher and Claygate have already physically coalesced along Hare Lane however, the Council disagrees that, even though the Green Belt continues to play a role in maintaining a sense of perceptual separation between settlements, that this coalescence along Hare Lane diminishes the role of the sub-area in regard to Purpose 2.
- 6.103 It is the Council's view that the development of the site would diminish the essential gap between Esher and Claygate even further than acknowledged by Ove Arup, both in terms of the physical, visual and perceived gap / separation between the two settlement. The Council also disagrees that due to its smaller scale and sense of visual / physical enclosure, the northern part of the sub-area plays a lesser role.
- 6.104 In regard to Purpose 3, the Ove Arup assessment of the northern part of the sub-area is that it has a distinctly different feel to the more open countryside to the south, with stronger visual influences from surrounding built development (including the BT telephone exchange, railway line and residential properties on Hare Lane).
- 6.105 The Council disputes this concept, as all parcels adjacent to an urban area have residential development on their borders and it is not agreed / followed that this reduces the openness of the Green Belt parcel itself.
- 6.106 In terms of the impact of the wider Green Belt, the GBBR assessments identifies that the removal of this sub-area from the Green Belt is likely to have a limited impact on the performance of surrounding sub-areas against the Green Belt purposes. The Council agrees with the assessment in that SA-41 has a strong visual connection to SA-33 as a result of limited visual buffering along the watercourse that separates these areas, and SA-33 also provides the physical connection between SA-41 and the wider Green Belt and agrees that the removal of SA-41 will have an impact upon the performance of SA-33 against Purpose 3 by reducing the sense of visual openness and creating new urbanising influences along the northern edge; as a result of local topography, this is likely to be visually prominent.
- 6.107 However, the Council disagrees that there is a 'strong separation' between SA-41 and SA-42, particularly in the far north, and, as such the removal of SA-41 would have only a very limited impact upon the performance of SA-42 against Purpose 3. The Council believes that the unmade farm track to the

west, separating SA-41 and SA-42, forms a weak separation point and thus the removal of SA-41 would have a significant impact upon the performance of SA-42 against Purpose 3.

- 6.108 In addition, the Council notes that the proposed southern boundary of the site formed by the hedgerow would need strengthening to ensure its strength and likely permanence (as recognised by Ove Arup).
- 6.109 Similarly, the Council notes that while the western boundary is predominantly recognisable, the southern part of this boundary is less recognisable at Loseberry Farm and again, further strengthening would be required (as recognised by Ove Arup).
- 6.110 Overall, the Council considers that the sub-area plays an important role in the context of the wider Green Belt and the performance of the Local Area is critical in preventing coalescence between Esher and Claygate and, to a lesser extent Cobham / Oxshott / Stoke D'Abernon.

**SA-45: Land south of 77 Pleasant Place, Hersham (allocation)**

- 6.111 The sub-area is located to the south-west of Walton-on-Thames / Weybridge / Hersham and to the west of Esher. It is bounded by dispersed hedgerow and nursery uses from the adjoining garden centre to the south. To the west, the sub-area is partly bounded by Pleasant Place, and irregular backs of gardens and residential dwellings. To the north and east, the sub-area is bounded by dispersed hedgerow and open fields, with some irregular backs of gardens bordering the north-western boundary.
- 6.112 The Council agrees with the assessment of the sub-area in regard to Purposes 1 and 2. However, the Council does not agree that it should follow that surrounding urban influences e.g. neighbouring residential properties, reduces the openness of the Green Belt parcel itself particularly when it is free from development. It is also noted by the Council that the southern boundary of the sub-area, between SA-45 and SA-43, would require strengthening in order to limit visual impact on the wider Green Belt to the south.

**SA-47: Land at and south of Burhill School, Hersham (allocation)**

- 6.113 The sub-area is located to the south-west of Walton-on-Thames / Weybridge / Hersham and to the west of Esher. It is bounded to the north and west by the built edge of Hersham, to the east by hedgerow and dispersed mature trees, and to the south by dispersed hedgerow and open fields. The sub-area is north of SA-45.
- 6.114 The Council agrees with the assessment of the sub-area in regard to Purpose

2 and, to an extent Purpose 3. In terms of Purpose 3, the Council agrees that in comparison to other sub-areas, this sub-area is not free from development and therefore, its level of openness has been reduced. Nevertheless, the Council notes that the sub-area is bounded by weak features to the east, comprising dispersed hedgerows and treelines, and would require strengthening to ensure the boundaries are durable and likely permanent.

6.115 In regard to Purpose 1, the Council considers the Ove Arup assessment to be inconsistent in the scoring for SA-45 and SA-47. For Purpose 1, SA-45 is scored by Ove Arup as strongly performing (scoring 5+) whereas SA-47 is considered weakly performing (scores 1+). The Council considers the scoring of SA-47 incorrect as it does not meet the criteria (see Appendix 3 of this paper). For example, SA-47 is not 'enclosed' by a large built-up area. Rather, the Council considers that against Purpose 1, the Sub-Area meets the criteria of a score of 3 (moderately performing).

#### **SA-50: Land at Moore Place Golf Club, Esher (allocation)**

6.116 This sub-area lies toward the western side of Esher. It is bounded by residential dwellings to the north and south, woodland to the west and the A307 to the east. The sub-area comprises a golf course with ancillary built form.

6.117 The GBBR identifies that the sub-area forms a small part of the wider gap between Esher and Hersham and, as a result of development wrapping around the sub-area and the morphology of the settlement, the sub-area makes no tangible contribution to separation between Esher and Hersham.

6.118 The Council notes the point made in regard to the separation between Esher and Hersham, however, it is of the view that its removal from the Green Belt and development would eliminate the separation between the two distinct communities of West End and Esher; leading to the coalescence of the communities and contrary to the Council's place-making ambition. Particularly given that land to the north (SA-54) is also proposed for allocation.

6.119 Furthermore, in regard to SA-54 and the Purpose 2 assessment, the Council notes that the Ove Arup report recognises this gap and states that the sub-area provides a gap between two areas of Esher.

6.120 The Council also notes that whilst there is some built form and the sub-area largely consists of managed land e.g. the golf course, it is nonetheless open.

#### **SA-53: Land West of Slough Farm, Claygate (allocation)**

6.121 The sub-area is located to the north of Claygate. It is bounded by established

tree belts to the north, and a dense hedgerow and the edge of a cluster of agricultural buildings to the east. It directly adjoins Claygate to the south.

6.122 The Council agrees with the assessment of the sub-area in regard to Purposes 1 and 2. In regard to Purpose 3 however, the Council considers that development would represent encroachment into the countryside. The sub-area is free from built form (consisting of paddock fields) and, as recognised by Ove Arup, has a strong sense of openness. Whilst surrounded by built form, to the south in particular, the Council disputes that this follows that the openness of the Green Belt parcel itself is reduced.

6.123 In addition, the Council notes that overall, the sub-area would result in the designation of a weaker boundary if removed from the Green Belt.

#### **SA-54: Land south of Lammas Lane, Esher (allocation)**

6.124 This sub-area lies toward the western side of Esher. It is bounded by residential dwellings to the north and south and the A244 to the north-west. To the west lies West End Lane and adjacent West End Recreation ground and to the east lies Moore Place Golf Course (SA-51). The sub-area comprises dense woodland, hospice centre and some residential properties.

6.125 The Council agrees with the Ove Arup assessment that the sub-area provides a gap between the two areas of Esher. As set out in regard to SA-51, the Council is of the view that the removal of the sub-area from the Green Belt and its development, would eliminate the separation between two distinct communities; leading to coalescence and thus contrary to the Council's place-making ambition.

6.126 Nevertheless, the Council places stronger weight than the Ove Arup assessment as to the role the sub-area plays in maintaining the gap between Esher and Hersham. The assessment notes that whilst the sub-area is relatively enclosed by the settlement of Esher, it prevents coalescence with Hersham due to the dense woodland topography, Ove Arup have only considered this to score 'moderately' against the criteria.

6.127 In regard to Purpose 3, the Council does not agree that it should follow that surrounding urban influences e.g. neighbouring residential properties, reduces the openness of the Green Belt parcel itself. It is also noted by the Council that the southern boundary of the sub-area, between SA-45 and SA-43, would require strengthening in order to limit visual impact on the wider Green Belt to the south.

6.128 Furthermore, the Council notes that the Ove Arup assessment identifies that the sub-area lies directly adjacent to SA-52 to the west and states that, its (SA-54) release may impact upon the scoring of this area due to its strong



visual connection in addition to increasing its (SA-52's) importance in relation to the remaining gap between Esher and Hersham.

- 6.129 As such, the Council also places greater weight on the role of the sub-area plays in contributing to the integrity of the wider Green Belt.

**SA-58: Land East of Telegraph Lane, Claygate (allocation)**

- 6.130 The sub-area is located to the north of Claygate. It is bounded by established tree belts to the east and north, and Telegraph Lane and the edge of a wooded area to the west. It directly adjoins Claygate to the south.

- 6.131 The Council agrees with the assessment of the sub-area in regard to Purposes 1 and 2. In regard to Purpose 3 however, the Council considers that development would represent encroachment into the countryside and places greater importance on this fact than the Ove Arup assessment. The Council notes that sub-area is free from built form (consisting of a single pastoral field) and whilst the sub-area adjoins residential properties to the south, disputes that this follows that the openness of the Green Belt parcel itself is reduced. In addition, the Council does not place the same level of weight on the built development that 'partially wraps around the sub-area to the west'. The built form on the western boundary consists of some residential properties however, these are inter-dispersed by an open frontage and woodland to the north.

**SA-59: Land east of Claygate House, Claygate (allocation)**

- 6.132 The sub-area is located to the north of Claygate and east of Esher. It is bounded by established tree belts / hedgerow to the north and partially to the east. The sub-area directly adjoins Claygate to the south, east and west.

- 6.133 The Council agrees with the assessment of the sub-area in regard to Purposes 1 and 2 and, to an extent, Purpose 3. In comparison to other sub-areas, this sub-area is not free from development and therefore, its level of openness has been reduced. Nevertheless, only 19% (approximately) of the sub-area is covered by built form therefore there will be a level of impact which is considered greater than that recognised in the Ove Arup assessment (a score of 1).

**SA-68: Weylands Old Treatment works, Hersham (part allocation)**

- 6.134 The sub-area is located to the east of Hersham. It is bounded by a railway line to the south, an unmade track, tree belt and bridleway to the north and the River Mole to the east. The sub-area directly adjoins Hersham to the west.

- 6.135 The Council agrees with the Ove Arup assessment in regard to Purposes 1 and 2. In particular, the Purpose 2 assessment which identifies the sub-area as forming almost the entirety of the essential gap between Walton-on-Thames / Weybridge / Hersham and Greater London (Weston Green) and, that whilst a small area of woodland to the east, (the adjacent sub-area SA-71), would play a role in maintaining visual separation between Walton-on-Thames / Weybridge / Hersham and Greater London (Weston Green), the scale of separation between the settlements would be reduced to such an extent that the settlements would, in effect, merge physically.
- 6.136 In regard to Purpose 3, the Council disagrees with the assessment that the sub-area plays no role (a score of '0' is given) in protecting the openness of the countryside. The Council acknowledges that 48% of the sub-area is covered by built form. However, as the assessment states this is focussed in the west, comprising established (but informal) industrial uses. Nevertheless, part of the sub-area (the eastern extent towards the river) has, as acknowledged in the report a more open, rural feel, comprising scrubland and marshes. Due to this, the Council feels that the assessment of the sub-area against Purpose 3 has been under-valued.
- 6.137 Furthermore, later on in the Ove Arup assessment, it is stated that the sub-area does make a lesser contribution (than the wider Local Area) to preventing encroachment into the countryside as a result of its urban character, particularly in the west. This implies that some contribution is made however, this is inconsistent with the Purpose 3 assessment as noted above and the score of '0'.
- 6.138 Regarding the impact on the wider integrity of the Green Belt if removed and allocated for development, the Ove Arup assessment notes that SA-68 is adjacent to SA-72 and in very close proximity to SA-71. It states that the removal of SA-68 from the Green Belt would diminish the performance of these sub-areas against Purpose 3 as a result of the formalisation and potential intensification of urbanising influences along their edges, as well as reducing their connectivity to the wider countryside.
- 6.139 With respect of the sub-areas lying to the east, the assessment continues that although these sub-areas (SA-71 and SA-72) may play a more critical role in preventing the coalescence of Walton-on-Thames/Weybridge/Hersham and Greater London (forming a critically small, finite gap), the effective coalescence of these settlements through the removal of SA-68 would limit the effectiveness of these areas in preventing further merging.
- 6.140 Overall, the assessment states that SA-68 is considered to be critically important at both the Local and Strategic scales in restricting the merging of Field Common, Greater London (Weston Green) and Walton-on-

Thames/Weybridge/Hersham and that together with surrounding sub-areas, SA-68 forms the only substantive gap between Greater London (Weston Green) and Walton-on-Thames/Weybridge/Hersham, and thus plays a particularly important role in terms of the wider Green Belt. Furthermore, the removal of SA-68 may reduce the performance of a number of surrounding Green Belt sub-areas.

- 6.141 The Council agrees with the assessment. As such, it is unclear why the assessment then states that as the western part makes a less important contribution to the wider strategic Green Belt, it should be considered further. Particularly as the assessment states that whilst a weaker performing area of Green Belt within the sub-area has been identified (the western part), no existing readily recognisable intermediate boundaries were noted within the sub-area. The assessment continues that whilst a number of remnant features exist from the historic sewage treatment works use, it is considered that none of these could, in themselves, form an appropriate Green Belt boundary between the two areas of differing Green Belt performance. An entirely new boundary would therefore need to be created which, the Council does not consider consistent with the NPPF.

**SA-69: Land north of Café Rouge, Esher (allocation)**

- 6.142 The sub-area is located to the north-east of Esher and to the south of the Greater London built-up area (Weston Green). It is bounded by Station Road (B3379) to the east, the edge of a commercial estate to the south and west, and a dispersed tree line and fence to the north, beyond which is located Sandown Park.
- 6.143 The Council agrees with the Ove Arup assessment in regard to Purposes 1 and 2. However, disagrees with the commentary in the assessment in regard to Purpose 3 and the statement that as the sub-area comprises a small paddock field, bounded by development it plays a weak role in maintaining the openness of the countryside. The Council consider that its role in regard to Purpose 3 is undervalued in the assessment.
- 6.144 Furthermore, the Ove Arup assessment states that as the sub-area comprised a small paddock field, bounded by development, it plays a weak role in maintaining the openness of the countryside; this is in line with the wider Local Area (LA-52). Again, the Council considers the sub-area as being undervalued and considers its view is supported by the recent appeal decision, at Land at Sandown Park Racecourse, Portsmouth Road, Esher. Application ref. 2019/0551).
- 6.145 On 15 June 2020, the above appeal was recovered for the Secretary of

State's determination, in pursuance of section 79 of, and paragraph 3 of Schedule 6 to, the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. On 21 May 2021, the Secretary of State issued their decision which agreed with the Inspectors' recommendation that the appeal be dismissed.

6.146 The outline application was for development / redevelopment of sections of the site to replace / modify existing operational / associated facilities, and to provide up to 150 bedroom hotel (Use Class C1), family/community zone, residential development up to 318 units (Use Class C3) and to relocate existing day nursery (Use Class D1), all with car parking, access and related works following demolition of existing buildings and hardstanding (for access only); and full application for the widening of the southwest and east sections of the racecourse track including associated groundworks, re-positioning of fencing, alterations to existing internal access road from More Lane and new bellmouth accesses serving the development.

6.147 Within the application, Site 4 is the same as SA-69: Land north of Café Rouge, Esher. Although the number of units proposed on the site as part of the application (72 units) is higher than the number proposed under Option 5a, the Inspectors' Report (IR) provides some general statements on the Green Belt and the harm that the development of the site (in principle may have).

6.148 Paragraph IR347 states:

"I note that the GBBR found that Site 4 performs weakly in terms of purpose 3 (safeguarding the countryside from encroachment) and I saw that it is visually enclosed by fencing and planting. However, it does not follow that the site performs no function in relation to purpose 3. **The proposals would have an urbanising effect, both in relation to the site itself and in relation to other parts of the Green Belt (such as Littleworth Common and the racecourse) from which it would be seen. In my view that would amount to a conflict with purpose 3**". (Council's emphasis).

#### **GB51 / SA-66: Hersham Golf Club, Hersham (part allocation)**

6.149 The area is located to the east of Hersham. It is bounded the built edge of Hersham to the south and west, a tree line to the east, and a private road leading to the golf course to the north. The proposed site extends beyond the boundaries of the sub-area to the east (into the golf-course), to the north to the boundary of the wider Local Area (LA-48) which runs to the railway line and to the north-east, again running into the golf-course.

6.150 As such, the assessment by Ove Arup is not considered reflective of the proposed development site and the role the wider areas plays in terms of the

## Green Belt.

- 6.151 In particular, the Council considers the wider proposed development site plays an important role in regard to Purpose 2 in providing a gap between the settlements of Hersham and Esher especially in regard to the northern extent of the site. The Council believes that the scale of the separation between the settlements would be reduced, impacting on the integrity of the Green Belt.
- 6.152 In addition, there is not a recognised boundary line in the south-east of the proposed development site, thus creating a weaker Green Belt boundary without strengthening.
- 6.153 The Council considers that its assessment of this proposed development site is supported by an appeal decision (dated 9 May 2011), in regard to a two underground hotel comprising 198 rooms (22,207sqm), associated car parking (10,194sqm), and new access from Esher Road following demolition of existing buildings (353sqm) proposed at the site address (application ref. 2010/0860). The appeal was dismissed.
- 6.154 The application / appeal site is similar to GB51 / SA-66, particularly in terms of the footprint of the underground hotel and where the majority of built-form could occur under Option 5a. Whilst the two proposals are different, the Inspectors' Report (IR) provides some general statements on the Green Belt and the harm that the development of the site (in principle may have).
- 6.155 Paragraph IR17 states:

“I turn to the effect of the scheme on the purposes of including land in the Green Belt, as described in PPG2. The purposes of most relevance to this appeal are checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, preventing neighbouring towns from merging into one another and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The appeal site lies within a section of Green Belt separating Esher from Hersham. It is part of a more extensive swathe of Green Belt land which separates the urban area of Walton-on-Thames from settlements such as Cobham, Esher and West Molesey. The section of Green Belt between Esher Road and the railway line is relatively narrow, being just 400 – 900m in width. I consider that the appeal scheme would extend the built-up area of Hersham and erode this narrow gap”.

## Concluding commentary on the nature and extent of the harm the Green Belt

- 6.156 As set out in the sub-section above, it is the Council's position that, on the whole, the Ove Arup assessment in regard to the Green Belt sites forming Option 5a, undervalues their 'performance' against the Purpose of Green Belt as well as ensuring the fundamental aim of Green Belt in preventing urban

sprawl by keeping land permanently open.

6.157 In addition, the Council considers that, all of the sites either via Ove Arup's assessment or the Council's own, performs some degree (weakly, moderately, strongly) of function when considered against the Purposes of Green Belt. Even in Ove Arup's assessment which in the opinion of the Council undervalues the Local Areas and Sub-Areas, two areas continue to perform strongly overall, in regard to the Green Belt Purposes. In five instances the areas continue to perform moderately overall, and in seven instances the sites performed weakly overall.

6.158 It is the Council's view that whilst areas are considered to perform 'weakly' in the Ove Arup assessment in regard to the Purposes of the Green Belt, they still perform some function. Neither the GBBR 2016 nor 2018, identified any part of the Green Belt as no longer performing against the Purposes overall. This opinion is supported by a recent Inspector's Report in regard to the Sandown appeal.

6.159 Paragraph IR347 of the Inspector's Report states:

**"I note that the GBBR found that Site 4 performs weakly in terms of purpose 3 (safeguarding the countryside from encroachment) and I saw that it is visually enclosed by fencing and planting. However, it does not follow that the site performs no function in relation to purpose 3.** The proposals would have an urbanising effect, both in relation to the site itself and in relation to other parts of the Green Belt (such as Littleworth Common and the racecourse) from which it would be seen. In my view that would amount to a conflict with purpose 3". (Council's emphasis).

6.160 In addition, whilst the GBBR 2018 identified some areas that play 'a less important contribution to the wider strategic Green Belt', it is the Council's position that this must not be read that they have 'no contribution' to the wider strategic Green Belt. It is the Council's view that all land designated as Green Belt within the borough is forming a Green Belt function (to some degree) and that it also plays a role (to some degree) in maintaining the integrity of the wider strategic Green Belt.

6.161 The Council also considers that, in some cases, the removal of land / sites from the Green Belt as proposed under Option 5a, would result in a weaker Green Belt boundary that is not clearly defined / defensible and would take time to mitigate and, would result in areas of predominately greenfield land being removed from the Green Belt (not previously developed / degraded land).

**(v) the extent to which the consequent impacts on the purposes of the Green Belt may be ameliorated or reduced to the lowest reasonably practicable extent**

- 6.162 Paragraph 142 of NPPF (2021) states, “.... (local plans) should also set out way in which the impact of removing land from the Green Belt can be offset through compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land”.
- 6.163 PPG expands on this and provides several suggestions on how this may be achieved. For example, through the provision of new or enhanced green infrastructure, woodland planting, new or enhanced walking and cycling routes and so on.
- 6.164 In a similar vein, paragraph 145 of the NPPF states that once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.
- 6.165 The Council considers that the degree of harm to the Green Belt that would occur through pursuing Option 5a as the preferred spatial strategy is so significant that it cannot be ameliorated or reduced to the lowest reasonable practicable extent that, would be considered acceptable.
- 6.166 The allocation / safeguarding of the 15 sites as proposed by Option 5a, on the whole, would lead to the loss of openness and valuable green spaces and, in some instances, sites used and very much valued by our communities for recreational activities both formally and informally. For example, both SA-50 and GB51 / SA66, are golf courses; providing valuable sporting facilities adding to the health and wellbeing of our residents and visitors. In addition, both these areas have public footpaths adjacent to / through the sites. Whilst the footpaths could be protected, our communities’ experience of using them, will dramatically change; from walking through generally tranquil open spaces to footpaths surrounded by built form.
- 6.167 In regard to the area of LA-58 proposed for allocation under Option 5a, this is also an area free from development. The development of the site would result in the loss of green spaces which the community uses for informal recreation activities including dog walking. The significance of part of the site, in particular, to the local community, is recognised in the draft Local Plan by the proposal to allocate ‘one tree hill’ as a Local Green Space in accordance with paragraphs 101 - 103 of the NPPF (2021).

- 6.168 Focusing on the opportunity to improve damaged and derelict land, with the exception of SA-68: Weylands Old Treatment works, Hersham (proposed for waste / employment use), the Council does not consider any of the Green Belt sites proposed for allocation / safeguarding by Option 5a to be damaged and derelict. There are also very limited opportunities to improve other damaged and derelict land within the Green Belt to offset the loss of the sites proposed for allocation / safeguarding by Option 5a.
- 6.169 It is also the Council's view that given the dispersed nature of the Green Belt sites, there will not be the opportunities to provide new or enhanced walking and cycling routes between them. In addition, the ownership of neighbouring sites is uncertain and therefore there are no guarantees that linkages to the wider Green Belt can be secured or, could be secured to land that is not already publicly accessible.
- 6.170 Whilst planting could take place on the Green Belt sites, this could take place (subject to landowners' agreement) without the allocation / safeguarding of the sites for development. Furthermore, in regard to some sites, and in particular GB51 / SA66, some areas of woodland / tree coverage would be removed to make way for the development of the site.
- 6.171 In addition, in their current form, the majority of sites forming Option 5a acts as carbon sinks i.e. absorbs more carbon than it releases. These sinks are important in managing the levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.
- 6.172 Finally, many of these sites provide opportunities for biodiversity and wildlife. Through the consultation responses received, a variety of wildlife including deer, badgers, owls and bats are present on the majority of sites identified. The development of these sites would lead to a destruction of their natural habitats which, the Council considers, cannot be ameliorated or reduced to the lowest reasonably practicable extent, that would be acceptable to the Council.
- 6.173 For the reasons above, the Council does not consider Option 5a to be in conformity of paragraph 11(a) of the NPPF that states, all plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to: (amongst other criteria) improve the environment.

### **Other considerations**

- 6.174 In addition to the points of the Calverton Case that the Council has taken into consideration as to whether exceptional circumstances are evidenced and justified to amend the Green Belt boundary, it has also considered other factors in determining whether Option 5a is its preferred spatial strategy.



## Weakening the boundary of the Green Belt

6.175 Paragraph 143 of the NPPF states, “that when defining Green Belt boundaries, plan should: .... (f) define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent”.

6.176 In several instances, the GBBRs (2016 and 2018) identify that the boundary of the Green Belt may be weakened by the release of some sites identified as part of Option 5a. Where relevant, this is set out in paragraphs 6.88 – 6.155, and is summarised below.

- SA41 - although some strengthening of the boundary could be undertaken, the removal of the SA from the GB would result in a weaker GB boundary than the existing.
- SA47 - the site (in isolation) would result in the designation of a weaker Green Belt boundary than presently exists and would be formed of predominantly dispersed hedgerow.
- SA53 - the removal of the SA would result in the designation of a weaker GB boundary. The existing inner Green Belt boundary is aligned with softer natural features, specifically the backs of residential properties with strongly defined gardens, which is also further emphasised by dense planting and a ditch.
- SA68 - the sub-area would result in designation of a boundary of similar strength to the existing inner Green Belt boundary, which is aligned with the well-defined edge of an existing industrial estate. An entirely new boundary would therefore need to be created through the development process if this area were to be considered further.
- SA69 - the sub-area would result in the designation of a weaker Green Belt boundary than the current boundary, however strengthening could be undertaken.
- SA66 / GB51 - strengthening of the east boundary would be necessary to provide a clearly defensible boundary.

6.177 Whilst in place the GBBR (2016 and 2018) identify opportunities where the boundary of the Green Belt could be strengthened to mitigate the removal of some Local Areas / Sub-Areas from the Green Belt, the Council is mindful that this would take time as sites came through the planning pipe-line.

6.178 Therefore, for a period of time, the boundaries of the Green Belt would not be defined clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely

to be permanent. Thus, not in accordance with paragraph 143 of the NPPF.

### Previously developed land

6.179 Paragraph 142 of the NPPF states, “where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously-developed and / or is well-served by public transport”.

6.180 Whilst the Council does not consider that exceptional circumstances to amend the Green Belt boundary are evidenced or justified and, that the NPPF states that plans should give ‘first’ consideration to land which has been previously developed, as set out in Table 8, the Council notes that the sites under Option 5a are relatively free from built-form.

6.181 As such, developing these sites would largely be on greenfield sites.

<b>Site ref.</b>	<b>PDL commentary</b>
LA-58: Land north of A309, Long Ditton (part allocation / part safeguard)	The site contains less than 15% built form and possesses a largely rural character however, the area proposed for allocation is greenfield.
LA-70: Imber Court, Molesey (part allocation)	The majority of the site is PDL.
SA-41: Loseberry Farm, Claygate (part allocation)	The majority of the site comprises pastoral fields, with a farm / agricultural building.
SA-45: Land south of 77 Pleasant Place, Hersham (allocation)	This is largely a greenfield land, as less than 1% of the area is covered by built form.
SA-47: Land at and south of Burhill School, Hersham (allocation)	There is some built form but 80% of the site remains undeveloped.
SA-50: Land at Moore Place Golf Club, Esher (allocation)	The majority of the site comprises the Moore Place Golf Course and is approx. 94% greenfield.
SA-53: Land West of Slough Farm, Claygate (allocation)	The site is greenfield.
SA-54: Land south of Lammas Lane, Esher (allocation)	The site comprises dense woodland and only 12% is covered by built form (x 2 residential properties, garages etc.)
SA-58: Land East of Telegraph Lane, Claygate (allocation)	The site is greenfield.
SA-59: Land east of Claygate	Only about 19% of the site is covered by built

House, Claygate (allocation)	form with the remainder being a greenfield land.
SA-68: Weylands Old Treatment works, Hersham (part allocation)	The majority of the site is PDL.
SA-69: Land north of Café Rouge, Esher (allocation)	The site is greenfield.
GB51 / SA-66: Hersham Golf Club, Hersham (part allocation)	A mix of previously developed land and greenfield.
LA-20: Chippings Farm & The Fairmile, Cobham (safeguard)	Only 4.6% of the LA is covered with built form relating to agricultural use.

**Table 8: Option 5a sites – previously developed land**

### Impact on the landscape character of the borough

6.182 It is the Council's position that the release of land from the Green Belt would negatively affect the borough's existing settlement pattern, thus harming the character of Elmbridge's existing communities. The Council also considers that, as the development of the Green Belt sites forming Option 5a would result in the outward expansion of our existing communities, this would lead to the dilution of the sense of place that our residents' value so highly.

6.183 Utilising information from the Landscape Sensitivity Study (2019), Table 9 sets out Landscape Character Areas (units) that the Green Belt sites forming Option 5a are located. At a borough-level, the table shows that, on a five-point scale, all are attributed a 'County' or 'Borough' Landscape Value<sup>11</sup>. On the scale, 'County' Level is point 2 whilst 'Borough' is point 3 (with 1 'National' being the highest).

6.184 Areas attributed 'County' Landscape Value may contain / include:

- regionally rare or important landscape types or elements, or notable examples.
- notable examples of important landscape types at the county level or be broadly representative of this.
- include assets designated as an asset of county level importance, e.g. locally listed landscapes on the county register or may be recognised for

<sup>11</sup> From the Landscape Sensitivity Study (2019) - Landscape value refers to the relative value that is attached to different landscapes by society, whether this be the landscape as a whole or individual elements, features and aesthetic and perceptual qualities which contribute to the character of the landscape. The following range of factors can help in the identification of valued landscapes: Landscape quality (condition); Scenic quality; Representativeness of wider landscape character; Rarity; Conservation interests (heritage or ecological); Recreational value; Experiential qualities, and Cultural associations (such as links to events, writers, poets, artists etc).

- its recreational quality/importance e.g. Regional Park or Country Park.
- featured in artistic/literary works of regional/sub-regional importance.

6.185 Areas attributed 'Borough' Landscape Value may contain / include:

- notable concentration of locally rare landscape types/examples of borough importance, or have moderate degree of representativeness of wider landscape character.
- assets of local importance, e.g. locally listed landscapes on the county register or part of their setting, or locally designated nature conservation interests.
- featured in artistic or written works of borough level importance.

6.186 Overall, the Landscape Character Areas (units) that the Green Belt sites forming Option 5a are located, have a 'medium' or 'medium – high' Landscape Susceptibility<sup>12</sup> i.e. the landscape susceptibility is the ability of a landscape to accommodate the development type without undue negative change to its character (see Table 9).

6.187 Regarding Landscape Sensitivity<sup>13</sup>, overall, the majority of the Landscape Character Areas (units) in which the Green Belt sites forming Option 5a are located, have a 'moderate' or 'moderate-high' Landscape Sensitivity. Only one area in which one or more of the Green Belt sites is located, is characterised as 'moderate-low' (see Table 9).

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<sup>12</sup> From the Landscape Sensitivity Study (2019) - Landscape susceptibility is the ability of a landscape to accommodate the development type without undue negative change to its character. Susceptibility of each Landscape Unit has been assessed using a 5-point scale with reference to the criteria set out in Table 4. The intermediate classifications (medium-high and low-medium) have only been used in the instances where a Landscape Unit does not neatly fit within the high, medium or low susceptibility categories.

<sup>13</sup> From the Landscape Sensitivity Study (2019) – Landscape sensitivity has been assessed for each Landscape Unit based on a combination of the landscape value and susceptibility in each case. For this study, landscape sensitivity has been assessed using a five-point scale, as shown in Table 5.

Landscape Character Area (Unit)	Green Belt Sites – Local & Sub-Area References	Landscape Value	Landscape Susceptibility	Landscape Sensitivity	Key commentary from the Landscape Sensitivity Study
LF2-A	LA-58 SA-53 SA-58 SA-59	Borough	Medium	Moderate	<p><b>Settlement Character and Edge Conditions</b> - The Landscape Unit is assessed as having a Medium-High Susceptibility to change in terms of its settlement character and edge conditions as a result of the following:</p> <p>The Landscape Unit plays an important role in perceptual separation of the surrounding settlements of Claygate, Hinchley Wood and Long Ditton and forms a buffer between the settlements and the A3 and A309. Settlement within the character area is limited to the occasional farmstead and associated complexes of agricultural buildings. The landscape surrounding Claygate contributes to the rural setting of the settlement. The landscape to the south of Long Ditton contributes to the provision of recreational open space in proximity to the settlement and as such would be vulnerable, in this regard, to change arising from potential development.</p> <p><b>Visual Character</b> - The Landscape Unit is assessed as having a Medium-High Susceptibility to change in terms of visual character by virtue of the following:</p> <p>A relatively high degree of intervisibility across larger, open fields, but tree cover formed by blocks of woodland or field boundaries generally obscures distant views. Glimpses of nearby settlement and busy roads are mostly filtered by vegetation.</p>
LF2-B	SA-41	Borough	Medium – High	Moderate – High	<p><b>Settlement Character and Edge Conditions</b> - The Landscape Unit is assessed as having Medium-High Susceptibility to change in terms of its settlement character</p>

					<p>and edge conditions due to the following:  The Landscape Unit forms an area of open countryside almost completely surrounding Claygate and is an important aspect of how the settlement feels and functions as a separate village. In part this is by virtue of the landscape's rural character resulting from large numbers of mature trees and historic field boundaries, with limited urban influence. The Landscape Unit is therefore important in maintaining the perceived separation between neighbouring settlements of Claygate, Esher and Oxshott by virtue of these rural qualities. However, more recent development in the north slightly erodes the regularity of the settlement edge in this area. A further characteristic increasing susceptibility is the position of Claygate along a ridge, the character of which would be likely to change if the settlement was to expand.</p>
SW6-A	LA-20	County	Medium – High	Moderate – High	<p><b>Settlement Character and Edge Conditions</b> - The Landscape Unit is assessed as having a High Susceptibility to change in terms of its settlement character and edge conditions as a result of the following:</p> <p>There are very limited dwellings within the wooded commons. Beyond the woodland are a few large buildings such as Cobham School and a motel. The area is bounded by the town of Esher to the north, and the towns of Cobham, Fairmile and Oxshott to the south. As such the Landscape Unit is a valuable recreational resource for these neighbouring settlements. The landscape forms a buffer between these settlements, a positive settlement gateway and displays a range of high-quality landscape features in proximity to the settlement edge, therefore it would be vulnerable to change.</p> <p><b>Visual Character</b> - The Landscape Unit is assessed as having a Medium Susceptibility to change in terms of visual character as a result of the following:</p>

					There is a strong sense of enclosure within the woodland afforded by the large extents of tree cover which obscures views generally, however there are views across open areas of common land and waterbodies.
UW5-A	LA-70	Borough	Medium	Moderate	<p><b>Settlement Character and Edge Conditions</b> - The Landscape Unit is assessed as having a Medium Susceptibility to change in terms of its settlement character and edge conditions, by virtue of the following:</p> <p>Susceptibility is reduced in this regard due to the presence of development within the Landscape Unit, consisting of Cranmere Primary School in the south and a number of sports and leisure facilities in the east. The Landscape Unit is important in the provision of accessible outdoor recreation for adjacent settlement edges bounding the north, east and south of the area (photo 2). However, access along the River Ember is limited. The landscape forms a buffer between Molesey to the north and Esher to the south. Tree planting along the River Ember and smaller streams, and forming defensible settlement edges, contributes to the setting of these settlements. Therefore, this increases susceptibility.</p>
UW6-A	SA-69	Borough	Medium - High	Moderate - High	<p><b>Settlement Character and Edge Conditions</b> - The Landscape Unit is assessed as having a Medium-High Susceptibility to change in terms of its settlement character and edge conditions due to the following:</p> <p>Littleworth Common and the mature landscape associated with Thames Ditton and Esher Golf Course strongly contribute to the setting of the settlement edges of Esher and Thames Ditton respectively and are important areas of accessible open land in proximity to urban areas. These landscapes also contribute to the perceived sense of separation from neighbouring settlements and busy road and rail infrastructure passing through the Landscape Unit. Sandown Park in the west is relatively private and enclosed by fencing, and</p>

					therefore contributes little to the scenic qualities of adjacent settlement edges, however its large scale contributes to the perceived gap between settlements, and acts as a buffer between Esher and the South Western Main Line. Weston Green in the north-east is heavily influenced by adjacent residential properties and while it is an important recreational resource, would be less susceptible to development by virtue of its eroded condition that diminishes its contribution to the setting of settlement in this area.
RF10-A	GB51 / SA-66 SA-68	Borough	Medium – High	Moderate – High	<p><b>Settlement Character and Edge Conditions</b> - The Landscape Unit is assessed as having a Medium-High Susceptibility to change in terms of its settlement character and edge conditions in light of the following:</p> <p>The Landscape Unit is generally unsettled apart from the occasional farmstead. The Landscape Unit does however abut several settlement edges; Molesey in the north, Hersham in the south-west and Esher in the southeast. The landscape plays an important role in the provision of open green space, particularly in the north -Molesey Heath Local Nature Reserve and Neilson Recreation Ground. The Landscape Unit also forms a strong buffer between the settlements.</p> <p><b>Perceptual Character and Landscape Experience</b> - The Landscape Unit is assessed as a having Medium-High Susceptibility to change in terms of perceptual character and landscape experience by virtue of the following:</p> <p>Limited settlement and public access enhance tranquility although the sense of remoteness is reduced by surrounding urban influences in the north of the Landscape Unit. Fields in the south feel quite remote along PRow where development is obscured by vegetation and the landscape possesses a rural farmland character.</p>



RF10-B	SA-45 SA-47 SA-50 SA-54	Borough	Medium	Medium – Low	<p><b>Settlement Character and Edge Conditions</b> - The Landscape Unit is assessed as having a Medium Susceptibility to change in terms of its settlement character and edge conditions due to the following:</p> <p>Settlement within the Landscape Unit is limited to a small number of farmsteads. However, the settlement edge of Hersham overlooks Hersham Riverside Park in the west of the Landscape Unit and the park plays an important role in the local setting by displaying a range of intact landscape features and for recreation. The Landscape Unit also fulfils the role in the perceived separation of Hersham and Esher.</p>
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**Table 9: Selected information from the Landscape Sensitivity Study in regard to the Green Belt sites forming Option 5a**

6.188 A landscape that has a ‘moderate-high’ sensitivity to change arising from residential and mixed-use development is point 2 of a 5-point scale. In these areas, the Landscape Sensitivity Study states that a high degree of care will be needed in considering the location, design and siting of any change within the landscape. A ‘moderate’ sensitivity to change arising from residential and mixed-use development is point 3 of the 5-point scale. In these areas, the Landscape Sensitivity Study states that although the landscape may have some ability to absorb change, some alteration in character may result and that considerable care is still needed in locating and designing such developments within the landscape.

6.189 At a finer grain, the Landscape Sensitivity Study, attributes a Landscape Sensitivity score to sub-areas within each of the Landscape Character Areas (units) from which the sensitivity of the Green Belt sites forming Option 5a to change arising from residential and mixed-use development can be obtained. Table 10 shows that for the besides two sites, the sensitivity rating has a ‘moderate’ element whereby a degree of care will need to be given in the location, design and siting of any change within the landscape. In seven cases, the degree of care is high or considerable.

Sensitivity Rating	Local Area / Sub-Area / Site Ref.
<p><b>Moderate-High:</b> The landscape has a moderate-high sensitivity to change arising from residential and mixed-use development. A high degree of care will be needed in considering the location, design and siting of any change within the landscape.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SA-41: Loseberry Farm, Claygate</li> <li>• SA-69: Land north of Café Rouge, Esher</li> <li>• GB51 / SA-66: Hersham Golf Club, Hersham</li> <li>• LA20: The Fairmile, Cobham (eastern extent of the wider Local Area)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Moderate:</b> The landscape has a moderate sensitivity to change arising from residential and mixed-use development. Although the landscape may have some ability to absorb change, some alteration in character may result. Considerable care is still needed in locating and designing such developments within the landscape.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LA-58: Land north of A309, Long Ditton</li> <li>• SA-53: Land West of Slough Farm, Claygate</li> <li>• SA-58: Land East of Telegraph Lane, Claygate</li> </ul>
<p><b>Moderate – Low:</b> The landscape has a moderate-low sensitivity to change arising from residential and mixed-use development. The landscape may have relatively greater ability to absorb change although care is still needed in locating and designing such developments within the landscape. There may be opportunity for mitigation, enhancement and restoration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SA-45: Land south of 77 Pleasant Place, Hersham</li> <li>• SA-47: Land at and south of Burhill School, Hersham</li> <li>• SA-50: Land at Moore Place Golf Club, Esher</li> <li>• SA-54: Land south of Lammas Lane, Esher</li> <li>• LA20: Chippings Farm, Cobham (western extent of the wider Local Area)</li> <li>• LA-70: Imber Court, Molesey</li> </ul>

<p><b>Low:</b> The landscape has a low sensitivity to change arising from residential and mixed-use development. Change can potentially be more easily accommodated or there may be considerable opportunities to integrate such developments within the landscape, to positively create new character, or restore/ enhance the landscape. Sensitive design is still needed to accommodate change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SA-59: Land east of Claygate House, Claygate</li> <li>• SA-68: Weylands Old Treatment works, Hersham</li> </ul>
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**Table 10: The sensitivity rating of the Green Belt sites forming Option 5a**

### Accessibility and impact our retail centres

6.190 Outward expansion of the existing settlements could also negatively affect the vitality, vibrancy and viability of the economic centres within them. Contrary to national planning priorities which seek to ensure strong neighbourhood centres and enable and support healthy lifestyles through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments, and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.

6.191 New residents would be located further from the facilities and services provided by the borough's centres. The further the distance of new homes from the centres, the less likely residents are to make use of the services provided.

6.192 Table 11 shows the distance from the sites proposed under Option 5a to various key services and facilities. Using active modes of travel, guidance advises that 'walkable neighbourhoods' are typically characterised by having a range of facilities within 10 minutes walking distance' (up to about 800m). Table 11 shows:

- Only one site where the average distances to the services listed is below 800m.
- Only two sites within 800m of a primary school.
- Only three sites are within 800m of a train station.
- Seven sites are within 800m of a retail centre.
- Only two sites are within 800m of both retail facilities and a train station
- The majority of sites are considered to have only 'fair' access to services and facilities.

6.193 In addition, as the range of shops / services / facilities provided by the borough's centres is relatively limited compared to the higher order settlements just beyond the boundary, the Council considers this will have a negative impact on its centres.

6.194 Elmbridge’s centres already retain relatively low proportions of residents’ spending on comparison and convenience goods. Locating new residential development on the outskirts of existing settlements is considered unlikely to reverse this trend.

	Distance to major service centre / employment location (km)	Distance to significant employment site (km)	Distance to bus stop with good / very good / excellent service (km)	Distance to railway station (km)	Railway Station	Quality of rail service	Distance to primary school (km)	Distance to secondary school	Distance to health centre / GP (km)	Distance to dentist (km)	Distance to nearest retail centre (km)	Local retail centre	Average distance to local services (km)	Overall score (accessibility)
LA-58	5.35	7.55	0.9	2.35	Hinchley Wood	Good	1.75	1.6	2.2	2.1	1.05	Hinchley Wood	1.86	Fair
LA-70	5.4	3.3	1.85	1.1	Esher	Good	0.8	2.7	2.1	1.3	1.5	Thames Ditton	1.62	Fair
SA-41	7.65	4.85	0.3	0.7	Claygate	Good	1	2.75	0.85	0.7	0.65	Claygate	0.99	Good
SA-45	9.15	0.95	0.65	1.95	Hersham	Good	0.3	1.7	0.35	0.45	0.45	Hersham	0.84	Good
SA-47	9.2	0.8	0.5	1.8	Hersham	Good	0	1.55	0.2	0.3	0.3	Hersham	0.66	Excellent
SA-50	8.1	3.45	0.35	2.35	Esher	Good	2.25	1.55	1.6	1.2	0.6	Esher	1.41	Fair
SA-53	7.35	5.4	0.4	0.95	Claygate	Good	1.65	2.55	1	0.95	0.9	Claygate	1.2	Fair
SA-54	8.15	2	0.2	2.4	Esher	Good	2.15	1.45	1.5	1.25	0.6	Esher	1.36	Fair
SA-58	8.2	6.35	0.6	1.6	Claygate	Good	1.7	2.15	1	1.4	1.45	Claygate	1.41	Fair
SA-59	7.5	4.5	0.35	0.75	Claygate	Good	0.9	2.25	0.5	0.75	0.7	Claygate	0.89	Good
SA-68	10.3	0.9	1.2	0.6	Hersham	Good	1	2.05	2.2	1.45	2	Hersham	1.5	Fair
SA-69	6.1	3.25	0.2	0.25	Esher	Good	1.4	1.95	1.45	0.95	1.1	Esher	1.04	Good
GB51 / SA-66	6.9	5.25	0.15	0.9	Claygate	Good	1.6	2.2	0.95	0.85	0.7	Claygate	1.05	Fair
LA-20	11.9	7.5	0.36	4.05	Cobham	Good	2.45	1.35	0.4	1.3	1.55	Cobham	1.64	Fair

**Table 11: The accessibility of the sites under Option 5a**

6.195 If land was released from the Green Belt, none of the resulting development sites would provide residential units in sufficient numbers to be able to support new community services or facilities. Paragraph 105 of the NPPF requires that significant development should be concentrated in locations which “are or can be made sustainable” and, given the reasons above, it is considered that a spatial strategy which involved Green Belt release would directly conflict with this requirement.

### Elmbridge’s strategic context

6.196 It is the Council’s opinion that, separate to the consideration of exceptional circumstances, the harm to the wider strategic Green Belt arising from the release of land within its designation would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of releasing land to accommodate Elmbridge’s development needs.

6.197 Surrey’s 2050 Place Ambition (Draft Version 2) has been produced by its constituent local authorities and their strategic partners and sets out the emerging county-wide position on place leadership, infrastructure and good growth. Under Strategic Priority 2: Enhancing the place offer of Surrey’s

towns, the Ambition states that our urban areas will continue to be where most of Surrey's homes, services and jobs are located. It has identified that focusing growth in these areas will provide the greatest opportunity to support access to services and cultivate changes in the way that we travel, both within urban areas and between different places. With three quarters of the land in Surrey being covered by Green Belt and national and international environmental designations there is a need to make effective use of our urban areas.

- 6.198 The Ambition identifies the larger centres of Guildford, Reigate/Redhill, Staines and Woking in particular, as areas which will continue to provide the greatest potential for delivering a strong residential and economic offer, and will be key in enhancing Surrey's transport connectivity.
- 6.199 Furthermore, the Ambition recognises that given Surrey's close proximity to London there are no options for delivering sustainable development and large new settlements of the same scale that is possible in other parts of the country, without compromising some of our most valuable assets or redirecting investment away from the main urban areas. The Ambition, however, identifies a number of opportunities to deliver some completely new settlements to help meet housing needs and support the economic priorities of the County up to 2050. None of these opportunities are within Elmbridge Borough; the four new communities have been proposed in Dunsfold; Longcross; South Godstone and Wisley.
- 6.200 Strategic Priority 3: Maximising the potential of our Strategic Opportunities Areas (SOA), identifies those areas with the greatest long-term potential for delivering 'good growth' across Surrey by investing in places that offer opportunities to boost productivity by maximising the value of strategic assets such as universities, transport hubs and strategic employment sites / centres to support our economic strengths and priority industrial sectors.
- 6.201 Elmbridge borough is not at the centre of a SOA identified for facilitating the delivery of growth. There are some areas of the Borough (Brooklands & Weybridge) that are identified within the Woking Hub SOA however, Elmbridge simply does not have the opportunities for delivering growth comparable to other authorities, given its proximity to London and relatively small-scale existing settlements, without compromising its existing character and environmental assets. This is reflected in Surrey's 2050 Place Ambition. In addition, part of the vision for the Place Ambition is to align the delivery of growth with investment in infrastructure and highlight where the focus of both should be. With Elmbridge borough not at the centre a SOA and notwithstanding the constraints on providing large-scale development in the borough, there would also not be the opportunities to access funding streams

to deliver the infrastructure projects required to support a high level of growth within the borough as investment is directed elsewhere across the County.

- 6.202 Though it is now aged and was largely revoked in 2013, it is pertinent to note that The South East Plan (2009) also did not identify land within Elmbridge as a regional hub; strategic development area; or as primary or secondary regional centre (indeed its town centres are not mentioned at all).
- 6.203 The Surrey Structure Plan (2004) identified the part of Surrey in which Elmbridge falls as restricting the outward spread of urban areas and “restricting new development to...within the existing urban area.” That historic regional planning, or its more recent successor, has not identified Elmbridge as a suitable location for meeting the wider area’s range of development needs is reflective of the critical role played by the land designated as Green Belt within its boundary, as well as the relatively small-scale nature of its settlements and its limited capacity both of existing infrastructure, and for improvements to the same.
- 6.204 Moreover, release of land from the Green Belt within Elmbridge would be prejudicial to the outcome of a strategic review of the entire Metropolitan Green Belt requested by the Inspectors examining the (then draft) London Plan. Whilst it is noted that other local planning authorities with Metropolitan Green Belt within their boundaries have considered it appropriate to release land to meet their development needs, Elmbridge’s location adjoining two London boroughs is particularly sensitive: the Metropolitan Green Belt within the borough’s boundary contains London’s growth and retains the identity of the Surrey settlements separate from London and from each other. Changes to the boundaries in advance of a strategic review of the Metropolitan Green Belt being undertaken could undermine the outcomes of that review.
- 6.205 On the basis of the above, the Council does not consider that Option 5a would be in accordance with paragraph 11(a) of the NPPF as, the option would not promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to align growth and infrastructure.

#### The approaches of other Local Planning Authorities

- 6.206 The Council is aware that other Local Planning Authorities, including those in neighbouring Surrey Boroughs and Districts, have concluded that exceptional circumstances exist within their area to fully evidence and justify amendments to the Green Belt boundary in order to meet their development needs in full or part.
- 6.207 As part of the preparation of the draft Local Plan, the Council has carefully monitored the progress of other Local Plans, considering the implications for

its own plan-making. However, by working collaboratively with neighbouring authorities as part of the duty to cooperate and in responding to their Regulation 18 and 19 consultations, it is apparent that each Council's planning context is different; each faces its own issues and challenges and, as the decision-maker, it is for individual Local Planning Authority to determine the appropriate response.

6.208 Thus, it is the Council's position that each Local Planning Authority area is different and, just because one authority determines is appropriate to alter the boundaries of the Green Belt, does not automatically transpose to others.

#### The deliverability of Option 5a

6.209 The Council has some doubt as to the deliverability of Option 5a and whether, even with the release of Green Belt land, the local housing need figure of 647 homes per annum would be delivered.

6.210 It is notable that the market has only delivered a net number of dwellings at anything approaching the local housing need figure in the last monitoring period 2021/22 and that this is attributed to the completion of several large schemes. In 2015/16, 910 units were granted permission, with a dip in 2016/17 before recovering to 643 units in 2017/18 and 1,155 units in 2018/19. Despite permission for these units being granted some years ago, a proportion have not been completed. On average, circ. 330 net homes have been delivered per annum over the last 11 years.

6.211 The reasons for this under-delivery are not clear. A viability analysis has demonstrated that the contributions to affordable housing are viable, as are the rates set for the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Applications for permission are mostly processed within the statutory timeframes and so the Council's decision-making performance is not considered to present an unnecessary delay or cost to the delivery of new homes. The potential for strategic issues or insufficient infrastructure influencing the delivery of housing have been explored and it is concluded that there were no such barriers.

6.212 Generally, it is considered that the development industry is unlikely to want to 'flood the housing market' with a significant increase in new homes.

6.213 Furthermore, as there are sites within the urban areas which have planning permission, but these permissions have not been implemented, to release land from the Green Belt to meet this need would, in the Council's view, take away from the Government's emphasis of making efficient use of the land in the urban areas, conflicting with the NPPF and in particular paragraph 11(a).

## Concluding commentary of the Council's position on amending the Green Belt

6.214 It is the Council's position that due to Elmbridge's location adjacent to two London Boroughs, the particular function of its Green Belt is to form a buffer to the outward growth of London. The Green Belt within Elmbridge serves to preserve the separation between London's urban edge and the distinct settlements in Surrey. It allows the identity of existing towns in this densely settled area around London to be preserved and helps deliver the Council's place-making agenda.

6.215 The Green Belt within the borough is closely interwoven with the borough's settlement and is generally fragmented, rendering it particularly vulnerable to erosion while it makes a significant contribution to environmental character as part of a green network.

6.216 The Council agrees with the Core Strategy Inspector in that, in this context, even small-scale deletions from the Green Belt would be likely to be harmful and undermine its longer-term protection.

6.217 The Council has carefully considered whether exceptional circumstances are evidenced and justified to amend the boundaries of the Green Belt. This has included considering whether or not the policies in the NPPF which address land within the Green Belt provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development within Elmbridge. This has included considering paragraphs 140, 141 and 142 of the NPPF which advise:

"Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans. Strategic policies should establish the need for any changes to Green Belt boundaries, having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so they can endure beyond the plan period..." (paragraph 140 of the NPPF).

Paragraph 141 of the NPPF states:

"Before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries, the strategic policy-making authority should be able to demonstrate that it has examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development. This will be assessed through the examination of its strategic policies, which will take into account the preceding paragraph, and whether the strategy:

a) makes as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land;



b) optimises the density of development in line with the policies in chapter 11 of this Framework, including whether policies promote a significant uplift in minimum density standards in town and city centres and other locations well served by public transport; and

c) has been informed by discussions with neighbouring authorities about whether they could accommodate some of the identified need for development, as demonstrated through the statement of common ground.”

Paragraph 142 of the NPPF states:

“When drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries, the need to promote sustainable patterns of development should be taken into account. Strategic policy-making authorities should consider the consequences for sustainable development of channeling development towards the urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary. Where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously-developed and/or is well-served by public transport. They should also set out ways in which the impact of removing land from the Green Belt can be offset through compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land”.

6.218 Having considered the relevant policy tests within the NPPF and having regard to the Calverton Case, the Council has concluded:

- The acuteness / intensity of the objectively assessed need within Elmbridge is not dissimilar to neighbouring authorities and those in the wider South-East;
- The inherent constraints on supply / availability of land prima facie does not place pressure on providing unsuitable development elsewhere;
- Sustainable development can be achieved through the pursuit of Option 4a, that does not impinge on the Green Belt;
- The nature and extent of the harm to this Green Belt (or those part of it which would be lost if the boundaries were reviewed) are significant; and
- Given the significant harm to the Green Belt, the consequent impacts on the purposes of the Green Belt cannot be ameliorated or reduced to the lowest reasonably practicable extent considered accepted to the Council.

6.219 In addition to the above, the Council considers that:

- In some cases, the Ove Arup assessment of the Green Belt Local Areas / Sub-Areas, undervalues the importance of the sites proposed under Option

5a both in terms of the role they play in delivering the fundamental aim of the Green Belt and the Green Belt Purposes.

- In some cases, the removal of land / sites from the Green Belt as proposed under Option 5a, would result in a weaker Green Belt boundary that is not clearly defined / defensible and would take time to mitigate;
- Option 5a would result in areas of predominately greenfield land being removed from the Green Belt (not previously developed / degraded land);
- The removal of land from the Green Belt will negatively impact on the character of the borough's existing communities;
- The sites under Option 5a are not accessible to a range of community services and facilities and would not promote active travel;
- There is no wider strategic policy support for significant growth in Elmbridge; and
- Option 5a is not necessarily deliverable by the development industry.

## **Option 6 – Optimisation and intensification in more sustainable locations**

6.220 This option includes the same sites within the urban areas as Options 4a and 5a, but increases the development densities for urban sites located in the town, district and local centres as well as any sites close to the borough's railway stations. This is in accordance with paragraph 130 of the NPPF, which aims to ensure that significant development is focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable. Though intensification was the basis of Option 1 presented in the Options Consultation 2019, Option 6 is different in that it does not include land swapping of urban green spaces and does not use a blanket density across all urban sites.

6.221 The evidence supporting this option has found that 9,776 dwellings can be delivered, which would meet Elmbridge's housing need in full with a small amount of contingency (71 units over fifteen years).

### **Relevant policy tests**

6.222 Paragraph 11 of the NPPF states that, "plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

For plan-making this means that:

- a) all plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to: meet the development needs of their area; align growth and infrastructure; improve the environment; mitigate climate change (including by making effective use of land in urban areas) and adapt to its effects;

- b) Strategic policies should, as a minimum, provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses, as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas, unless:
  - i) the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type and distribution of development in the plan area; or
  - ii) any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.”

6.223 With paragraph 11 of the NPPF in mind, the Council must be satisfied that its draft Local Plan and preferred spatial strategy does all it reasonably can to meet the borough’s development needs in a sustainable manner that conforms with current national policy.

6.224 In seeking to achieve sustainable development, paragraph 9 of the NPPF, when referring to the three pillars of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) states:

“These objectives should be delivered through the preparation and implementation of plans and the application of the policies in this Framework; they are not criteria against which every decision can or should be judged. Planning policies and decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, **but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area**”. (Council’s emphasis).

6.225 Nationally, there is a drive to deliver more homes faster, as well as achieving the effective use of previously development land. The NPPF 2021 supports this approach, by placing emphasis on the effective use of land and particularly brownfield land, as well as promoting the use of minimum density policies, upward extensions, conversions and reallocation of sites in other uses to deliver housing.

6.226 Specifically, paragraph 124 states that planning policies “should support development that makes efficient use of land, taking into account:

- a) the identified need for different types of housing and other forms of development, and the availability of land suitable for accommodating it;
- b) local market conditions and viability;
- c) the availability and capacity of infrastructure and services – both existing and proposed – as well as their potential for further improvement and the

- scope to promote sustainable travel modes that limit future car use;
- d) **the desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character and setting (including residential gardens), or of promoting regeneration and change; and**
  - e) the importance of securing well-designed, attractive and healthy places.” (Council's emphasis).

6.227 Paragraph 125 also states that “where there is an existing or anticipated shortage of land for meeting identified housing needs, it is especially important that planning policies and decisions avoid homes being built at low densities, and ensure that developments make optimal use of the potential of each site. In these circumstances:

- a) plans should contain policies to optimise the use of land in their area and meet as much of the identified need for housing as possible. This will be tested robustly at examination and should include the use of minimum density standards for city and town centres and other locations that are well served by public transport. These standards should seek a significant uplift in the average density of residential development within these areas, unless it can be shown that there are strong reasons why this would be inappropriate;
- b) the use of minimum density standards should also be considered for other parts of the plan area. It may be appropriate to set out a range of densities that reflect the accessibility and potential of different areas, rather than one broad density range; and
- c) local planning authorities should refuse applications which they consider fail to make efficient use of land, taking into account the policies in this Framework. In this context, when considering applications for housing, authorities should take a flexible approach in applying policies or guidance relating to daylight and sunlight, where they would otherwise inhibit making efficient use of a site (as long as the resulting scheme would provide acceptable living standards).”

6.228 Given the need to provide additional housing in Elmbridge to provide for its local housing need, the Council has prioritised opportunities to optimise the capacity of the urban areas using a ‘brownfield first’ approach in accordance with the NPPF. Intensification (Option 6) of development on sites will deliver additional housing capacity within the borough's existing urban areas through a combination of:

- Providing higher density layouts, such as flats and terraced houses, rather than detached and semi-detached houses;

- Ensuring the comprehensive re-development of sites, combining them where possible, to result in a more efficient site layout; and
- Encouraging the delivery of taller buildings.

### Consideration of Option 6

- 6.229 As Option 6 contains the same urban sites as Option 4a, the results of the Sustainability Appraisal are similar. However, major positive impacts are expected for the accessibility SA objective as development will be intensified in the most sustainable urban areas, which would reduce future occupants need to travel, encourage sustainable transport options and improve accessibility to key services and facilities (see Table 12).
- 6.230 Meeting the identified housing need in full by directing development toward the existing urban areas and intensifying development schemes would, protect the existing boundaries of the Green Belt: firstly, by putting forward a strategy for the borough's development over the plan-period which does not rely on Green Belt release and secondly, by resisting future pressure which may be exerted by speculative planning applications during the plan-period.
- 6.231 However, the Council considers that that Option 6 would see the delivery of residential units that negatively impact the urban structure and grain of local communities through the continued sub-division of plots beyond the scope of 'optimising' / making efficient use of land. This is contrary to the NPPF including paragraph 11(a). It is also considered that the size, height and bulk of new structures to the prevalent scale in other buildings in the immediate areas would be substantially different, negatively impacting on the built form (the function, shape and configuration of buildings as well as their relationships to streets and open spaces) and the character of our existing communities.
- 6.232 In addition, the availability of on-site parking would need to be reduced or eliminated in order to achieve the intensified yields required. Whilst the Council supports the drive towards sustainable modes of travel, it is considered that this will result in 'pushing parking stress' to neighbouring areas whilst a shift in behaviour towards zero car parking communities evolves and, as the public transport infrastructure required to support a model shift is delivered. It is not considered that the infrastructure required to support on option of intensification is currently in place. Thus, contrary to paragraph 11(a) of the NPPF.
- 6.233 Amenity and other open space would also be limited on sites to achieve the intensified yields required. This place greater pressure / reliance on the borough's public open spaces. The lack of amenity and other open spaces on

sites would also conflict with other policies in the draft Local Plan. For example, ENV6 – Protecting, enhancing and recovering biodiversity which seeks to protect and enhance biodiversity on-site, and Policy ENV9 – Design quality which states “that development should preserve, and where possible enhance, Elmbridge’s distinctive character, townscape and landscape...”

6.234 Whilst Policy ENV9 continues that “within allocated sites identified by policies in this Plan, development need not necessarily reflect the character of the area, this is on the proviso that it is of excellent design quality and would integrate sensitively into the locality”, it is the Council’s position, that the development of schemes at the densities promoted through Option 6, could not be integrated sensitively into the locality.

6.235 The Council is of the opinion that these factors would cause the urban areas to feel more urban than at present; further negatively affecting the character of our existing communities.

6.236 As set out above, Option 6 would meet the local housing need figure for the borough. However, an intensification strategy would not necessarily deliver the type of homes required within the borough. The Local Housing Need Assessment (2020) identifies that the greatest affordable need is for four-bedroom units (40%) followed by 2-bedroom homes (34%). It is considered that a strategy of intensification would constrain the delivery of the types of homes required.

## SA Objectives

## Option 6: Urban area and intensify development around town and village centres and train stations. 9689 homes

1. Homes	-
2. Health	+
3. Heritage	?
4. Accessibility	++
5. Previously developed land	++
6. Economic growth	?
7. Employment	-
8. Energy Use	-
9. Natural Resources	-
10. Climate Change	-
11. Flooding	-
12. Water	-
13. Land	+
14. Pollution	-
15. Landscape	++
16. Biodiversity	+

**Table 12: Sustainability Appraisal of Option 6**

6.237 Furthermore, in considering more intense forms of development in the past, the Council has had regard to the evidence base (Viability Assessment 2022) which highlights that beyond around six-storeys, build costs for taller structures are disproportionate, adding significant cost, and would impact on viability unless higher still sales values were supported to balance out the increase. The Council's evidence base (Viability Assessment 2022) indicates that in general, viability on urban sites is becoming increasingly challenging due to a combination of high land values and rising build costs.

6.238 Furthermore, the Viability Assessment makes the following observation:

“There is currently no experience of high-rise development in the borough. We cannot be sure given the nature of the plan area that there would be a clear demand for this to support viable schemes. To our knowledge, Elmbridge is a borough where the market offer and appeal is more related to the generally lower rise and relatively “leafy” or open / more “village-like” nature of much of the urban areas. We offer this observation relative for example to the contrasting characteristics of some other areas nearby – such as parts of Woking, Spelthorne, Kingston and other boroughs where the more typically

larger town or urban nature and transport hubs or other local features have been supporting an established demand for some higher-rise living or where there are such proposals being considered. We cannot say what a bold vision may lead to in any area of course, but the prospect of viable high-rise in Elmbridge does not seem to be an obvious one at this stage in our view, with that available elsewhere and the borough providing a different offer generally”.

- 6.239 The Council has also considered how this strategy of intensification would fit with other key challenges that Local Plan should seek to address (see Section 4). As set out in Section 4, the Council is seeking to achieve ‘good growth’, that benefits our existing and future residents and builds on the prosperity of the borough. As set out in the emerging Surrey 2050 Place Ambition, good growth includes being proportionate and sustainable; supports overall improvements to the physical and mental health and well-being of our residents; is supported by the necessary infrastructure investment – including green infrastructure; and delivers high quality design in our buildings and public realm. The Council considers that Option 6 would be in conflict with these elements of the concept of good growth.
- 6.240 Furthermore, the basis of the draft Local Plan is a presumption in favour of sustainable place-making and a reflection of what this means in the context of Elmbridge borough. As set out in Section 4, the Council is seeking to balance meeting the development needs of the borough with protecting and enhancing the assets of the borough of importance. This includes the borough’s natural assets but also the overall urban structure of the borough and the recognition of the separate and distinct places / neighbourhoods. The Council has made clear the importance of new development building on the success of our existing communities and places and responding to their individual identities and development needs. It is considered that Option 6 would conflict with the Council’s pursuit of sustainable place-making.
- 6.241 With the NPPF and its evidence base in mind, it is the Council’s position that Option 6 would not promote a sustainable pattern of development and that the benefits of meeting local housing need through the pursuit of Option 6 would be significantly and demonstrably outweighed by the impact on the built-form and character of the existing urban areas and is not acceptable when assessed against the policies in the Framework when taken as a whole in particular paragraph 11(b)(ii).



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## 7. The preferred spatial strategy

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- 7.1 At a Special Council on 13 June 2022, it was agreed that Option 4a – Optimisation should be pursued as the Council’s preferred spatial strategy for the borough as part of the new Elmbridge Local Plan.
- 7.2 Option 4a, the Council’s preferred spatial strategy, is expected to deliver circ. 6,787 new homes across the plan-period. In regard to the local housing need figure for the borough (as set by the Standard Methodology), this represents a 30% shortfall (2,918 dwellings across the plan-period).
- 7.3 This section of the paper sets out the Council’s reasoning for identifying / recommending Option 4a, as the preferred spatial strategy for the new Local Plan.

### National Planning Policy

- 7.4 Paragraph 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2021) states that:

“plans and decisions should apply the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

For plan-making this means:

- a) All plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to: meet the development needs of their area; align growth and infrastructure; improve the environment; mitigate climate change (including by making effective use of land in urban areas) and adapt to its effects;
- b) Strategic policies should, as a minimum, provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses, as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas, unless:
  - i) the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type and distribution of development in the plan area; or
  - ii) any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.”

- 7.5 Whilst the NPPF asks local planning authorities to meet needs in full, this is subject to a full analysis against relevant policies. A Plan which meets the borough's full development needs (as defined by the Standard Methodology and other evidence base documents) might be found sound in terms of its meeting needs in full, but this does not mean that a Plan which does not meet needs in full cannot be found sound.
- 7.6 The NPPF provides for such a scenario by including the wording in paragraph 11b) which advises that strategic policies should meet objectively assessed need in full "unless..."
- 7.7 Furthermore, the NPPF and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) make clear that the local housing need figure as calculated by the Standard Methodology is not automatically transposed into a Local Plan to be the housing target / requirement for the authority. Government recognises that there are constraints to meeting needs and sets out in Guidance whether or no plan-makers should override constraints such as Green Belt, when carrying out the assessment (land availability) to meet identified need.

7.8 PPG states:

"Housing need is an unconstrained assessment of the number of homes needed in an area. Assessing housing need is the first step in the process of deciding how many homes need to be planned for. It should be undertaken separately from assessing land availability, establishing a housing requirement figure and preparing policies to address this such as site allocations..." (paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 2a-001-20190220).

and,

"The National Planning Policy Framework expects strategic policy-making authorities to follow the standard method in this guidance for assessing local housing need. The standard method uses a formula to identify the minimum number of homes expected to be planned for in a way which addresses projected household growth and historic under-supply. The standard method set out below identifies a minimum annual housing need figure. It does not produce a housing requirement figure". (paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 2a-002-20190220).

and,

"Plan-making bodies should consider constraints when assessing the suitability, availability and achievability of sites and broad locations. For example, assessments should reflect the policies in footnote 6 of the National

Planning Policy Framework, which sets out the areas where the Framework would provide strong reasons for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan areas (such as Green Belt and other protected areas)". (paragraph: 002 Reference ID: 3-002-20190772).

- 7.9 In determining the spatial strategy within the draft Local Plan, the Council has carefully considered whether, in light of the evidence base and the scale of the need for development, the policies within the NPPF provide a strong reason for restricting development within Elmbridge (as per paragraph 11b)i)). The Council has also considered whether certain options would promote a sustainable pattern of development.
- 7.10 As set out in Section 6 of this paper, the Council has assessed the option of amending the boundary of the Green Belt to assist in meeting the borough's local housing need in full. However, having considered the relevant policy tests, the Council does not consider that exceptional circumstances have been fully evidenced and justified to do so.
- 7.11 The Council attaches great importance to the Green Belt and, in accordance with the NPPF (as per paragraph 11b)i)), has concluded that the Green Belt provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type and distribution of development in the plan area.
- 7.12 Furthermore, the Council does not consider Option 6 appropriate as the preferred spatial strategy for the borough. As set out in Section 6, the Council considers that intensifying development within the urban areas, would significantly alter the character of our existing communities and would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole (as per paragraph 11 a) and b)ii) of the NPPF.

## **The preferred spatial strategy**

- 7.13 With paragraph 11 of the NPPF in mind, the Council is satisfied that its preferred development strategy does all it reasonably can to meet the borough's development needs in a sustainable manner, conforms with current national policy and reflects the Council's evidence base.
- 7.14 At the heart of the spatial strategy is the commitment to respond to the climate emergency and sustainable place-making (as set out in Section 4). The scale and location of growth set out in the draft Local Plan - Strategic Policy SS3: scale and location of growth, has been informed by careful consideration of the evidence and the balancing of the social, economic and environmental positive and negative effects which could arise from growth and development.

- 7.15 The location of development in the borough has also been driven by the principle of sustainable development as set out in national policy. With this in mind, planning for the borough's housing needs builds on the existing pattern of development in the borough, taking a 'brownfield first' approach. In taking a 'brownfield first' approach, the draft Local Plan seeks to make as much use as possible of existing suitable brownfield sites, including all publicly owned assets and land holdings.
- 7.16 The key principles behind the scale and location of growth in the borough include:
- Optimising opportunities for development on previously developed land within the existing urban areas by proactively optimising sites in sustainable locations providing access to services and facilities.
  - Continuing to deliver a strong network of sustainable and distinguished settlements across the borough.
  - Increasing the number of new homes and genuinely affordable homes in the borough.
  - Seeking to support sustainable patterns of travel.
  - Taking account local and strategic infrastructure capacity in particular, the road network.
  - Protecting the Green Belt from inappropriate development.
  - Avoiding other sensitive areas including areas identified for biodiversity and nature conservation importance as well as areas at high risk of flooding.

## **Sustainability Appraisal**

- 7.17 Option 4a meets 70% of the borough's local housing need by optimising the use of sites in the urban areas in accordance with the NPPF. This will result in a significant negative impact for the homes SA objective as this option will not meet the housing need or the mix required (see Figure 9). However, the Council considers this still provides a sustainable option for development within the borough in accordance with paragraph 11(a) of the NPPF as this strategy seeks to align growth and infrastructure provision, and protects and enhances the built and natural environment including the landscape character of the borough and its rich biodiversity.

SA Objective	Option 4a: Urban area only
1. Homes	---
2. Health	+
3. Heritage	?
4. Accessibility	+
5. Previously developed land	+
6. Economic growth	?
7. Employment	-
8. Energy Use	-
9. Natural Resources	-
10. Climate Change	-
11. Flooding	-
12. Water	-
13. Land	+
14. Pollution	-
15. Landscape	++
16. Biodiversity	+

**Figure 9: The sustainable appraisal of Option 4a**

## The scale and location of growth

- 7.18 Draft Strategic Policy SS3 scale and location of growth, sets out the quantum and spatial distribution of development in the borough, as required by national policy. The housing requirement is for the Council to deliver 6,785 homes over the 15-year plan-period (452 homes per annum)<sup>14</sup>.
- 7.19 In principle, the draft Local Plan provides for a significant step-change in its housing target in comparison to those previously set. For example, this represents a **100% increase in the per annum target set in the Core Strategy (225 dwellings per annum)**.
- 7.20 The recommended preferred strategy achieves a broad balance to and proportionate distribution of growth across the borough focused on the key settlements / most sustainable locations / opportunities for infrastructure and sustainable transport. This is summarised in Table 12.
- 7.21 The Key Diagram shown at Figure 10 has been produced to indicate the broad extent of the key locations, landscape and other designations relevant to the Local Plan.
- 7.22 To deliver the spatial strategy, the Council will need to work with our partners,

<sup>14</sup> Within the Local Plan, the figure of 6,787 from the LAA 2022 has been rounded to the nearest 5 to form the housing requirement of the borough.

local communities and the development industry. Through continued engagement with neighbouring Local Planning Authorities, the Council will also need to continue to actively explore ways for how the unmet housing need of the borough may be met elsewhere as neighbouring plans come to fruition and opportunities may arise.

<b>Settlement</b>	<b>No. of units<sup>15</sup></b>	<b>% of the total</b>
Claygate	320	4.7%
Cobham & Oxshott, Stoke D'Abernon and Downside	870	12.8%
East & West Molesey	730	10.7%
Esher	1,215	17.9%
Hersham	560	8.3%
Long Ditton, Thames Ditton, Hinchley Wood & Weston Green	635	9.3%
Walton-on-Thames	1,255	18.5%
Weybridge	1,200	17.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,785</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 11: Anticipated distribution of new homes by settlement area**

## Supporting the delivery of the draft Local Plan

7.23 A number of evidence base documents have not only informed the preparation of the Local Plan and the determination of the spatial strategy but also demonstrate its deliverability including mitigation measures. These include:

- Air Quality Assessment – Phase 2
- Equality Impact Assessment
- Habitats Regulation Assessment
- Heritage Impact Assessment
- Infrastructure Delivery Plan
- Sustainability Appraisal
- Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area – Avoidance & Mitigation Strategy
- Transport Assessment
- Viability Assessment

<sup>15</sup> Figures have been rounded to the nearest '5', hence the total of 6,787 is slightly lower than the Land Availability Assessment (LAA) of 6,785.



- |                           |                     |                                 |
|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| Green Belt                | River Thames Scheme | Borough Boundary                |
| Urban Areas               | Rivers              | Waste Sites                     |
| SANG                      | Motorways           | Town Centre                     |
| Strategic Employment Land | A Roads             | Local Centre                    |
| Thames Basin Heath (SPA)  | Railway             | District Centre                 |
| Open Water                | Railway Station     | Broad Locations for Development |

Figure 10: Local Plan Key Diagram

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## 8. Conclusion

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- 8.1 This paper explains how the Council has developed its recommended preferred strategy; using a range of factors to inform the development and consideration of reasonable options and selecting a preferred option.
- 8.2 The Council has tested a wide range of spatial options and has explored their implications across a range of sustainability objectives. This has been supported by an extensive evidence base and Regulation 18 consultations with our communities and other stakeholders. The Council has also undertaken considerable engagement and shared its evidence base with key stakeholders throughout the process of developing its position on the level and distribution of growth. This process has been reinforced and informed by its collaborative working with key bodies on strategic matters under the Duty to Cooperate.
- 8.3 The Council has sought to recommend a sustainable approach to development despite the challenges of the levels of growth the borough is facing, and the extensive constraints faced by the borough. In principle, the recommended spatial strategy within the draft Local Plan provides for a significant step-change in its housing target in comparison to those previously set and, seeks to provide new homes in the right places through a logical and evidence based spatial strategy that promotes sustainable patterns of development. It also reflects the Council's place-making ambition and commitment to tackle climate change.
- 8.4 The recommended spatial strategy will concentrate growth within urban areas, optimising the development potential of each site with a key focus on our high streets and other retail centres as their evolution into community hubs is supported. It will seek to increase the level of housing over the lifetime of the plan including, the delivery of affordable homes, supported by the necessary infrastructure.
- 8.5 The Council, whilst recognising that this efficient use of land will help to respond to demand, it will not meet all of it. The Council considers however, it has struck the correct balance in terms of meeting its housing, economic and other development needs in sustainable locations, whilst balancing this with the need to continue to conserve and enhance the qualities and characteristics that make our existing communities attractive places to live, work and spend leisure time. This includes the Green Belt, for which the Government attached great importance, and our open spaces, as well as safeguarding other areas of recognised importance such as ancient



woodland, habitat sites and heritage assets of international and national importance and avoiding areas unsuitable for new development for example, where they are at high risk from flooding.

- 8.6 Through continued engagement with neighbouring Local Planning Authorities, the Council will need to continue to actively explore ways for how the unmet housing need of the borough may be met elsewhere as neighbouring plans come to fruition and opportunities may arise.

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**Appendix A: Summary of selected Local Plan  
evidence base documents as referred to in  
Section 5**

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## **Air Quality Assessment Phase 1 – 2019**

A phase 1 assessment of the Air Quality in the borough was undertaken in 2019 by Cambridge Environmental Research Consultants (CERC). The phase 1 assessment provided information on the baseline modelling for the year 2017. The assessment stated that the main sources of air pollution in the borough was road traffic emissions. The aim of the modelling was to ascertain whether or not the development associated with the Local Plan has the potential to cause air quality issues, i.e. approaching or exceeding air quality standards for nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub> and NO<sub>2</sub>) or particulate matter (PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub>). Human health and habitats impacts are of concern.

As the baseline, on high resolution air quality maps were generated the human health impacts of NO<sub>2</sub>, PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub> across the borough have been assessed. These were used to determine the extent to which the air quality objectives for these pollutants are exceeded. In examining the baseline, the report stated “with the exception of some locations close to major roads, the air quality objectives are met throughout the borough. There are modelled exceedances of the annual mean NO<sub>2</sub> objective of 40 µg/m<sup>3</sup> along the M25 and other busy roads. Exceedance of short-term NO<sub>2</sub> and PM<sub>10</sub> objectives are less extensive. The annual mean PM<sub>2.5</sub> objective of 25 µg/m<sup>3</sup> is met throughout the borough”.

In terms of sensitive habitats impacts, the baseline study calculated the annual average NO<sub>x</sub> concentrations at the area of each Special Protection Area (SPA) within the borough for comparison with the critical level of 30µg/m<sup>3</sup>. The modelling at each sensitive habitat location exceeded the critical levels. For each SPA the baseline modelling concluded, “the model predicted annual average NO<sub>x</sub> concentrations exceed this critical level across the majority of this SPA. Concentrations below the critical level are found towards the centre of the SPA and at the boundaries away from the major roads. Within the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, the close proximity of the M25 and A3 result in model-predicted annual average NO<sub>x</sub> concentrations exceeding the critical level across the majority of this SPA. Concentrations below the critical level are found towards the centre of the SPA and at the boundaries away from major roads”.

In terms of NO<sub>2</sub> (contributions to nitrogen deposition), this was calculated at each of the SPAs, with the baseline concluding “the ammonium (NH<sub>4</sub>), nitrate (NO<sub>3</sub>) and nitric acid (HNO<sub>3</sub>) contributions to nitrogen deposition were taken into account using background concentrations of these species. For South West London Waterbodies SPA, the nitrogen deposition falls below the critical load range of 20-30 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup>. Thames Basin Heaths SPA comprises both forest and grassland habitats. The calculated nitrogen deposition shows exceedances of the critical load of 5-15 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup> for the forest habitat; and values within the critical load range of 10-20 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup> for the grassland habitat”.

## **Air Quality Annual Status Report 2019**

At the time of the report, the borough has seven Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs), and in line with the Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) Technical Guidance (TG) the borough had produced an Air Quality Annual Status Report.

In reviewing the air quality monitoring for the borough, the report concludes the need for continued improvements at many locations across the borough. However, it does identify that exceedances of the annual mean NO<sub>2</sub> objective have been identified at four monitoring locations in 2018. Three of these sites are located in the Esher AQMA (Esher 1, Esher 7 and Esher 8), whilst one site (Esher 5) is not located within the AQMA. The Esher 5 site is located at the Copsem Lane Roundabout, where Copsem Land adjoins the A3 Esher bypass.

Working with the Surrey Air Alliance (SAA), the borough is part of a modelling project that aims to provide a better understanding of air quality in the borough and Surrey. Utilising the results of the SAA modelling project the borough will be reviewing existing AQMA's and investigating any potential areas for further investigation identified.

Priorities for the Air Quality Annual Status Report include:

- Seeking provision of infrastructure through the planning process for the promotion and support of low emission vehicle usage;
- Utilising development management control within the borough's AQMAs to avoid introducing more people to poor air quality or additional sources of pollution;
- Working collaboratively with other Surrey authorities, SCC Public Health team, Surrey's Clinical Commissioning Groups, SCC Local Highway and Transport Authority, in addition to actively participating in the SAA;
- Promoting air quality, raising awareness and seeking to change behaviours; and
- Increasing electric vehicle charging points in council car parks and exploring further incentives for electric vehicle users.

## **Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Level 1 (Aecom, 2019)**

The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Level 1 (2019) provided a strategic overview of flood risk within the borough, taking into account all sources of flooding and the impacts of Climate Change. Crucially this document identified the functional floodplain (Flood Zone 3b) in conjunction with the Environment Agency. The assessment included a number of policy recommendations and development management measures to inform the development of the Local Plan and day-to-day decision-making.

## **Strategic Views Study 2019**

This study examined the rationale and appropriateness for the selection of 7 strategic views presented in the current Elmbridge Local Plan (Core Strategy 21 2011) and identified potential approaches to view management and protection through bench-marking with examples in other Surrey local authorities and further afield, and field surveys.

The study recommended that of the current 7 views identified, two remain as Strategic Views. These two are Strategic View 1: The River Thames Meadowlands from St Mary's Church, Hampton, and Strategic View 7: Dorking Gap from Oxshott Heath.

## **Ancient & Veteran Trees 2018**

This study was undertaken in response to the new NPPF (published in July 2018 and updated in February 2019) which updated the guidance for the consideration of ancient and veteran trees. The report establishes an appropriate methodology for assessing ancient and veteran trees in the borough and applied it to an area of search within the borough.

Following the desk survey and site visits, eight trees were recorded as ancient or veteran. Two trees (T6 and T8 Sweet Chestnuts) met the requirements to be categorised as ancient. Six trees (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5 and T7 English Oaks) meet the requirements to be categorised as veteran. All these trees are now covered by Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs).

## **Water Cycle Study 2019**

The Water Cycle Study assessed the most appropriate options for development in the borough with respect to water infrastructure and the water environment. Planned and proposed future development throughout the borough has been assessed with regards to water supply capacity, wastewater capacity and environmental capacity.

The assessment was made on the basis of two housing growth scenarios, one which focuses on urban optimisation only and one which considered a combination of urban optimisation and partial Green Belt release.

In terms of wastewater treatment, the study identified that both the Sewage Treatment Works that serve the borough have capacity to treat the additional wastewater volumes from proposed growth. However, the study did identify that water quality modelling was needed due to the impact of the increased pollutant load on the water quality. These assessments showed that the Water Framework Directive objectives could be met for all proposed housing scenarios without the

need for significant upgrade to treatment infrastructure.

The study concluded regarding water supply “Based on the growth assessed, allowing for the planned resource management for Affinity Water’s, Thames Water Utilities’ and Sutton and East Surrey Water’s supply areas in the borough, the water supply companies would have adequate water supply to cater for growth over the plan period”.

The Water Cycle Study set out ways in which demand for water can be minimised as a result of development, including technological measures to deliver more water efficient development and reduced water consumption through development management policies.

### **Local Green Space Designation Study (2016)**

The Study set out the methodology used for the assessment of potential areas for designation as Local Green Spaces and the assessments themselves.

As a result of extensive consultation with the community and Councillors, 164 areas were suggested as Local Green Space opportunities. A number of these potential areas were excluded from consideration as they were protected from development by an existing piece of legislation or policy (e.g. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)), were below the site size threshold set by the Council or had planning permission for an alternative form of development.

Following on from the detailed assessments, the initial findings found that there were 38 areas which meet the Local Green Space Criteria.

### **Elmbridge Open Space & Recreation Assessment (2014)**

The Assessment was produced in 2014 by the consultants Atkins. The assessment identified the quantity and appraised the quality, value, and accessibility of open space provision across the borough.

It identified a level of local open space needs by analysing demographic and socio-economic indicators that influence the open space needs of different localities. It found that natural or semi-natural greenspaces represent the largest share of total open space, and there is a good coverage of natural greenspace across the borough. There was no additional requirement in terms of accessibility.

The study assessed the quality and value of the borough’s open spaces. It concluded that the value placed on open space is multi-functional and relates to a range of roles. It found that 22% of the open spaces assessed were of high quality / of high value to the community. However, many of the high quality / low value spaces represent mono-functional open spaces which only contribute to the

community in a limited way.

It identified areas deficient in public open space and children's play provision and recommended that public park provision should increase by 6 ha and that the remaining deficiencies could be met by improving the facilities within existing open spaces.

The assessment identified individual spaces that had scope for improvement and how the open spaces can be improved. The assessment concluded that projected population growth will place increasing pressure on existing open spaces and recreational facilities as the number of users increase and potentially, that existing facilities are likely to face increasing pressure from development for alternative uses. The assessment of open space is being updated as part of ongoing work on Green Infrastructure.

### **Baseline and Functional Economic Area 2016**

The purpose of this study was to identify the functional economic area that Elmbridge is located within and identifies the boroughs that the Council will need to work with to ensure an effective supply of employment land to meet business needs.

The study concluded that Elmbridge functions within a south west London / north Surrey economic area and this area is similar to that identified by the Enterprise M3 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) as the Upper M3 commercial market area.

As part of the study, prominent economic sectors were identified within the borough. These were knowledge based such as professional, computing and information services. Whilst the prominence of distribution and warehousing functions within the borough were more reflective of the LEP area as a whole, and as a result of good transport linkages.

### **Elmbridge Retail Assessment 2016 (Bilfinger GVA)**

This study provided an evidence base on the existing and future roles and performance of the borough's Town, District and Local Centres and assessed the future demand for retail floorspace in the borough over the period to 2035. The study took into account the expected levels of growth in Elmbridge and neighbouring authorities, as well as recent and emerging changes in consumer behaviour.

It identified a 'need' for additional comparison and convenience goods floorspace, as follows:

- Comparison goods — between 14,100 and 19,700 sqm net additional comparison goods floorspace by 2035; and
- Convenience goods — between 1,000 and 1,900 sqm net additional

convenience goods floorspace by 2035.

The capacity forecasts shown above had regard to planning 'commitments' for new retail floorspace in the borough and were based on a range of scenarios in terms of population growth and, in respect of comparison goods, the amount of comparison goods spending which will be retained in the borough in light of the planned developments for new comparison goods retail floorspace in competing centres such as Kingston-upon-Thames, Woking and Guildford. It was concluded that the centres in Elmbridge should seek to play a complementary, supporting role to these higher order centres, which enable day-to-day and some higher-order shopping needs to be met.

It concluded that retail will continue to be an important contributor to the vitality and viability of town centres, and a driver for growth. It is therefore important the Town and District centres are protected and supported through policy. It was recommended that the council should consider the introduction of appropriate measures, including Article 4 Directions, to support this. Whilst a more flexible approach to 'town centre' uses is appropriate in secondary locations, it was recommended that active uses on ground floors should be encouraged throughout the Town and District Centres.

### **Elmbridge Commercial Property Report 2017 (GL Hearn)**

This report provided a commercial property market review, updated employment forecasting, an analysis of the local property market demand and supply and future employment land requirements.

The report identified that the borough is a highly desirable place for both office and industrial industries. There is a skilled local labour force with a strong transport network with connections to London and the South East.

In terms of supply, it was concluded that Elmbridge has a greater provision of warehousing than its surrounding boroughs with Brooklands Industrial Estate and Molesey Industrial Estate providing most of the borough's industrial supply with modern, large warehouse accommodation with good accessibility to the strategic road network. The other industrial areas in the borough serve a more local market.

It found that the current industrial stock experienced low vacancy levels, and this was considered to be restricting market performance. This was reflected in the identified undersupply in the Upper M3 area. Overall the borough was not a prime market for industrial property however latent demand is considered to exist.

The baseline employment forecast showed demand for Use Class B8 (Warehouse & Distribution) particularly in transport, storage & distribution. This was fueled by a lack of provision of B8 space in adjacent boroughs. Demand was for both larger B8



distribution as well as small plots for construction and niche manufacturing. However, the constrained physical nature of the borough means it is difficult to increase this floorspace.

In terms of office supply, Brooklands at Weybridge were identified as the principal office location in the borough. Overall there was limited office space and little in the development pipeline for new office development. It found there is a strong supply of offices in neighbouring boroughs with a number of schemes being developed and therefore businesses could migrate to neighbouring authorities and this may lead to a lower rate of demand for Grade A space in the short to medium term. However, in the long-term Elmbridge and the Upper M3 will remain areas of demand for office accommodation.

Permitted development rights were found to be adversely affecting the borough and had resulted in loss of office space in town centre locations. This could potentially result in an undersupply of second-hand space for smaller businesses and replacement stock would require market intervention.

The analysis identified a short to medium term demand for smaller (less than 1,000sqm) and medium sized suites (between 1,000-5,000sqm). It also highlighted that there is a need to consider office provision for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups looking for flexible small workspace at lower rents that traditionally occupied second-hand space in town centres.

Informed by the analysis, the Review established a 'Local Scenario' to identify a jobs growth forecast for the borough. This adjusted the labour demand forecasting to take account of completions trends and planned development in the borough. The result of this was an increase in the need for office space and a decrease in the need for warehouse/distribution space. This is because the employment densities for warehouse/distribution jobs is much lower than it is for office jobs.

Following on from this, the Review used plot ratios to translate this floorspace forecast to a land need. This resulted in a need of 16ha of employment land to provide the floorspace needed to support growth, with around 7ha required for warehouse/distribution use and 9ha for office use. Along with a forecast net loss of around 2ha of industrial land and 1ha of Sui Generis uses.

### **Strategic Employment Land Review 2019**

The Review assessed the borough's current Strategic Employment Land (SEL) designations of which there are 13 along with other non-designated employment sites. All of the sites were assessed by taking into account market signals, physical signals, sustainability signals and whether the site could provide opportunities for future growth. A number of the SELs have already been granted planning permission for residential redevelopment and this has been considered in the assessment.

The assessment concluded that only five sites were worthy of being retained as SEL: Brooklands Industrial Estate, The Heights, Hersham Trading Estate in Walton-on-Thames, Hersham Place Technology Park and Molesey Industrial Estate. These five SEL sites considered suitable to retain their designation of SEL are all over 5ha in size and have the potential for intensification and redevelopment to provide more employment floorspace.

The other sites assessed were either considered to be unsuitable for retaining their SEL designation or becoming designated SEL in the first place. These sites were found to be of a small size and scattered in locations around the borough and therefore could not form significant elements of strategic employment land. Other sites were located near to settlement centres and were viewed as providing a complementary role to the settlement centre function rather than providing a strategic employment role.

### **Local Market Appraisal 2020**

The Local Market Appraisal 2020 was undertaken by Boyer Planning and they were tasked with providing a review of the council's evidence base in relation to the economy in the borough. In addition, they were to provide recommendations in the relation to the existing SEL sites and other employment uses to aid the development of policy in the emerging Local Plan.

The key findings were as follows:

- Projections, previous completions and trend information points towards a reduced need for industrial floorspace.
- Information showing that the price/sqft as well as on-site observations of Molesey Industrial Estate and Hersham Industrial Estate show that there are very low vacancy rates.
- The GL Hearn report and other trend data may point towards a continuing need for additional B1 (office) floorspace across the borough but it was suggested that caution should be given as to how future need is provided.
- Notable level of vacancies in a number of larger office units at the northern section of The Heights SEL.
- A greater need for smaller start-up offices to replace office space lost to permitted development rights changes of use to residential, which has taken place since 2013.
- The ongoing and increasing demand for online shopping (as indicated by the trend data) shows that there is likely to be a continued requirement for B8 warehousing and distribution units. This is mostly likely to be needed in the Brooklands Industrial Estate and in those areas located with good access to the strategic road network.

- Due to the limited land in the borough and the very high residential property market and housing need this leads to challenges as to where future employment floorspace can come forward. On that basis, the most likely viable approach would be to protect and intensify existing employment locations.
- Large areas of surface car parking at The Heights, presents opportunities for redevelopment through decked car parking and use of 'spare' land yield.
- Focus should be given to intensify existing industrial sites to provide modern accommodation for B8 uses.
- Additional growth could be provided from Heathrow expansion but would depend on the location to the strategic transport network.
- Recommend updating the SEL Review 2019 paper to update the list of sites that have had planning permissions and to undertake an assessment of the exact boundaries of each SEL.
- Boyer Planning recommend eight of the adopted 13 SELs which have not been granted planning permission to convert to residential use should be designated or retained as SEL in the emerging Local Plan. Five of those eight SELs have been recommended as strategically significant and these are:
  - The Heights, Weybridge
  - Hersham Place Technology Park, Hersham
  - Brooklands Industrial Estate, Weybridge
  - Hersham Trading Estate, Walton-on-Thames
  - Molesey Industrial Estate, West Molesey

### **Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) 2017**

The Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) provided a robust assessment of the current and future need for Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople accommodation in the borough. The GTAA sought to understand the accommodation needs through a combination of desk-based research, stakeholder interviews and engagement with members of the Travelling Community.

Based upon the evidence gathered in the study the estimated additional pitch provision needed to 2031 for Gypsies and Travellers who meet the Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS) (2015) definition is for 2 additional pitches. However due to a number of households, who may meet the PPTS definition of a Traveller, the study also concluded that the overall level of need could rise due to this to a total of 9 pitches. Further to this the needs of Gypsies and Travellers who do not meet the 'planning' definition in the GTAA will need to be considered and assessed as part of the wider housing needs of the area.

### **Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Site Assessment Study 2018**

The purpose of the study was to identify sufficient sites required to meet the accommodation needs of Gypsy, Roma and Travellers in line with the methodology

set out in the PPTS (2015) and to meet the need identified in the Council's most recent GTAA 2017.

The study considered 45 sites in the borough in both the urban area and on Green Belt. Through the assessment 4 sites were highlighted as having potential to meet the borough's needs (as identified in the GTAA 2017).

### **Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) 2020**

Opinion Research Services (ORS) were commissioned to update the GTAA to provide evidence across the new 15-year plan-period and to ensure that the Council's evidence base was up to date and accorded with the requirements towards Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople as set out under the Housing Act 1985, Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS) 2015, the Housing and Planning Act (2016), the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019, and the revised Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) 2019.

The GTAA concluded that across a 15-year period up to 2036, 18 pitches were required for Travellers that met the planning definition, 9 pitches for Travellers who did not meet the planning definition, and up to 1 pitch where it was not determined whether the household met the planning definition. No need for plots for Travelling Showpeople was identified.

### **Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Site Assessment Update May 2021**

This Assessment updated that published in 2018 with the purpose identifying opportunities to meet the need for Traveller pitches identified in the GTAA 2020.

The Update took into account the number of pitches that had been granted planning permission since the GTAA 2020 had been undertaken and concluded that the amount of remaining pitches required would not warrant a formal set of pitches being allocated at this stage.

Rather, a combination of a criteria-based policy in the Local Plan to provide a basis for decisions for applications that come forward either as windfall supply or as part of the alternative measures suggested in the GTAA 2020 such as changes to conditions to allow for additional pitches, caravans and dayrooms, was suggested.

### **Boat Dwellers Accommodation Assessment (BDAA) 2022**

Opinion Research Services (ORS) was also commissioned to undertake a Boat Dwellers Accommodation Assessment (BDAA) to consider the accommodation needs of households living on boats of the River Thames through the local authority

area in accordance with paragraph 62 the NPPF (2021) and the Housing and Planning Act 2016.

The Assessment concluded the need (evidence based) to provide 10 new moorings.

### **Strategic Employment Land Review Addendum (2021)**

The Strategic Employment Land (SEL) Addendum provides an update to the previous SEL Review paper produced in 2019. The review paper in 2019 undertook an assessment of the borough's employment sites and considered those sites needed to meet the needs of the market and deliver new growth to meet demand. The Addendum analysed the existing SELs adopted in the Core Strategy (2011) and recommends which are suitable and not suitable for designation in the new Local Plan.

The Addendum reports on the available floorspace and what floorspace has been lost through different methods of data collection. Reference is also made to the Local Market Appraisal (LMA) 2020, which provides an updated economic position of the council's economic market evidence. It also highlights the significance of the legislative changes from the Use Classes and the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO).

### **Local Green Space Study (2021)**

The Council updated the Local Green Space (LGS) Study published in 2016 to take account of new areas suggested for designation as LGS and to re-assess previous suggestions and new areas against an amended methodology following consideration of the responses received during the Regulation 18 consultations.

### **Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) (Addendum) 2021**

The SFRA Level 1 (2019) was produced to provide an overview of flood risk within the borough to enable effective strategic planning decisions to be made including; the direction of the spatial strategy, site allocations and development management policies in the emerging Local Plan.

Since the publication of the SFRA Level 1 (2019), the Environment Agency (EA) has published more up to date information relating to climate change allowances and updated flood mapping within the Thames Basin district for Elmbridge.

The Addendum outlines the implications of the changes in data and considers whether this affects the emerging draft Local Plan and/or if the SFRA Level 1 (2019) needs to be updated as a result.

### **Transport Assessment (2022)**

To inform the level of growth that could be accommodated within the borough with and without mitigation to offset the impacts to an acceptable level of the Strategic and Local Road Networks in accordance with the NPPF, the Council commissioned WSP to undertake a Transport Assessment.

The Transport Assessment looked at varying scenarios for growth within the borough linked to the Options identified in the 2019 consultation. Testing the 'worst case' scenario (aligned with Option 3), it was concluded that this scale of development would increase levels of congestion and delay and that although mitigation measures were possible, the physical / environmental constraints are such that residual effects could be considered severe contrary to the NPPF.

As the Council has refined the Options, further modelling was undertaken to examine the impacts of the road networks and the mitigation measures required as part of the eventual preferred spatial strategy as set out in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) 2022.

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## **Appendix B – Housing need / potential unmet need in housing market area and neighbouring authorities**

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**Epsom & Ewell Borough Council** - Undertook a 2017 Issues and Options public consultation to consider different approaches to delivering the borough's housing and employment need. Initial evidence showed that need could not be met by a continuation of the existing development strategy and that optimising land within the urban areas and / or the use of Green Belt would be required.

From on- going discussion under the duty to cooperate and as part of the Housing Market Area (HMA) Partnership, it is known that the council is at the stage of reviewing its evidence base and considering its growth strategy including whether this can meet its identified development needs.

It is expected that there will be unmet need arising from Epsom & Ewell. As a guide, their latest Land Availability Assessment showed a shortfall of 4,381 dwellings across the plan-period.

Officers are engaged in the preparation of the new Local Plan for Epsom & Ewell Borough and continue to discuss cross-boundary planning issues including meeting housing need.

**Guildford Borough Council** - Adopted their Local Plan in April 2019. The housing target is 10,678 homes to be provided up to 2034 (562 dpa). Through various revisions to the SHMA, the level of need has been amended however, the conclusion is that it can be met. In addition, the headroom is likely to address a level of unmet need arising from Woking Borough. Need is being met through a combination of urban sites, urban extensions and new towns / garden villages.

Based on the above, it is not considered that there is unmet housing need arising from Guildford Borough.

Furthermore, the authority is undertaking work to re-look at the basis for the local housing need figure and the inclusion of student population data and how this has potentially over-estimated their housing need against levels of development currently being planned for.

**Woking Borough Council** - Adopted their Core Strategy in 2012. The Site Allocations Plan was adopted in October 2021. The uplift in housing need as



identified in the Core Strategy is being provided through the allocation of additional sites (including those in the Green Belt) as well as Waverley Borough Council being allocated an additional 83 dwellings per annum to help with the shortfall. Guildford Borough Council is also likely to accommodate an element of Woking's unmet need though headroom in their housing target. Both Guildford's and Waverley's Local Plans have been adopted.

Based on the above, it is not considered that there is unmet housing need arising from Woking Borough.

**Runnymede Borough Council** - Adopted their Local Plan in July 2020. The Council reduced their plan period to 10-years (2020 – 2030) to ensure that it could meet its identified housing need but is to commence an immediate review to establish how future development needs can be met. Need for the first 10-years is being met through the redevelopment of brownfield sites and Green Belt releases including a new garden village.

Based on the above, it is not considered that there is any immediate unmet housing need arising from Runnymede Borough however, their position may change as the local plan review evolves.

**London Borough of Richmond upon Thames** - The Local Plan was adopted on 3 July 2018 and 3 March 2020 in relation to two legal challenges. Work is now underway to prepare a new Local Plan for Richmond borough. In February 2020 the council consulted on a Direction of Travel document which sought comments on what the vision for growth and future development should be. The council will be working to meet the London Plan housing target set for the borough of 4,110 dwellings across a 10-year period (2019/20 – 2028/29) (411 dwelling per annum). The Standard Method figure for the borough is 595 dwellings per annum.

It is currently unknown whether there is unmet housing need however, historically the borough has delivered new dwellings at a rate of circ. 400 per annum.

Officers are engaged in the preparation of the new Local Plan for the London Borough and continue to discuss cross-boundary planning issues including meeting housing need.

**Mole Valley District Council** - The Regulation 19 stage of the process setting out the proposed development strategy for the borough took place towards the end of 2021. Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) is not planning to meet its development needs (as established by the Standard Methodology) in full. Rather, there is a shortfall of 94 dwellings per annum. MVDC has twice formally written to Elmbridge Borough Council requesting that as part of the duty-to-cooperate, it can help assist in providing for its unmet housing need. The two Councils have an agreed Statement of

Common Ground (August 2021) covering our respective positions on housing need and delivery.

**Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames** - The council is preparing a new Local Plan which seeks to meet the housing target for the borough as set out in the London Plan (9,640 dwellings across a 10-year period (2019/20 – 2028/29) (964 dwelling per annum). The Standard Method required is 2,038 dwellings per annum.

In May 2019 the council undertook an Early Engagement Consultation (Regulation 18) which considered several options for meeting the development needs of the borough. This was followed by the Shaping the Future Together: Our Vision for Kingston 2021 – 2041 consultation (Summer 2021). Again, various options were presented for meeting development needs.

It is currently unknown whether there is unmet housing need however, last year borough delivered circ. 600 new dwellings. On this basis it is considered likely that there will be unmet needs.

Officers are engaged in the preparation of the new Local Plan for the Royal Borough and continue to discuss cross-boundary planning issues including meeting housing need.

**Spelthorne Borough Council** - The Council consulted on their preferred options Local Plan in November 2019. Covering a 15-year period up to 2035 and through a series of urban and Green Belt sites, the plan sought to meet the Standard Method figure of 603 dwellings per annum. The consultation document identified a shortfall of meeting need in the urban area of circ. 1650 dwellings across the plan-period.

Officers are engaged in the preparation of the new Local Plan for the Spelthorne Borough and continue to discuss cross-boundary planning issues including meeting housing need.



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# Appendix C – GBBR Assessment Criteria

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## Purpose 1 Assessment Criteria

### *To check the unrestricted sprawl of the large built-up areas*

Purpose	Criteria	Scores
<b>To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas</b>	(a) Land parcel is at the edge of one or more distinct large built-up areas.	PASS: Sub-area meets Purpose 1. FAIL: Sub-area does not meet Purpose 1 and will score 0 for criteria (b)
	(b) Prevents the outward, irregular spread of a large built-up area and serves as a barrier at the edge of a large built-up area in the absence of another durable boundary.	<p>5+: Sub-area is contiguous with two or more large built-up areas; or connected to a large built-up area, protecting land adjacent to the large built-up area from urban sprawl where there are no boundary features to restrict the scale of growth and regularise development form. The large built-up area(s) is/are predominantly bordered by features lacking in durability or permanence.</p> <p>5: Sub-area is contiguous with two or more large built-up areas; or connected to a large built-up area, protecting land adjacent to the large built-up area from urban sprawl where there are no boundary features to restrict the scale of growth and regularise development form. The large built-up area(s) is/are bordered by prominent, permanent and consistent boundary features.</p> <p>3+: Sub-area is connected to a large built-up area, however there are boundary features present which may restrict the scale of growth and regularise development form. The large built-up area is predominantly bordered by features lacking in durability or permanence.</p> <p>3: Sub-area is connected to a large built-up area, however there are boundary features present which may restrict the scale of growth and regularise development form. The large built-up areas is predominantly bordered by features lacking in durability or permanence.</p> <p>1+: Sub-area is enclosed by a large built-up area which is predominantly bordered by features lacking in durability or permanence.</p> <p>1: Sub-area is enclosed by a large built-up area which is predominantly bordered by prominent, permanent and consistent boundary features.</p>
<b>Total score</b>		<b>xx/5</b>

## Purpose 2 Assessment Criteria

### *To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another*

Purpose	Criterion	Scores
<b>To prevent neighbouring towns from merging</b>	Prevents development that would result in merging of or significant erosion of gap between neighbouring settlements including ribbon development along transport corridors that link settlements.	5: An 'essential gap' between non-Green Belt settlements, where development would significantly visually or physically reduce the perceived or actual distance between them.
		3: A 'wider gap' between non-Green Belt settlements, where there may be scope for some development, but where the overall openness and the scale of the gap is important to restricting merging.
		1: A 'less essential' gap between non-Green Belt settlements, which is of sufficient scale and character that development is unlikely to cause merging between settlements.
		0: Sub-area does not provide a gap between any settlements and makes no discernible contribution to separation.
<b>Total score</b>		<b>xx/5</b>

## Purpose 3 Assessment Criteria

### *To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment*

Purpose	Criterion	Score
<b>Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment</b>	Protects the openness of the countryside and is least covered by development.	5: Contains less than 3% built form and possesses a strong unspoilt rural character.
		4: Contains less than 5% built form and/or possesses a strong unspoilt rural character.
		3: Contains less than 10% built form and/or possesses a largely rural character.
		2: Contains less than 15% built form and/or possesses a semi-urban character.
		1: Contains more than 15% built form and/or possesses an urban character.
		0: Contains more than 20% built form and possesses an urban character.
<b>Total score</b>		<b>xx/5</b>

- ‘Strong unspoilt rural character’ is defined as land with an absence of built development and characterised by open rural land uses and landscapes, including agricultural land, forestry, woodland, shrubland/scrubland and open fields.
- ‘Largely rural character’ is defined as land with a general absence of built development, largely characterised by open rural land uses and landscapes but with some other sporadic developments and man-made structures.
- ‘Semi-urban character’ is defined as land which begins on the edge of the fully built up area and contains a mix of urban and open rural land uses before giving way to the wider countryside. Land uses might include publicly accessible natural green spaces and green corridors, country parks and local nature reserves, small-scale food production (e.g. market gardens) and waste management facilities, interspersed with built development more generally associated with urban areas (e.g. residential or commercial).
- ‘Urban character’ is defined as land which is predominantly characterised by urban land uses, including physical developments such as residential or commercial, or urban managed parks.

#### **Categorisation (Sub-Areas only)**

- Sub-area meets the Purposes Assessment criteria strongly, and makes an important contribution to the wider strategic Green Belt. Categorisation: Not recommended for further consideration.
- Sub-area meets the Purposes Assessment criteria moderately, and makes an important contribution to the wider strategic Green Belt. Categorisation: Not recommended for further consideration.
- Sub-area meets the Purposes assessment criteria strongly, but makes a less important contribution, to the wider strategic Green Belt. Categorisation: Recommended for further consideration.
- Sub-area meets the Purposes Assessment criteria moderately, but makes a less important contribution to the wider strategic Green Belt. Categorisation: Recommended for further consideration.
- Sub-area meets the Purposes Assessment criteria weakly, but makes an important contribution to the wider strategic Green Belt. Categorisation: Not recommended for further consideration.
- Sub-area meets the Purposes Assessment criteria weakly, and makes a less important contribution to the wider strategic Green Belt. Categorisation: Recommended for further consideration.

In line with the 2016 GBBR, overarching performance against the NPPF Purposes was determined as follows:

- Any sub-area scoring relatively strongly, strongly or very strongly (4 or 5) against the criteria for one or more NPPF purpose was judged to be strong Green Belt;
- Any sub-area scoring moderately (3) against at least one NPPF purpose and failing to score strongly against any purpose (4 or 5) was judged as moderate Green Belt; and
- Any sub-area scoring relatively weakly, weakly or very weakly (1 or 2) across all NPPF purposes was judged to be weak Green Belt.