



Elmbridge Local Plan Examination

Stage 2 Matters Statement

Matter 6 – Affordable Housing

Andrew Black Consulting on behalf of Esher
Rugby Club

March 2024

Project	Esher Rugby Club
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Client	Esher Rugby Club

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Introduction

- 1.1 This Matters Statement has been prepared by Andrew Black Consulting on behalf of Esher Rugby Club for Stage 2 of the Local Plan Examination.
- 1.2 Esher Rugby Club is a central feature of the local community within Elmbridge and has long term aspirations to grow as a community-based club as it reaches its centenary year in 2023.
- 1.3 The club has been in discussions with the council for over 15 years on its aspirations for the existing site. The club has engaged with the council and community, at considerable expense, over a number of years to illustrate how the club could grow and evolve sustainably in order to meet the long term needs of the club, its players, its supporters and the wider community in addition to unlocking a highly appropriate area of land for housing growth in order to fund the plans for the club.
- 1.4 It is with considerable disappointment that the submitted local plan does nothing whatsoever to recognise or support the aspirations of Esher Rugby Club, and indeed other sports clubs within the borough.
- 1.5 Each of the Matters raised by the Inspector in document ID-005 (Schedule of Matters, Issues and Questions for Stage 2 of the Examination) are set out within this statement.
- 1.6 Regard has been had to document ID-004 (Guidance Note for People Participating in the Stage 2 Examination). Any reference to the National Planning Policy Framework is in accordance with the previous version. Annex 1 of latest version released in December 2023 sets out the implementation of the new framework for the purposes of plan making and states that previous version of the framework will apply to plans already at examination.



Issue 10 – Does the Plan set out a justified and effective approach to the provision of affordable housing?

5.1 The evidence identifies an affordable housing need of 269dpa. HOU005 sets out that there is a backlog need for affordable housing of 1434 units. The Plan proposes to address this backlog need over a period of 20 years. The evidence states that in the context of a high demand area such as Elmbridge, an extended period is likely to be necessary. What is the reason for this and does it present a justified approach? Will it prove effective in addressing the need?

5.1.1 The approach of the council in addressing the backlog over an extended period of 20 years does nothing for those in acute housing need within the borough. The situation will continue to worsen over the plan period and it is not considered justified or effective for the council to take this approach to the delivery of vital affordable housing in the borough.

5.2 What would be the affordable housing need if the backlog were to be addressed over the Plan Period?

5.2.1 This is a matter for the council to respond on.

5.3 The Planning Practice Guidance states that an increase in the total housing figures included in the Plan may need to be considered where it could help deliver the required number of affordable homes. Have the Council considered this?

5.3.1 Clearly the council is aware of the significant shortfall in affordable housing. There is no evidence that the council properly considered a higher housing figure in this regard as suggested by the Planning Practice Guidance. Even meeting the housing need in full would lead to a significant delivery against the established shortfall but the council choose to not pursue this route within the submitted spatial strategy.

5.4 In pursuing a strategy which fails to meet the boroughs affordable homes needs over the Plan period, what are the likely implications of this strategy for affordability ratios?

5.4.1 At the time of the submission of the plan for examination, the affordability ratio for Elmbridge was around 18. At the time of the start of the examination in early March 2024 the affordability ratio has increased to just above 20, making it the fourth least affordable LPA in the whole of England. The failure of the council to seriously consider affordability as part of the preparation of the spatial strategy shows a lack of effective plan in this regard.

5.5 My initial letter (ID-001, notably paragraphs 11-17) raised some concerns and questions regarding the Council's approach to affordable housing delivery. These concerns can be summarised as follows: The spatial strategy and the impact of this in terms of affordable housing delivery, with particular reference to the reliance on sites within existing urban areas as well as the requirement set out at policy HOU4 for affordable housing to be sought



on sites which are not major development, which is contrary to paragraph 64 of the Framework. The Council have responded to these concerns through the preparation of a Topic Paper (TOP002). Having reviewed this document, the following questions arise:

- Document TOP002 states that without the ability to collect affordable housing contributions on small sites, the ability of the Council to *provide affordable homes* will be highly restricted. However, the Statement on Affordable Housing provision on Small Sites (October 2021) states that between April 2011 to March 2021, there have been the delivery of 87 affordable homes over this 10 year period. This is less than 9dpa. The funding secured through the Section 106 Agreements has resulted in a total fund of £17.8m for this period. Are these figures correct? If these figures are correct, in what way does this demonstrate that the policy approach to collecting affordable housing payments on small sites is resulting in the delivery of affordable homes?

5.5.1 The council is acutely aware of the lack of affordable housing supply that is likely to result from its brownfield first approach on small urban sites.

5.5.2 The council has amassed a significant fund through the collection of contributions from affordable housing payments, but this has not resulted in the delivery of affordable housing dwellings accordingly.

5.5.3 The plan as submitted would continue this approach and fail to address the significant shortfall that has resulted from the approach taken by the council over many years.

- The evidence states that for the period 2011/2012-2021/2022, a total of 771 affordable units have been delivered across the Borough. The small sites contribution equates to 11% of this overall supply. In what way can this be described as an important component of the overall affordable housing supply?

5.5.4 A delivery of 11% would be well below the 30% requirement as set out in the plan. It is clear that in its current form, the plan would continue to fail in the provision of on-site affordable housing. The only way for on-site provision to be achieved is through allocation of larger sites which can viably and reasonably deliver a high proportion of affordable homes.

- Paragraph 2.26 of document TOP002 states that policy HOU4 would result in the delivery of 1057 affordable housing units from years 1-15. Policy SS3 states that the Plan will delivery 6785 homes of which at least 30% will be affordable. How are the remaining 978 (minimum) affordable dwellings to be delivered and in what way will the Plan achieve this?

5.5.5 There is no evidence that these remaining affordable dwelling will be delivered in any way at all and the spatial strategy is fundamentally unsound as a result.



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- **Paragraph 2.27 of document TOP002 states that the financial contribution expected from small sites would be subject to a contribution methodology. However, this approach is not reflected in the policy wording. Indeed, paragraph 6.34 confirms that there should be no need for further viability assessments to be undertaken at the decision making stage. Is this a justified approach?**

5.5.6 This is not a justified approach. It is extremely likely that further viability assessment will be submitted on small sites for a variety of reasons. Small sites are inherently constrained and the brownfield only approach from the council is likely to bring forward sites with unknown issues such as contamination and other abnormal costs which would justify the use of a viability approach.

- **Whilst the Council have confirmed that 98 of the proposed site allocations contained within the Plan are small sites, it is not possible to provide information concerning how many affordable dwellings the policy approach would deliver – is this correct? If this is correct how is this approach justified and effective?**

5.57 This is a matter for the council to respond on, but it is right for the inspector to raise these concerns. Further submission will be made at the hearing sessions once this information is provided by the council.

5.6 Given the Council's acceptance that one of the biggest opportunities the Council has to meet its affordable housing need is through the development of larger sites (paragraph 5.66 of Establishing Local Housing Need, May 2022) what are the implications of the Council's spatial strategy in terms of affordable housing delivery?

5.6.1 It is abundantly clear that the council accepts that allocation of larger sites would be the best opportunity to meet affordable housing need. It would still be possible to make significant modifications to this plan to allocate larger sites to enable delivery of affordable housing through this route and we urge the inspector to consider this option in the examination of this plan.