



Elmbridge Borough Council

Ms Masters MA (Hons) FRTPI
c/o Charlotte Glancy
Programme Officer
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Elmbridge Borough Council
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Date: 1 October 2024
Reference: COUD008

Dear Ms Masters,

Examination of the Elmbridge Local Plan

Thank you for your letter dated 11 September 2024 setting out your interim findings for the Elmbridge Local Plan.

As you can imagine we were disappointed to read that you consider the proposed growth strategy, as submitted, unsound. The draft Local Plan focused development on brownfield land in our towns and villages providing as many homes as we could whilst protecting the Green Belt from further erosion. It also sought to update our policies in other areas such as climate change, sustainability, and biodiversity. Whilst we disagree on the balance between housing need and protecting the Green Belt, we are grateful for the time you have taken to set out a path for modifications to make the plan sound.

As you are aware, plan making has proven to be an extremely difficult task for local authorities across the country with Litchfield's reporting more that 75% of local authorities are expected to have out of date plans by 2025. This is especially true in the southeast where local authorities feel the pressure of London and its Green Belt. The strong support for the Green Belt and its protection has resulted in many local authorities pausing examinations to wait for updates to the NPPF or to consider changing their growth strategy. It is against this backdrop that we understand the intent behind the letter from the Minister of State Matthew Pennycook MP to the Planning Inspectorate to reduce the length of examinations.

However, the Minister's proposed timeframe of 6 months for this work appears to be completely arbitrary and doesn't allow sufficient time to complete the majority of modifications. It also doesn't take into account the individual circumstances of each council. We have submitted a realistic timetable to undertake the modifications required to make the plan sound and we are asking for an extension beyond the suggested 6 months because this is the fastest route to an up-to-date Local Plan.

Officers have provided you with two work programmes, the first is a 12-month programme which demonstrates that this is the shortest amount of time to undertake the modifications. However, that does not allow any time for us to involve our residents in these important changes. Community engagement is a cornerstone of how Elmbridge Council works to deliver for its residents. We therefore ask that you also consider a 15-month work programme to allow us to engage with our residents on the proposed new site allocations.

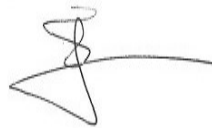
Your letter sets out that inspectors can agree work programmes beyond the suggested 6-month period, but only where an inspector is confident the work can be completed in the timeframe. We are therefore writing to confirm that the council is committed to completing the necessary modifications to make this plan sound. To reassure you on our intent, the administration has already ensured that officers will have all the additional resources required to complete this work and made certain that a new call for sites will start next week.

With this in mind, we cannot see that withdrawing the plan to start again would be a pragmatic approach. It would not speed up the delivery of homes, in particular affordable homes, and it would delay the wider benefits of updating the 2011 Core Strategy policies. We therefore ask that you allow us the time necessary to work with our residents to make our plan sound.


Yours sincerely



Councillor Mike Rollings
Leader of the Council



Councillor Simon Waugh
Deputy Leader of the Council



Councillor Janet Turner
Hinchley Wood Residents Association Group