

Alliance of Elmbridge Residents and Civic Groups Statement of Position on the preparation of the Elmbridge Local Plan made to the political organisations in Elmbridge

We are an alliance of Residents and Civic Groups speaking for many thousands of residents right across Elmbridge. We are highly concerned that the current Government imposed housing target for the preparation of the Local Plan in Elmbridge, 633 new dwellings per annum (some 9,500 over the fifteen-year period), will destroy the character of our towns and villages. This number would result in intensification on a grotesque scale and/ or see the release of Green Belt land for development.

Most residents in the borough understand that more dwellings are needed and especially affordable homes. However, they categorically do not want to see a level of development imposed on Elmbridge that would change its character forever and turn it in to another overdeveloped London borough.

With the local elections upon us, you will be acutely aware that the issue of the Local Plan will be foremost in many electors' minds and will be one of the first issues the new Council will need to resolve.

The basis for the preparation of the Local Plan, NPPF paragraph 60, means the housing target for the next 15 years must be either:

- The Government issued figure of 633 new dwellings per annum; or
- A locally developed target derived from first principles and justified by the council arguing that there are many exceptional local circumstances - only 43% urban land supply being just one.

The Covid-19 pandemic is permanently changing land use around the Borough and will have a significant impact on land supply for housing. Amongst other factors, the presence of permanently vacated office and retail buildings, much-changed commuting habits, and the greater importance of green spaces, must materially change the planning and development landscape and has to be considered in the context of the Local Plan.

This Alliance believes the Council should show strength of resolve, reject the Government figure of 633 and adopt the latter approach which we believe can be wholly and objectively justified. For many local reasons Elmbridge can justify not adopting the Government's figure and such an approach is allowed under Law. Basing our figure on local needs using up to date figures would result in an achievable Local Plan that did not lead to unacceptable intensification. Incidentally, the 633 figure is more than double that achieved by Elmbridge in recent years and many view it as unachievable.

We urge you to make clear, in your election manifestos and material, and, if elected, subsequent actions, that your party and candidates are strongly against a Local Plan based on a housing number of 633 new dwellings per annum. This is a perfectly acceptable stance, since it is regarded as being 'pre-disposed' and not 'pre-determined'.

We urge you to explain that such a housing target would result in unacceptable urban intensification across the Borough and that declassification of any Green Belt land, would expose it all to challenges from housing developers. Furthermore, that, if your candidates are elected, you will strongly encourage them to vote against any Local Plan containing such proposals.

The Covid-19 pandemic has made most people very much more aware of the quality of life in their local surroundings. They categorically want that quality enhanced not destroyed. So, this is your chance to put a popular and a sound message before your electorate!

This note is supported by the following:

Alliance of Elmbridge Residents and Civic Groups:

Blu-Wav Group Oxshott

Cobham Conservation and Heritage Trust

Cobham and Downside Residents Association

FEDORA – the Voice of Oxshott

Long Ditton Residents Association

Oxshott Way Residents Association

Save HWLD Green Belt

Stoke D'Abernon Residents Association

Stop Wrecking Thames Ditton and Beyond

Summer Road Action Group

The Weybridge Society

Organisations with a political affiliation who support this statement:

Elmbridge Community Assembly

Esher Residents Association

11th February 2021