



STRUCTURE PLAN

Surrey County Council Local Committee in Epsom & Ewell

29th September 2003

KEY ISSUE

To consider the changes made to the distribution of new housing in advance of the Structure Plan's Examination in Public.

SUMMARY

The County has, in partnership with the Borough and District Council's, undertaken a further housing capacity study to identify where the Government target of 35,400 new homes should be built by 2016. The study indicates that the number of new dwellings capable of being accommodated in Epsom and Ewell has increased from 2,170 to 2,650.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is recommended to:-

- a) receive the changes made to the Deposit Draft of the Structure Plan in advance of the Examination in Public and note the impact of the re-allocation of the housing target;
- b) urge officers of the County to work closely with their Borough and District colleagues to put in place robust policies to ensure that the impact of the development of small town centre sites on infrastructure needs are recognised and dealt with through planning gain mechanisms;
- c) request officers to investigate all planning applications for residential development to ensure that they will not present problems with water supply or local drainage;
- d) receive a further report when officers have completed their consideration of options to change affordable housing policies and targets.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Members will recall that the Local Committee considered the Deposit Draft of the Surrey Structure Plan in February, 2003. That report informed Members that the County's proposal for "urban extensions" to the north-east and north-west of Guildford had been downgraded to reserve proposals and that the concept of an "urban reserve" of housing to be built on sites yet to be identified had been rejected by Government. The report also drew attention to the increase of 220 in the number of new dwellings allocated to Epsom and Ewell from 1,950 to 2,170.

1.2 The implication of the downgrading of the "urban extension" and the rejection of the "urban reserve" proposal was that at least 7,500 dwellings needed to be re-allocated across the County. This needed to be done in ways which did not undermine other planning policies such as the preservation of the Green Belt, improving the quality of urban open space, locating new development in places with access to transport and other social infrastructure but avoiding "town cramming", and ensuring that new and additional infrastructure is provided to meet the needs of the residents of new properties.

1.3 In response to that report, the Committee agreed, amongst other things, to accept the new target of 2,170 homes provided that the allocation of the outstanding properties was based on a capacity study and excluded sites developed or identified for development before April 2003. In addition, the Committee raised issues about the adequacy of water supply for new dwellings.

2. NEW HOUSING PROPOSALS

2.1 By the close of the consultation period on the Deposit Draft, 2,559 representations had been received. Many of these dealt with minor matters or factual inaccuracies and the Deposit Draft has been amended to take account of these. The bulk of the representations, however, related to the distribution of the housing target, the proposal for a new community to the north-west of Guildford, affordable housing and waste.

2.2 The opportunity has been taken to make amendments to the Deposit Draft on these issues in advance of the Examination in Public which will be held in November. In relation to housing, a new housing capacity study has been undertaken in conjunction with the Boroughs and Districts. This study will be refined as each Borough or District completes a local capacity study looking in more detail at the opportunities for development. The new Surrey-wide study is, therefore, not directly linked to individual sites except where planning consent has already been granted or there is a planning authority resolution to grant such consent.

2.3 The study brings together the known housing completions between April 2001 and March 2003, existing planning consents, the capacity of sites identified in local plans for future development and estimates of other future planning consents based on a statistical model of how other development land has become available in the past. This is supplemented by estimates of the density at which

new housing will be built in different locations so that a number of dwellings can be estimated.

2.4 The result of this work for Epsom and Ewell is that the total number of dwellings allocated to the Borough increases from 2,170 to 2,650 – an increase of 480. Of these, 2,300 are estimated to be the product of existing developments, consents and identified sites leaving 350 to be produced through windfall developments. The results of the study are underpinned by an assumption that future residential development in the town centre will average 85 dwellings per hectare and 48 dwellings per hectare in the rest of the Borough. This compares with anticipated densities in Guildford and Woking town centres of 100 dwellings per hectare. Other town centres such as Cranleigh and Dorking are expected to produce 55 dwellings a hectare. The new allocations for each Borough and District are set out for information in Appendix 1 to this report.

3. OTHER ISSUES

3.1 North-west Guildford: The Executive has agreed to remove the proposal for a new community to the north-west of Guildford because of the problems in providing suitable transport solutions and the potential impact on Whitmoor Common which is a Special Protection Area.

3.2 Affordable Housing: The Deposit Draft of the Structure Plan included a target of 40% of new housing being ‘affordable’. The Local Committee noted that, as the target can only be applied to sites over a certain size, the proportion of ‘affordable’ housing provided on the larger sites needs to exceed 40%. The period for public comments produced objections to the 40% target from house builders but support from affordable housing providers and most of the Boroughs and Districts.

3.3 Officers are, however, concerned that the increasing proportion of new housing likely to be provided on small town centres sites and the abolition of Local Authority Social Housing Grant (LASHG), which was used to subsidise affordability, both make the existing target challenging. Further work is underway to consider the scope for imposing a target on smaller sites and to determine the proportion of housing that is ‘affordable’ that could be provided without any public subsidy. Accordingly, no change is proposed to the target at this time but notice is given that there may be refinements by the time of the Examination in Public.

3.4 Waste: The waste issue that has excited most interest is incineration and the Executive has clarified the policy by indicating that waste minimisation, recycling and composting are solutions preferred to incineration although that option needs to be retained. The Executive has also made clear that, due to the contentiousness of the location of waste facilities, the Structure Plan needs to safeguard all sites in existing waste management use for further use in the management of waste. This is so that a search for suitable sites for new facilities has a number of locations available for consideration but does not imply that all of them will be used for the foreseeable future.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 The issues of waste and the community at north-west Guildford are of interest but do not impact directly on the Committee at this time. The Committee's main focus should be on the allocation of new dwellings. Here, the re-allocation process appears to have been conducted on an objective and transparent basis and the full capacity study report is available on the County Council's website or from the Community Support Team for inspection. The implication of the increased target, together with the continued support for preserving the Metropolitan Green Belt and improving urban open space, leads inexorably towards higher densities in town centre locations. Higher densities often, although not always, contribute to lower unit prices for housing and may contribute to meeting affordability targets. As the bulk of the target is made up from existing development sites or those identified for development, there is every chance that the target will be met although there must still be some concern over the capacity of the Borough to absorb an additional 350 dwellings on suitable yet currently unidentified sites.

4.2 If, as seems likely, an increasing proportion of new housing is provided on smaller, previously developed town centre sites, there is a greater need to ensure that the impact of development on the infrastructure of the town centre, its transport, health and leisure facilities is recognised and reflected in Section 106 agreements.

4.3 The possibility of producing affordable housing without public subsidy needs to be investigated further in the light of the withdrawal of LASHG.

5. CONCLUSION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

5.1 The changes to the Deposit Draft Structure Plan in advance of the Examination in Public represent a stage in the production of the new structure plan which is scheduled to be adopted in June, 2004. The changes set out in this report deal with the Government's rejection of a substantial "urban reserve" of new development on unspecified sites although the extent of the total of windfall dwellings envisaged is close to the original urban reserve total. In line with the Committee's previous comments on this issue, the re-allocation process appears to have been conducted in an objective and transparent manner. The issue of affordability is acknowledged to be subject to further work while the impact of small scale development on town centre infrastructure needs to be addressed.

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Background Papers:	Structure Plan report to Executive – June 2003 Housing Capacity Study, 2003	

Appendix 1

District	Distribution in Deposit Draft		Revised Distribution	
	Allocated Housing	Strategic Allocation	Allocated Housing	Strategic Allocation
Elmbridge	1,800		3,370	
Epsom and Ewell	2,170		2,650	
Guildford	2,350	2,500	2,720	2,500
Mole Valley	1,330		2,330	
Reigate and Banstead	2,540	2,600	3,690	2,600
Runnymede	1,920		2,030	
Spelthorne	1,700		2,450	
Surrey Heath	1,970		2,780	
Tandridge	1,920		2,120	
Waverley	1,850		2,810	
Woking	2,250	1,000	2,350	1,000
	21,800	6,100	29,300	6,100
	+7,500 urban reserve			
Totals	35,400		35,400	

District	Revised Distribution			
	Total Provision	Commitments	Windfalls	Strategic Allocations
Elmbridge	3,370	2,700	670	
Epsom and Ewell	2,650	2,300	350	
Guildford	5,220	2,210	510	2,500
Mole Valley	2,330	1,900	430	
Reigate and Banstead	6,290	3,040	650	2,600
Runnymede	2,030	1,560	470	
Spelthorne	2,450	1,870	580	
Surrey Heath	2,780	2,150	630	
Tandridge	2,120	1,700	420	
Waverley	2,810	2,130	680	
Woking	3,350	2,010	340	1,000
Total	35,400	23,570	5,730	6,100