

Purpose of the Advice Note

This note is one of series of advice notes produced to assist applicants and their agents when considering proposals for new homes in Elmbridge during the preparation of the new Local Plan. The note focuses on the need to optimise development land in the Borough and the Council's approach to ensuring the optimisation of development land when assessing development proposals.

The need for new homes in the Borough is significant and land supply is limited. The Council is committed to responding to this challenge and is in the process of producing a new Local Plan. We have been further developing our Local Plan evidence base and this work will inform the next key stage in the Local Plan preparation. An updated Local Plan timetable will be published in the new Local Development Scheme in due course.

Why we need to optimise development land

Nationally, there is a drive to deliver more homes faster, as well as achieving the effective use of development land. The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2018 supports this approach.

Specifically, NPPF paragraph 123, says that where there is a shortage of land for meeting identified housing need, it is especially important that planning decisions avoid homes being built at low densities and ensure that developments make optimal use of the potential of each site. It states that 'Local Planning Authorities should refuse applications that fail to make efficient use of land, taking into account the policies within the NPPF'.

Existing local policies promote the efficient use of urban land and buildings and new housing schemes in sustainable locations. Policy CS17 Local Character, Density and Design requires new development to deliver high quality and inclusive sustainable design, which maximises the efficient use of urban land. Policy DM2 Design and Amenity, requires all new development to achieve high quality design and respect local character. Policy DM10 Housing, promotes housing types and sizes that make the most efficient use of land and meets local housing need on housing sites of 0.3 hectares or more.

Elmbridge has a shortfall in its housing land supply¹ and sites coming forward for development are predominantly small in size². The local housing need figure has significantly increased and is now 612 homes per year based on the standardised methodology³. This is a significant increase from previous housing need figures identified in the Kingston and North Surrey Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) (2016)⁴. However, the qualitative information from the SHMA remains relevant as it outlines the 'right' type of homes needed. The SHMA identified an overwhelming need for smaller homes (1 to 3 bedrooms), indeed the provision of smaller homes is vital for widening the choice of homes within the Borough. As demonstrated in the Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) (2016-2017), past delivery of new homes in the Borough has been dominated by large, four or more bedroom properties. Going forward, this size of home does not make a positive contribution towards meeting local housing need.

¹ Authority Monitoring Report, 2016-17

² Land Availability Assessment, 2016,

³ Paragraph 60, NPPF, July 2018, It is important to note that this figure relates to housing need and is not an adopted housing target. The Core Strategy's adopted housing target is 225 dwellings per year but this is out of date as it pre-dated the NPPF publication in 2012, a new housing target will be identified in the new Local Plan.

⁴ Kingston and North Surrey Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) (2016)

The national and local context in relation to housing need and housing land supply, requires the development potential of housing sites to be optimised. This is a material planning consideration.

How to optimise development land

Given the Borough's high need for new homes, it is essential that development proposals make the most efficient use of land and that any new homes proposed meet the identified need. Therefore, any scheme should avoid inclusion of 4 bedroom and above properties unless it can be demonstrated that this is required in order to make efficient use of the land.

The constrained land supply may lead to a conflicting demand from different uses. The Local Plan evidence shows there is still a need to protect and enhance employment land and competing demand will have to be balanced. It may mean that in some locations there could be an increase in mixed use schemes coming forward in the Borough

The existing policies support development proposals that are design-led, of a high quality and that respects local character. The Council does not accept that smaller units and higher densities detrimentally affects character of an area. To enable the optimisation of land and to respond to local housing needs development schemes will need innovative and utilise higher densities while respecting the local character.

The Council will carefully consider whether the proposal represents the 'most effective' use of the site, this includes balancing the demand for different uses. The Council will resist development proposals that do not optimise the capacity of the development land.

Further information about housing need can be found in the draft Development Management Advice Note 1: Understanding Housing Need.

Positive decision and plan making

The Council is committed to positive plan making and responding to future development needs. It is currently considering the level of growth that can be sustainably accommodated within the Borough over the next plan period up to 2036.

The Council is acutely aware of the high demand for housing as identified by the national standardised methodology and in the SHMA. However, the Borough is heavily constrained by land designations and, as such, the current supply of housing land is limited. The Council is working hard to respond positively to the challenges through the Local Plan preparations.

Through the Council's pre-application advice service, the Council will pro-actively engage with the housing developers, applicants and agents to encourage the submission of development schemes that represent the efficient use of land and that optimise the capacity of each site.