



Ashtead Independents

Keep national party politics out of local government

Changing the direction of the local plan – David Harper; Councillor Ashtead Park Ward.

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Changing the direction of the local plan – A letter from David Harper, Councillor Ashtead Park Ward.

Dear fellow residents,

This letter starts with what I feel the Draft Local Plan misses completely, and which if challenged by sufficient numbers, may make a difference. After that, I write answers to some of the questions residents have been asking me which may be of general interest.

Can the Spatial Strategy be changed?

In my opinion there are grounds for challenging the Spatial Strategy and I've written to the Cabinet member for Planning Policy, asking if the Gatwick expansion is a material consideration. Gatwick announced this expansion after our spatial strategy was formulated. It's clear more housing is needed close to Gatwick due to its expansion plans. It's the central economic growth point in our area. The National Planning Policy Framework requires Local Plans to support National Infrastructure- which Gatwick is. Therefore, I would argue that the Spatial Strategy is out of date, and more housing is required closer to Gatwick. What's the point of building houses in the North, when they are going to commute to Gatwick?

Background to 'Spatial Strategy'

The Spatial Strategy was developed in 2017 following a consultation with residents. Ashtead Independents strongly objected to the interpretation of the consultation for following reasons:-

- A large number of people voted for a new settlement but these votes were just discarded
- The Ashtead Residents' Association (ARA) view was recorded as one vote like any individual. Responses were received from IP addresses outside the district but these views were given equal weight to ARA!
- We argued the conclusions did not reflect the majority view of the district and were mis-interpreted.

The spatial strategy was determined by the then Conservative Administration.

- Urban Extensions and
- Substantial Expansion of one or more rural village.

So whether Urban Extension sites are in Ermyn Way or Barnett Wood Lane or anywhere around the North, under this spatial strategy there are going to be Urban Extensions. The offered lands were reviewed along the following lines:

- Eliminate lands that were not contiguous with the Urban Area.
- Measure the lands 'performance' on the 5 reasons why Green Belt boundary exists.
 1. To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas



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2. To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another
3. To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
4. To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns
5. To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

And then eliminate the highest performing lands.

- Those sites with the lower performance against these measures were then checked for sustainability (there are 17 measures of sustainability used by all districts and boroughs in Surrey).

These are some issues for our area (you may know of others).

- The NHS doesn't plan for 15 months let alone 15 years, but GP services seems much more about recruiting Doctors, than land allocation for size of facility.
- The Ermyn Way field has noise and pollution issues.
- Surrey Highways have invested very little emotional capital into commuter patterns for schools and offices in the immediate area, and alternative modes of transport. They have done nothing about it since the last century.
- The congestion at Grange Road lights is severe at around 20-30 minutes wait time.
- The construction of the cycle lane required more time allocated to pedestrians at the lights- thereby causing more vehicle congestion.
- Surrey Highways can't use yellow box or other congestion control measures, because they can't use CCTV for enforcement (unlike London). This power rests with the Police and there is no current coordination. The efficiency of roads is not being optimised.
- For structural reasons, and on the basis of recent evidence, I have very little faith in Surrey Highways actually improving conditions for commuters (personal opinion).

Why use the Green Belt?

To avoid densification of the urban areas such as Ashtead, which would see 4 or 5 or more floors of construction to avoid using green field sites. The proposed use of Green Belt amounts to 1% of all Green Belt land.

Why aren't we using Brown Field land?

In my time as Cabinet Member for Planning Policy, I vigorously pursued making the most of Brown Field sites. Increases in brown field numbers arose from:-

- Retaining Dorking Station in the plan.
- Getting Leatherhead station ready to accept cars from Bull Hill into a double stacked car park and thereby freeing up capacity for more dwellings on Bull Hill.
- Increasing density of housing on Aviva site in Dorking
- Increasing density of housing on Exxon House site in Ashtead
- Other questions that need answering are:-
 1. Can low rise offices in Leatherhead be moved into the new Bull Hill offices and redevelop the low rise office at slightly increased height (as is prevalent at the offices in the area) for housing- which are near station/work/shops?



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2. What height is necessary over Leatherhead station to make dwellings viable?
3. At the Holmwoods in Dorking, there are already 2 high-rise apartments tucked into the hills around Dorking. Increasing the number of high rise there has never been discussed or explored.

If Exxon House is redeveloped, why should Ermyn Way field be developed- its not fair?

This is an emotional argument rather than a planning argument. The arguments that carry weight at inspection or a judicial review are planning arguments arising from a spatial strategy.

Conclusion

At this stage, questioning the spatial strategy or arguing reasonably for more Brown Field construction are the planning arguments to reduce development here.

Residents expect administrations to pursue all possible options to max out the Brown Field options, and I don't see the Lib Dems or the Conservatives having the vision or the persistence to see these options through. I look forward to your continued support working for Ashtead to use more Brown Field sites and look into the balance of the spatial strategy.

These are all my personal opinions and do not necessarily represent the views of all Ashtead Independents Councillors. If you'd like to discuss in any greater depth, please initially write to Councillor.Harper@molevalley.gov.uk