

# **INFRASTRUCTURE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The term community infrastructure encompasses a wide range of different assets. These can vary significantly in terms of size, scale and cost. The key uniting factor is that all essential community infrastructure is required to support and facilitate the new housing, employment and commercial growth is planned across the Borough. It can be described as the glue that binds new development together and helps it function as a place where people can live, work, learn, shop and enjoy themselves.

Our Local Plan says that community infrastructure can include new transport, social housing, public open spaces and play facilities, and social, education, leisure and cultural facilities that bring benefits to the local community and helps promote social cohesion. As we plan for the Borough's future, it is vital that we ensure that new housing and commercial uses are supported by the right infrastructure.

The provision of new community infrastructure to support new growth is a thread that runs through national planning policy. Although national planning policy does not go as far as to say that growth cannot happen without an equal or comparable investment in infrastructure, it does demand that local planning authorities plan positively, making the best use of available capacity within existing infrastructure networks and assets. Where possible guiding new development to those locations where infrastructure capacity can best accommodate it.

The Borough Council continues to work with infrastructure partners to try and ensure that new growth is supported by investment in our infrastructure. This isn't easy. The government require rapid solutions to the national housing crisis. Their most recent proposals, set out in the Housing White Paper and the "Planning for the right in the right places" consultation, appear to be committed to approaches that deliver more homes, faster and at all costs.

The Borough Council understands how important and necessary matching growth with improvements to infrastructure is to local residents and communities. We understand that there is a strong perception that the Borough's infrastructure, particularly transport and education, are close to capacity. We continue to work closely with our partners to ensure that investment in infrastructure continues to keep up with growth. Nevertheless, although we understand that infrastructure capacity is a very real constraint to accommodating growth this is not a view entirely shared by government or the Planning Inspector who will assess the soundness of our Local Plan. Recent experiences in Surrey and across the South East of England suggest that Planning Inspectors examining local plans do not consider infrastructure capacity the hard and fast constraint to growth that we consider it to be. Indeed, it would appear that Inspectors are prepared to allow housing growth to happen ahead of any infrastructure investment – thereby creating a situation where planning authorities and infrastructure providers are continually playing catch-up.

## **PLANNING FOR TRANSPORT**

Epsom & Ewell is well located in terms of access to transport and travel opportunities. The rail connections to the north into Central and Greater London are good, with relatively fast and regular services to Victoria and Waterloo. Rail connections to the south, particularly to locations such as Leatherhead, Dorking and Guildford, provide rapid access to employment opportunities beyond the Borough boundary. The nature of the local rail network, and the significant costs involved, mean that there are limited opportunities to extend or develop the railway lines, or tracks themselves. However, that does not mean that there are no opportunities to improve provision. The Borough Council continues to work closely with Network Rail, who are responsible for the physical infrastructure (the railway lines and station buildings), and the train operators, who are responsible for running the services (on both the trains themselves and at the stations), to ensure that rail services meet the needs of residents, local communities and businesses. This work has already resulted in significant improvements at Epsom Station, with further improvements being achieved at Ewell West and Stoneleigh Broadway.

In the longer term, the Borough Council is already working closely with Network Rail and Transport for London in response to the Cross Rail 2. Should this proposal be realised, the improvements to the Borough's rail service will be significant – particularly in terms of frequency and speed of connection into Central London but also in terms of

enhancing capacity across the wider network. These improvements will undoubtedly help support the Borough's growth – both in terms of new homes and new jobs. The Borough Council will continue to work with all of Cross Rail 2 partners to ensure that the Borough shares in the benefits that these improvements will bring.

The Borough is also well connected via the Primary road network. The A24, which forms a spine through the middle of the Borough, provides a relatively good road connection north into South West London and south towards Dorking. The A240 branches off the A24 to the north of Ewell and serves as a direct link into the Royal Borough of Kingston and onto the A3. The primary issue impacting upon our highway networks is peak time traffic volumes. Our evidence shows that there is high levels of car ownership and car dominant travel patterns, which means that there are high numbers of cars on the roads during peak periods. In some respects this is to be expected as the Borough is accessible with highly desirable road linkages and the motor car is a highly convenient and desirable form of transport.

The Borough Council and its partners, especially Surrey County Council who are the local transport authority, continue to plan for and introduce improvements to the highway network to manage traffic volumes and congestion. This encompasses a wide range of measures that include intelligent signalling, signage (directing users along less congested routes) and reduced speed limits. The focus is upon managing traffic volumes and congestion, not upon creating additional capacity. The reason for this twofold. Firstly, new highway infrastructure, specifically new or expanded roads but also expanded junctions, are costly big-ticket infrastructure assets. Secondly, the suburban nature of the Borough means that there are limited opportunities to physically accommodate such big ticket items – there simply isn't the space. As a consequence we will largely have to work within the highway infrastructure that we already have in order to accommodate future growth.

Modal shift from the private motor car onto other more sustainable forms of transport, whether that be onto buses, motorcycles/ mopeds, or bicycles may provide a longer term solution. The Borough Council and the transport authority continue to identify opportunities to develop the provision for these alternatives. Notably, Surrey has a rapidly developing cycle network that could help relieve highway congestion. It is important to remember that the changes in travel patterns required to make modal shift from the motor car to other forms of transport take time. High traffic volumes and congestion are two of the essential ingredients required to trigger any shift – the other key requirements are well-located destinations (such as shops, jobs and schools), as well as safe and well-developed networks.

## EDUCATION

Epsom & Ewell has a full range of education facilities – both public and private – which meet the needs of people across the Borough, the wider South West London/ North Surrey sub-region and even further afield across the country. These facilities range from primary schools all the way through to institutes of higher and further education. This full range of provision is to be expected, especially given the Borough's pleasant visual character and appearance, its good transport links and its overall desirability as a place to live and work.

The Borough's education assets are provided by a mixture of public and private sector operators. As a general rule, public sector education is now provided by individual Academies or Academy consortia. These organisations have greater autonomy in terms of their management. Whilst the local education authority (Surrey County Council) continues to have a key role in planning for future education needs, particularly in terms of identifying school place numbers, they are unlikely to take the lead in physically building new schools. That role is now largely filled by Academies who are now able to bid for money from the Education Funding Authority to build new schools or extend existing ones.

Historically, public sector operated schools functioned within geographically defined catchment areas. These catchment areas tended to correspond to administrative boundaries. In simple terms this allowed the Borough Council (acting as the local planning authority) to work closely with the local education authority (Surrey County Council) to plan for the education needs of the Borough. Things are no longer this simple. The introduction of parental choice means that school catchment areas are no longer the key component for calculating future school places. Our evidence indicates that the Borough's schools serve a wide area – with many pupils commuting into and out of the Borough to gain an education. In many respects, this is a further side effect of the higher level of transport accessibility

that the Borough enjoys. The ability and desire of pupils and parents to travel complicates the assessment of future need. It is not quite as simple as more new homes equals more new schools, or extensions to existing schools. Whilst there is a strong local perception that the Borough needs new schools, local pupils have not found themselves wanting an education. This is in large part due to the local education authority successfully managing demand and finding school places at those schools that had capacity. Nevertheless, current evidence demonstrates that any capacity that does exist within our local public sector primary, junior and secondary schools will be exceeded during the local plan period. As well planning for new homes and jobs, we have to plan for new schools – and that is what we propose to do.

The private sector schools operating out of the Borough serve a much wider catchment area. In the past, these schools have provided additional education capacity by providing a direct fee-paying alternative to the public sector offer. However, evidence suggests that in the aftermath of the recent recessions and the subsequent changed economic environment (which significantly includes impacts on the cost of living – including the cost of housing) a visible number of parents who would have (or had) made the choice of securing a private sector education for their children have instead chosen the public sector.

The Borough is also home to three notable further and higher education facilities. These are the University for the Creative Arts, the North East Surrey College of Technology (NESCOT) and the Laine Theatre Arts. These institutions serve sub-regional, national and even international student catchment areas. They have their own aspirations for growth and development and the Borough Council, as the local planning authority, must be mindful of their strategic importance in providing education provision well beyond the Borough's administrative boundary.

## **WORKING WITH INFRASTRUCTURE PARTNERS**

The Borough Council is the local planning authority. We are responsible for planning for the Borough's future. Matching growth in new homes and jobs with the necessary infrastructure needed to support them is a very important part of the local plan making process. The new Local Plan will, in addition to including policies allocating sites for new homes and jobs, identify the key pieces of infrastructure needed to support new residents and workers. However, in most cases it won't be the Borough Council who delivers or takes responsibility for any new infrastructure.

Those bodies responsible for the Borough's necessary community infrastructure are a varied mix of public, quasi-public and private sector organisations. They include – Surrey County Council, who are principally responsible for most of the Borough's transport infrastructure, education planning and adult social care; Surrey Police; Surrey Fire & Rescue; the local health commissioning boards; local GP practices; local schools; Network Rail; Transport for London; National Grid/ Transco; local water, gas and electricity providers; and telecommunications providers.

We actively seek to work with all of the above organisations when we prepare our Local Plan. Our conversations focus upon how many new homes and jobs we are planning for and when we believe that they will be coming forward. In most cases, these organisations are carrying out parallel exercises to ensure that their services meet future needs. In almost all cases these conversations have been on-going for some time – we are not starting from square one. We are partners in shaping the Borough's future.

However, whilst this appears to be a straightforward process that is not always the case. Many of partners work to different planning timescales to ourselves – for example, school place planning works to a five year cycle. Other partners, such as Network Rail and the utility companies cover such wide areas that their interest in Epsom & Ewell may not be as intent as we would wish. Other partners, particularly those in the private sector can keep their cards close to their chests, due to commercial sensitivities.

Nevertheless, we continue to actively engage with our partners throughout the local plan process. A very good example of this engagement is the on-going discourse between ourselves and the transport authority. We are working very closely with them to prepare a series of 'models' that test the different growth scenarios that could take place across the Borough. The outputs from the models produce real-time micro-simulations of how the highway network could behave once new homes and jobs are taken into account. They show where the pressures on the existing network will increase – in terms of traffic volumes and journey times. This work is critical because it provides the best

possible evidence to inform necessary highway improvements – that will mitigate against any harmful impacts brought about by the additional homes and jobs.

Once we understand the possible impacts on the highway network, we can with the highway authority to identify possible solutions. These could include hard highway engineering solutions – essentially big-ticket improvements such as highway or junction widening. In extreme cases, especially where local planning authorities are pursuing urban extensions it could even include new ‘distributor’ road networks. Equally, the solutions may, out of necessity, be focussed upon managing conditions within the limits of the existing highway.

## POSSIBLE SOURCES OF FUNDING

Securing funds to deliver the necessary community infrastructure to support future growth is not straightforward.

Funding for necessary infrastructure improvements typically comes forward through a variety of sources. Within Surrey, the County Council have a significant infrastructure funding responsibility, with an annual expenditure of around £2 billion for the provision of services that include transport, education, fire services, libraries and waste management. Their funds now come from a variety of sources; these are a combination of government grants, developer contributions and other sources.

The borough and district councils also have access to a variety of infrastructure funding sources, which are typically spent in conjunction with the County Council and other infrastructure partners. A number of these sources are closely linked to new development. These include – [developer contributions through the Section 106 Regime](#) and the [Community Infrastructure Levy](#), which is a form of tax on certain types of new development. Both of these sources are in place to top-up the funding of infrastructure improvements. They rarely generate enough money by themselves to fund major infrastructure improvements.

Other infrastructure partners, such as Highways England, Network Rail and Transport for London have access to other sources of funding that are specifically tailored to them. These sources tend to be utilised for major improvements, upon strategic networks. A good example of this is the proposed Cross Rail 2 improvement. It is worth noting that even such strategic schemes are unlikely to receive funding in their entirety. For example, the forthcoming Cross Rail scheme has had to draw upon the [Mayoral Community Infrastructure Levy](#) as a source of top-up funding. At this point it is not known whether Cross Rail 2 will require similar top-up funding arrangements.

Surrey includes two cross-boundary Local Enterprise Partnerships. These are intended to be business led public/private bodies that play a similar role to the former Regional Development Agencies in supporting and promoting economic growth. The Enterprise Partnerships receive something called “growth deal” funding directly from Central Government. This money is intended to be used to fund infrastructure investments that unlock economic and housing opportunities. The amount of money involved is not insignificant but is spread over a wide area that covers many county, district and borough administrative areas. To date, the Borough and County Council have successfully accessed some of this growth deal money to fund the majority of the work being carried out under [the Epsom & Ewell Major Transport Schemes](#).

In addition to the above established sources of infrastructure funding, the government will occasionally introduce exceptional funding sources tasked with addressing specific issues, usually in the short-term with a tightly defined shelf-life. Whilst these sources of funding are not entirely reliable, as their comings and goings cannot be predicted; they can sometimes provide a valuable contribution in helping to pay for new infrastructure. A good example of this is [the Housing Infrastructure Fund](#) launched earlier this year. Whilst the tightly defined requirements and timetable for accessing this particular fund were not available to the Borough Council, the periodic surfacing of such funding does offer some potential for future investment.

Accessing future sources of funding is not guaranteed. In order to support future bids for funding Surrey County Council has prepared, in partnership with the districts and boroughs, an evidence document entitled [the Surrey Infrastructure Study](#). This document identifies a baseline position for transport, education and social care infrastructure across the County. It then projects forward future scenarios based upon where individual districts and boroughs stand with their plan-making. So for example, in Epsom & Ewell, the County Council were asked to project forward growth scenarios based on the objectively assessed housing need identified in the Kingston & North East Surrey Strategic Housing Market Assessment; namely, an annualised scale of housing growth of about 418 new homes per annum. The Study identifies a significant gap between funding already available or secured for infrastructure investment and the funding needed to match the scales of growth being projected. This is unsurprising as the purpose of the document is to bid for money to be used to fund the necessary infrastructure needed to support new growth. Therefore it is logical that it demonstrates shortfalls in the established sources of infrastructure funding. Nevertheless, the scale of the predicted funding gap is alarming.