

**Proposed Submission Epsom and Ewell Local Plan
(2022-2040)
Local Plan Examination**

Matter 4: Green Belt

Hearing Statement prepared on behalf of
Taylor Wimpey Strategic Land

September 2025

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Client

Taylor Wimpey Strategic Land

Our reference

02496_PLESE

September 2025

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Matter Statement has been prepared on behalf of Taylor Wimpey Strategic Land and in respect of Matter 4 of the Proposed Submission Epsom and Ewell Local Plan (2022-2040) Local Plan Examination (herein after referred to as the '*Reg 19 Local Plan*'). Matter 4 deals with the Green Belt.
- 1.2 Taylor Wimpey Strategic Land has submitted formal representations to the Reg 19 Local Plan.
- 1.3 The Statement has been prepared in response to the specific issue (Issue 4) raised by the Inspectors in the '*Matters, Issues and Questions*' published on 9th July 2025, namely '*Is the Plans approach to the Green Belt justified and consistent with national policy?*'
- 1.4 This Matter Statement responds to the Inspectors' questions and has been considered in the context of the tests of 'Soundness' as set out at Para 35 of the National Planning Policy Framework (December 2023).
- 1.5 The NPPF December 2024 has recently been published. The transitional arrangements set out in paragraph 234 confirm circumstances where an emerging Local Plan will be determined against the December 2023 NPPF. This includes where the Plan has been submitted for examination under Regulation 22 on or before 12 March 2025. This does apply in the case of the Reg 19 Local Plan. The references to the NPPF therefore relate to the December 2023 version.
- 1.6 These require that a Plan is:
 - Positively Prepared – providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area's objectively assessed needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;
 - Justified – an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;
 - Effective – deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and
 - Consistent with National Policy – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in this Framework and other statements of national planning policy, where relevant.

2. Matter 4: Green Belt

Issue 4: Is the Plans approach to the Green Belt justified and consistent with national policy?

Q5.1 The Framework is clear on a number of steps which need to be followed before reaching this conclusion. These are set out at paragraph 146 of the Framework. I have set these out below with my understanding of the evidence base in relation to these matters: Please could the Council review these and explain where within the evidence base the following assessments have been undertaken:

a) Make as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land – did the Council revisit sites discounted through the LAA exercise and when did this take place?

b) Optimise the density of development in line with the policies in chapter 11 of the Framework, including whether policies to promote a significant uplift in minimum density standards in town and city centres and other locations well served by public transport - TPO2 responds to this point at paragraph 3.9 – and HB01a draws a conclusion on this point at paragraph 4.14 however where is the evidence to support the conclusions drawn? Reference is made to document HB06a and HB06b however the only reference here I can see is to a masterplan principle of pursuing mainly low and mid-rise high density housing. Is there anything additional to this which the Council are seeking to rely upon?

c) Has been informed by discussions with neighbouring authorities to meet needs Statement of Common Ground have been prepared to address this point.

- 2.1 In addition to paragraph 146 of the NPPF, more detailed guidance is provided at out at para 025 (ID: 3-025-20190722) of the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG). This states that:

“When preparing strategic policies, it may be concluded that insufficient sites / broad locations have been identified to meet objectively assessed needs, including the identified local housing need. In the first instance, strategic policy-making authorities will need to revisit their assessment, for example to carry out a further call for sites, or changing assumptions about the development potential of particular sites to ensure these make the most efficient use of land. This may include applying a range of densities that reflect the accessibility and potential of different areas, especially for sites in town and city centres, and other locations that are well served by public transport”

- 2.2 It is acknowledged that the Council have undertaken call for sites exercises in 2017, 2022 and 2023 and sought to identify sites through other sources, including recently refused planning applications, non-confidential pre-applications, and Regulation 18 representations identifying possible sites (LAA Document HB01a). However, in the circumstances of a significant shortfall against LHN the discounted sites (Table 3 and Table 4 of the Site Assessment Methodology (Document HB05) should have been revisited and a more recent call for sites would have been appropriate, given the 2023 call for sites concluded on 31st July.

- 2.3 More significantly, there is little evidence of reconsidering the development potential of existing and/or proposed allocations. Paragraph 4.14 of the LAA (Document HB01) advises that:

“It is unlikely that increasing the density of potential sites is likely to yield a sufficient amount to address the shortfall, nor would revisiting discounted sites (for example there are numerous garage sites which have availability or deliverability issues by having a large number of leaseholders or freeholder interest across the site)”

- 2.4 In the absence of any justification for this statement, it is unreasonable to conclude that it would be unlikely such an exercise could address the shortfall. It is accepted that there are limitations based on the total number of all sites submitted to be considered for residential, regardless of their suitability. However, this exercise may well have identified additional capacity to better respond to the extensive shortfall.

- 2.5 This is particularly the case for town centre sites, particularly in Epsom Town Centre, which benefit from a highly sustainable location in close proximity to extensive facilities and services and a main line railway station, and could support a significant uplift in minimum density.

- 2.6 Too much reliance is placed on the Epsom Town Centre Masterplan (Document HBo6a and b) in determining capacity of relevant sites included as allocations, without recourse to reassessing this in the context of the emerging Local Plan and the need to plan positively to meet LHN. As set out in the Matter 2 Statement submitted on behalf of our client, the Council should be planning more positively to deliver against the housing requirement, by applying greater flexibility in the approach to density and capacity of proposed allocations.

Q5.2 The LAA (September 2024) indicates at paragraph 4.14 that it is ‘unlikely’ that increasing the density of potential sites is likely to yield a sufficient amount to address the shortfall. TP07 states at paragraph 5.30 that the Council have explored a and b above through a desk based study as part of the LAA process, call for sites exercise and development of the draft Epsom Town Centre Masterplan. Can the Council identify where in the evidence base I can find this assessment?

- 2.7 See response to Q5.1 above and Matter 2 Statement.

Q5.3 A number of concerns have been raised that the Council have failed to address this point correctly or have severely underestimated the capacity of the urban sites which could be achieved whilst balancing the quality of the urban environment – are these concerns valid and where is the evidence base to address these points?

- 2.8 See Response to Q5.1 above.

Q5.4 Are the exceptional circumstances outlined within paragraph 3.3 of TP02 to justify changes to the Green Belt boundaries suitably robust and do they justify the approach taken? A number of representations have stated that the Green Belt boundaries should not be reviewed as the Council has not done enough to optimise densities on brownfield sites. Are these concerns valid ?

- 2.9 My client agrees that the matters listed at paragraph 3.3 of the Green Belt Topic Paper (Document TP02) are suitably robust to represent the exceptional circumstances to release land from the Green Belt. These all focus around the significant under-delivery of housing against requirements over successive years (38% over the last 3 years since 2023 as evidenced within the 2024 HDT results), consequent presumption in favour of sustainable development that applies, and severe shortage of affordable housing.
- 2.10 However, this does not mean that the Council should not have done more to optimise densities from within the built-up area. As set out in the response to Q5.1 above and as detailed in my client's Matter 2 Statement, all reasonable steps should be taken in seeking to address the housing requirement, as required by paragraph 146 of the NPPF and para 025 of the NPPG, given that even with Green Belt release as proposed, it remains significant short of LHN requirements set out within the SM.

Q5.5 Paragraph 147 of the Framework states that where it has been concluded that it is necessary for the release of Green Belt land for development, plans should first give consideration to land which has been previously developed and/or is well served by public transport. Has the Council taken this approach and where is the evidence to support this? GB01 appears to indicate 4 assessments at paragraph 1.9 which do not include how well the site is served by public transport.

- 2.11 My client recognizes this is primarily for the Council to respond. However, Epsom is well served by public transport, including a mainline railway station, and several Metro Bus routes, including along Hook Road and Chessington Road, which link directly to it and the town centre. This would indicate that the sites within the Green Belt proposed for allocation, including Policy SA34, can be regarded as well served by public transport.

Q5.6 The Framework states that the Plan should also set out ways in which the impact of removing land from the Green Belt can be offset through compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land. Has this been done and where is the evidence to explain this?

- 2.12 My client has no comments on this question.

Q5.7 Paragraph 3.31 of document TP02 concludes that the Plan proposes a limited amount of land for Green Belt release and the same position would be unlikely in the event of a much larger release. How is the Council defining 'much larger' in the context of this Plan and where is the evidence base to support this conclusion?

- 2.13 Paragraph 3.31 of the Green Belt Topic Paper (Document TP02) concludes that "The key point is that the release at just 3.36% of the borough's greenfield Green Belt for future development is very limited and therefore the benefits clearly outweigh the degree of harm." It is agreed that for all the reasons set out in paragraph 3.3 of TP02 exceptional circumstances do exist.

- 2.14 However, there is no apparent evidence to indicate that a greater proportion of Green Belt release would not also result in benefits that outweighed harm. The assessment of land parcels against the purposes of the Green Belt as set out within the Green Belt Study Update 2024 (Document GB01), includes land that performs less well against the key purposes of the Green Belt and yet are not identified for release/allocation.
- 2.15 It is recognised that this is not the only consideration in determining release of a site from the Green Belt, and that other constraints are also relevant. Whilst some is included (see response to Q5.8 below), more evidence is required to conclude that the consequent harm of releasing further sites would outweigh benefits, given the benefits of delivering more housing, particularly affordable housing, would be very significant. This could have been addressed had the SA tested a higher growth scenario that included greater Green Belt release and/or enhanced capacity from within the urban area.

Q5.8 GB01 (Green Belt Study Update 2024) and GB02 (Green Belt Technical Note 2023) present the remainder of the evidence base in relation to the Green Belt boundaries within the borough. It identifies a scoring system for sites based on selecting sites with the least harm to the Green Belt purposes. Has the Council applied the criteria in a consistent manner? A number of representors have outlined how sites which have been discounted have scored less in Green Belt terms. Is the Council clear in the reasons they have discounted sites and where is this information provided within the evidence base?

- 2.16 As above, my client recognises that other considerations beyond the assessment of land parcels against the key purposes of the Green Belt are relevant in determining site allocations. The corresponding analysis within the Green Belt study update 2024 (Document GB01) also incorporates an assessment of landscape impact. The Green Belt Topic Paper (TP02) also includes an assessment of landscape and visual amenity and biodiversity, in accordance with Paragraph 002 of the NPPG (reference ID: 64-002-20190722) to provide *supporting evidence of landscape, biodiversity or recreational needs and opportunities*. However, there is no details land parcel assessment of other considerations such as heritage and flood risk.
- 2.17 More specifically, in relation to the assessment of the Hook Road Arena site (Parcel 031) within the Green Belt Study Update 2024 (Document GB01), it is concluded that :

'The Landscape and visual sensitivity is low. The parcel well defined robust and durable boundaries on its north eastern and western boundaries formed by Chessington Road and Hook Road respectively which are also considered capable of forming a new robust Green Belt boundary'.

- 2.18 My client agrees with these conclusions. However, there is little justification to distinguish the level of landscape sensitivity between the northern and southern parts of the site as set out. Both the northern and southern parcels are well contained from the wider landscape and are influenced by built form. Whilst residential development to the south-west is more apparent in the southern field, properties along Chessington Road are also visible.

Q5.9 Could the Council be doing more to address the 5500 dwelling shortfall?

- 2.19 See response to Q5.1 above and Matter 2 Statement.

Q5.10 In light of the representations made by Epsom College, should the land be allocated to reflect the potential for enhanced education facilities at the site? The Council have stated that the site has been assessed as part of the LAA. Please could the Council provide the page/paragraph references for this?

2.20 My client has no comments on this question.

Q5.11 The transitional arrangements confirm that policies in the NPPF 2024 apply to planning applications from the day of publication. Footnote 58 indicates that the golden rules contributions in paragraph 156 do not apply if sites were released from the Green Belt in a plan which was adopted prior to publication of the NPPF 2024. As this Plan is in the process of being examined, this exception would not appear to relate to new Green Belt release sites within this Plan. Does the Plan need to be modified to include requirements for development on housing allocations removed from the Green Belt relating to the contributions (Golden Rules) referred to in NPPF 156 (affordable housing, infrastructure and accessible green spaces)?

2.21 My client would simply observe that the NPPF 2023, to which this Plan and its related policies are being assessed against for soundness, does not contain any requirement to provide a higher level of affordable housing on sites released from the Green Belt through local plan review.

2.22 Any modifications to include a higher affordable housing of 50% in accordance with the Golden Rules would need to be appropriately tested through viability assessment as part of the evidence base to this Plan. Policy S6 currently seeks 40% on greenfield sites. Without this exercise the Reg 19 Plan cannot be considered to be justified. As detailed within the Matter 2 Statement, Policy S6 would also benefit from further flexibility in the approach to delivering affordable housing.

Q 5.12 If so, how would such requirements affect the viability of development on the relevant allocations?

2.23 See answer to Q5.11 above.

Q5.13 Is Policy DM15 Green Belt justified? In particular, is the reference to the National Planning Policy Framework correct and are the Council clear about which Framework they are intending to refer to here?

2.24 My client would agree that Policy DM15 repeats the NPPF, and this is confirmed within paragraph 7.40 of the Reg 19 Plan itself which states that 'This policy aligns with the NPPF definitions and exceptions'.

Q5.14 What does the wording of the policy add over and beyond the wording of the Framework. Is the policy justified?

2.25 Paragraph 7.40 claims that relative to the NPPF Policy DM15 adds references to clarifying definitions relating to the 'original dwelling' and 'replacement buildings'. However, these are not included within the Policy, but within the supporting text, and the original dwellings definition repeats that within the NPPF in any case.

- 2.26 In respect of the replacement dwelling definition, this differs from the relevant reference within the NPPF. Paragraph 154 states that development within the Green Belt would not be regarded as inappropriate *'provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces'*. The support text at paragraph 7.40 b) instead refers to *'if it is sited on or in a position that substantially overlaps that of the original building, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that an alternative position would not increase the overall impact on the openness of the Green Belt.'*
- 2.27 If any Policy or supporting text is included in respect of the Green Belt, it should be amended to ensure it is consistent with the NPPF.

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