

STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND

1. List of Parties involved:

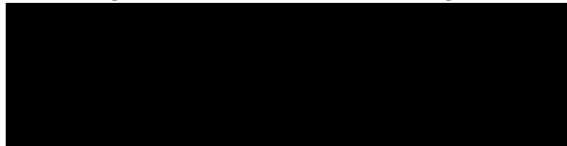
- Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC)
- Woking Borough Council (WBC)

2. Signatories:



02.08.2023

***Elmbridge Borough Council
Kim Tagliarini, Head of Planning & Environmental Health***



02.08.2023

***Woking Borough Council
Beverley Kuchar
Acting Strategic Director - Place***

3. Strategic Geography

The Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) is between the local authorities of Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC) and Woking Borough Council (WBC).

EBC and WBC share a common boundary within the Surrey County Council administrative area (see Figure 1). In terms of planning, both authorities have Green Belt and a range of environmental designations / assets. They also have flood risk, conservation areas and heritage assets which constrain development.

EBC and WBC do not sit within the same housing market area. Woking is located in the West Surrey Housing Market Area (HMA) alongside Guildford and Waverley Borough Councils. Elmbridge is located in the Kingston and North-East Surrey HMA alongside the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council and Mole Valley District Council. Both EBC and WBC are in the Enterprise M3 Local Enterprise Partnership.

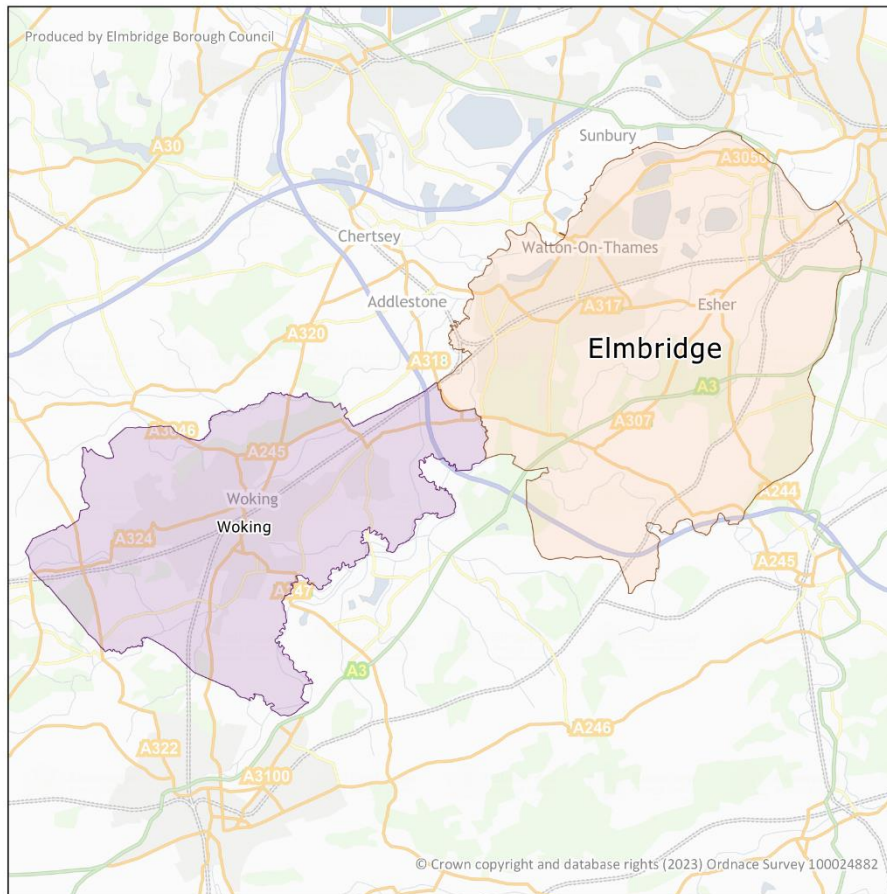


Figure 1: Elmbridge and Woking Boroughs

4. Strategic Matters

Duty to Cooperate

EBC and WBC have engaged with one another to discuss duty to cooperate matters throughout the preparation of their respective Local Plans. This has included engagement on their evidence base documents; through meetings; and at their respective Regulation 18 & 19 Stages.

Both parties agree that the duty to cooperate requirements have been met. Their duty to cooperate activities are recorded in the following documents:

- EBC's Duty to Cooperate Statement of Compliance (June 2022)
- WBC – Duty to Cooperate Statement, Site Allocations (July 2019).

Both authorities agree that the above documents are an accurate record of their engagement up until EBC's Regulation 19 consultation in June 2022.

Neither party has objected to each other's latest Local Plan stage for failing to comply with the duty. It is a duty that requires cooperation, not agreement, and the two authorities agree that they have cooperated in an ongoing and effective manner as set out in their respective Statements and associated updates, as well as this SoCG.

Local Plan Positions

Elmbridge

EBC invited representations on their draft Local Plan (Regulation 19) between 17 June and 29 July 2022. It is the Council's intention to submit its draft Local Plan to the Secretary of State for Levelling-Up, Housing and Communities for independent examination in July 2023.

Woking

WBC adopted their Core Strategy in 2012; Development Management Policies Development Plan Document (DPD) in 2016; and Site Allocations DPD in 2021. The Site Allocations DPD supports the delivery of the Core Strategy; allocating sites to meet the housing requirement of the borough and safeguards land to meet future development needs beyond the present Core Strategy period to 2027.

Regarding its strategic policies, WBC is currently preparing a review of the Core Strategy and the preparation of a new Local Plan. WBC asked EBC if there are any strategic policy related matters, cross boundary issues or impacts that WBC should consider in the current review. EBC provided a detailed officer response, stating that several key changes pointed to a need for WBC to prepare a new Local Plan. Regarding cross-boundary strategic planning matters, EBC stated that it had identified in several of its evidence base documents those strategic matters that need to be addressed, working with WBC. EBC also identified a need to work together to ensure the delivery of the infrastructure required to support the Woking Hub Strategic Opportunity Area (SOA) as set out in the Surrey Place Ambition.

Regardless of the outcome of the ongoing Core Strategy review, Woking's current Local Plan period ends in 2027, so WBC will be preparing a new Local Plan over the coming years, taking into account all relevant factors including need, market geographies and constraints.

WBC has also prepared a Town Centre Masterplan, in draft form; the work carried out on this will feed into the forthcoming update of the Local Plan.

Key Strategic Matters:

WBC did not submit a representation to the EBC's draft Local Plan Regulation 19 representation period (June 2022) however, through their on-going discussions, WBC and EBC have been identified the following as the key strategic matters: housing need, Green Belt, Gypsies and Traveller accommodation and transport. The position of each authority in regard to these matters, is set out as follows:

Housing Need

Elmbridge

The local housing need figure, as set by the Government's Standard Method, is 9,705 (647 dwellings per annum) over 15-years.

Elmbridge's proposed growth strategy focuses on delivering development and increasing capacity in its existing urban areas (a 'brown-field' approach). This includes the reallocation

and diversification of employment land, encouraging mixed use development and ensuring the potential of sites is optimised.

This approach provides for 6,785 dwellings, 70% of the local housing need figure. This leaves a local unmet housing need of circ. 2,920 dwellings over its plan period. This includes an element of unmet affordable housing need.

Woking

The Core Strategy makes provision for the delivery of 4,964 net additional dwellings between 2010 and 2027. This housing requirement was based on the most up-to-date evidence at the time of the Core Strategy's adoption and was found to be up to date at the time of the first Core Strategy review in October 2018. The requirement provides for 71% of Woking's objectively assessed need, with the remainder of Woking's need being met within the West Surrey housing market area. Delivery from 2010-2023 has been 101% of the Core Strategy housing requirement for that period; well below the objectively assessed need. There is therefore currently no opportunity to meet unmet housing needs from neighbouring authorities in Woking borough.

The Site Allocations DPD identifies that most of the required housing will be delivered on previously developed land in the Town, District and Local Centres. Sufficient land has been identified in the main urban areas to meet housing land supply up to 2022. The DPD also identifies sufficient land from the Green Belt to deliver at least 550 new homes between 2022 and 2027 and, sites to be safeguarded to meet anticipated development needs between 2027 and 2040.

Green Belt

Elmbridge

EBC has commissioned Arup to undertake two Green Belt Assessments. The first, Green Belt Boundary Review (GBBR) was published in 2016 and examined the performance of the Green Belt in and around Elmbridge against the Green Belt Purposes, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The analysis was undertaken at two scales: Strategic Areas and Local Areas.

The 2018 Supplementary Review was a more spatially focused piece of work to better understand the performance of smaller 'sub-areas' against the Green Belt purposes, as well as their context in relation to the wider Green Belt (Local Areas and Strategic Areas, as assessed through the 2016 GBBR).

In addition to the above, the Council has also undertaken further evidence base work on the Green Belt:

- Green Belt Boundary Review – Assessment of Weakly Performing Local Areas 2019: The assessment identifies the extent of development potential within each Local Areas considered to be 'weakly performing' as part of the GBBR 2016 and sets out whether there is an opportunity for large / small-scale development or no development.

- Green Belt Boundary Review – Accessibility Assessment, June 2019: This assessment looks at the sustainability of specific Green Belt areas (weakly performing and smaller sub-divisions) using a range of accessibility standards.
- Green Belt Boundary Review – Assessment of Previously Developed Land, June 2019: This assessment looks at the level of Previously Developed Land (PDL) within specific Green Belt areas (weakly performing and smaller sub-divisions).
- Green Belt Site Proforma – Utilising the information from the above documents and other evidence base documents, the pro-forma considers specific areas of land for potential release from the Green Belt.

The evidence base documents set out that alongside further assessments and evidence base documents, they will be used to inform the Council’s preferred approach for the Local Plan and site selection. This includes whether exceptional circumstances exist to justify releasing land from the Green Belt.

EBC’s rationale for its proposed development strategy is set out in the Topic Paper: How the Spatial Strategy was formed (June 2022). The Paper sets out the options assessed when considering how to address the Borough’s housing need and includes the Council’s consideration of whether exceptional circumstances are fully evidence and justified to release land from the Green Belt. The Paper sets the rationale for the Council’s recommended spatial strategy within the draft Local Plan; promoting sustainable development and place-making ambition and responding to the Council’s commitment to tackle climate change.

Woking:

The Green Belt boundary review report (2014) recommended sites to deliver at least 550 homes in the latter part of the plan period, between 2022 and 2027, and for safeguarding to meet anticipated development needs between 2027 and 2040. Sites were secured through the adoption of the Site Allocations DPD.

Gypsies & Travellers

Elmbridge

The need for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pitches during the plan period has been informed by the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (ORS, 2020) that sets out the current and future accommodation needs. The assessment looks at the needs of Travellers that meet the planning definition as set out in the Government’s Planning Policy for Traveller Sites 2015. It also assesses those that are undetermined in terms of the definition and those that do not meet the definition.

The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Site Assessment Study (2022) identified sites to meet the borough’s needs for Travellers as set out in the GTAA. Taking into account the recommendations in the GTAA, the council has not allocated sites for this group but will permit alternatives such as additional pitches on existing sites and windfall pitches, provided these meet the criteria set out in the policy.

There are no sites proposed in the draft Local Plan for transit or short-term site provision within the borough. Surrey County Council has been working closely with Surrey Police and other district and borough councils to identify a transit or short-term site and reduce the impact of unauthorised encampments across the county. A site has been identified in Tandridge and work is progressing on its delivery.

The concerns raised by WBC regarding Traveller Accommodation will be a matter for the planning inspector to consider in the EIP.

Woking

The Traveller Accommodation Assessment (2013) identified a need for 19 pitches to be provided between 2017 and 2027 and a further 11 pitches between 2027 and 2040. A Position Statement on the topic was published in 2019. Through the allocation of several sites, sufficient land was identified to provide 23 up to 2027. It was determined that through a future review of the Core Strategy and Site Allocations, WBC will identify specific site(s) to provide additional accommodation. This will now take place as part of the preparation of a new Local Plan.

Transport

Elmbridge

Elmbridge and Woking Boroughs are connected via the Byfleet Road (A245) which, running west from the A3 Painshill junction towards Woking Borough, connects the areas of Brooklands and Weybridge (Elmbridge Borough) to Byfleet and West Byfleet (Woking Borough). Running east of the A3 Painshill junction, the Byfleet Road leads into Cobham (Elmbridge Borough).

In support of the draft Local Plan, EBC has commissioned a Transport Assessment (2022) carried out by WSP in collaboration with Surrey County Council (SCC) and National Highways. The Assessment identified that the largest absolute increase in traffic flows on the Local Road Network (LRN) is forecast in the AM Peak on the eastbound A245 northwest of Cobham at the A245 Byfleet Road. The flows are forecast to increase by 185 vehicles (3 vehicles per minute), compared to the 2037 Baseline.

A detailed assessment has been undertaken of the performance of junctions forecast to operate with a $V/C > 1$ (volume / capacity) within the draft Local Plan spatial strategy. Only at junctions where the draft Local Plan spatial strategy is forecast to have a significant impact is mitigation proposed. EBC working with WSP, SCC and National Highways have agreed that the following junction, of relevance to WBC given its proximity, will require mitigation:

- B374 Brooklands Road / B372 St George's Avenue (Priority Junction)

Having discussed with SCC mitigation measures, it has been identified that the above junction will be fully or partially signalised. The “with mitigation” modelling demonstrates that the improvements proposed for the local highway network junctions (identified above) would successfully address the issues of queuing and delay.

Strategic Opportunity Area (SOA2) – Woking Hub

The Surrey Place Ambition (date) identifies parts of Elmbridge and Woking Boroughs as forming the Woking Hub SOA where strategic interventions will be focused to support long term prosperity. This includes investment in new strategic infrastructure and to address existing deficiencies and improving connectivity both within Surrey and between other strategically important economic areas.

The SOA comprises much of the borough of Woking but also the Brooklands employment area (Elmbridge Borough) and the strategic new settlement at the former Wisley airfield (Guildford Borough).

In regard to the two boroughs, improving connectivity (including digital) for businesses and residents and investment in infrastructure to encourage sustainable transport options has, been identified as a priority.

Current positions:

Elmbridge's draft Local Plan – Woking Borough Council's position

- WBC notes that the draft Elmbridge Local Plan does not meet objectively assessed needs in relation to housing based on the Government's standard methodology.
- WBC notes that EBC does not consider that exceptional circumstances exist to justify amending Green Belt boundaries.
- WBC considers that it is for the Planning Inspector to determine whether EBC's spatial strategy is sound through the Examination in Public (EiP) process.

Woking Local Plan – Elmbridge Borough Council's position

- EBC notes the stage of the Woking Local Plan in that WBC is currently scoping the requirement for a review of the Core Strategy and the preparation of a new Local Plan.
- EBC will respond to WBC's consultations in due course.

The parties agree:

1. The proposed development strategy as set out in the EBC draft Local Plan will be investigated through the Examination-in-Public process and it will be for the Planning Inspector to determine whether it is sound.
2. Despite the difficulties of meeting local housing need, the two authorities will continue to discuss any significant development and changes in housing land supply and approach that could enable the issue of unmet housing to be resolved.
3. The two authorities will continue to work together and with other relevant infrastructure providers e.g., Surrey County Council and National Highways, to ensure that the priorities and schemes (that are jointly relevant) to deliver the Woking Hub SOA are progressed.

Matters not specifically addressed within this Statement of Common Ground

The parties agree:

The following matters are defined in the National Planning Policy Framework as strategic matters but are not specifically addressed in the context of this Statement of Common Ground (the authorities continue to work together on these matters as appropriate).

- Employment, retail and leisure;
- Flooding;
- Green & Blue Infrastructure;
- Natural Environment & Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (TBHSPA);
- Climate Change; and
- Historic Environment.

The authorities agree that the engagement undertaken on these issues as set out in their respective Duty to Cooperate: Statement of Compliance documents is an accurate record and that there are no unresolved issues.

It is also agreed that the authorities will continue to work on these matters as appropriate.

5. Governance Arrangements

The authorities are committed to working positively together, sharing information and best practice, where appropriate, throughout the plan preparation phase and beyond. This co-operation and collaboration takes place at senior member, chief executive, and senior officer as well as at technical officer level.

Joint working will include the following existing governance arrangements:

- Surrey Leaders;
- Surrey Chief Executives;
- Surrey Futures;
- The Surrey Planning Officers' Association (SPOA); and
- Surrey Planning Working Group (PWG).

In terms of governance, the authorities agree:

- That in response to any new evidence / changes in circumstances, informal discussions will occur between the two authorities on the cross-boundary issues referred to in this SoCG in the form of officer level meetings with escalation of matters to Member level where necessary;
- that this SoCG will be reviewed at the above meetings or, when required by either authority e.g., for the purpose of their Examination;
- to continue to work collaboratively on plan preparation and evidence, whilst acknowledging others' timetables and timescales;
- to respect each other's right to develop their own plans that fit the specific circumstances of the local authority's communities; and to continue to work with the other Surrey authorities on housing, employment and other strategic issues affecting Surrey as a whole.