

Local Plan

Our future in your hands



What is this consultation paper about?

The Council is seeking your views on an update to our Local Plan. The Local Plan decides how much development should happen over the next 15 years and where it will go. It will allocate sites for development and guide decisions on whether or not planning applications should be granted. We would like to hear your views on how the borough's development needs should be met.

An up to date plan is essential to ensure that positive decisions are made for the future of our borough. The paper sets out the key planning issues that will affect Epsom and Ewell over the next 15 years. These include national issues such as the acute shortage of affordable housing and the need to increase the delivery of new housing.

The paper sets out the borough's development needs and provides an overview of the challenges we face and how we can respond and plan for future growth.

This is a great opportunity for you to engage in the development of the Local Plan; to let us know what you think of our suggested solutions; and tell us what matters most to you and which options you support.

Together we can produce a Local Plan that responds positively to the issues facing our borough, in line with national planning policy and for the benefit of current and future residents.

Why are we reviewing the Local Plan?

We have to update our Local Plan because national planning policy has changed since our last plan in 2007. Our housing policies are out of date and no longer conform to national planning policy. Updating our Local Plan will ensure that we can continue to plan positively with the borough's best interests in mind. We have until 2018 to update our Local Plan. Otherwise, we could lose control of where development takes place.














What is the evidence saying?



Over the past two years we have been preparing evidence for the update of the Local Plan. The objective behind this work has been to identify the future development needs of the borough up to 2032.

The evidence has informed the key issues and challenges that we face, which are summarised below. More background detail is available in our [evidence fact sheets](#) and [technical documents](#) which can be found on our [website](#).

Our development needs up to 2032	Challenges for our Local Plan
 <p>Population expected to increase by 20,000</p>	 <p>Housing is expensive; the average home costs over £480,000</p>
 <p>Need for 7,106 new homes* (over 60% affordable)</p>	 <p>Insufficient housing land (shortfall of 4,400 homes**)</p>
 <p>Need to maintain and intensify employment land and office space</p>	 <p>43% of land is Green Belt of which 44% has additional environmental designations</p>
 <p>Need for 8,400 sqm of retail space</p>	 <p>No surplus parks, allotments and play pitches</p>
 <p>Need for investment to support future growth as there is significant pressure on existing roads and facilities.</p>	 <p>Government focused on the national housing crisis</p>  <p>Most neighbouring boroughs in similar situation</p>

*418 new homes each year from 2015 to 2032

**There is space for about 3,000 new homes in our built up area. Because we have a shortfall national policy requires us to add additional housing on top of our assessed need to encourage more house building.



More homes! What does this mean for our Local Plan?

Frequently asked questions

What does the evidence show?

Our evidence shows there is demand for 418 new homes each year to be built in the Borough over the next plan period. The Government has recently published its own [indicative calculation](#) which currently estimates that 579 new homes are needed each year. **However, the evidence shows that we don't have enough currently available land to meet the demand for new homes over the next 15 years.** This is one of the reasons why we need to review our current Local Plan to see where and how that unmet demand might be accommodated. We have no choice but to review our housing target and the government require us to satisfy them that we have "left no stone unturned" in our search for suitable sites.

There is a national shortage of new housing and government has made it clear that every borough must do its bit to significantly boost the supply of new homes.

There has been a lot of new housing in Epsom and Ewell why do we need more?

Most of the existing houses in the borough were built during the 1920's-1930's often in the form of large suburban estates connected to the improved rail links of the period. The focus from the 1940s to 1970s was on infilling these original estates in response to the introduction of the Metropolitan Green Belt in 1947. Between the 1980s and early 2000s infilling continued but within this period the rate of house building slowed down. Since 2007, 2,611 new homes have been built, primarily on the former hospital sites. But the number of new homes has not kept up with local demand.

Where is the demand coming from; who is going to live in these new homes?

The forecast demand for market and affordable housing is calculated using a variety of data

including the Census, population and household projections, migration patterns, economic growth forecasts and commuter travel patterns alongside a survey of local residents.

Whilst it cannot be guaranteed that current Epsom & Ewell residents will live in the new homes there is significant demand from residents who are struggling for space and those wishing to downsize. There are of course our younger residents who will eventually be seeking their own home in the next 15 years.

Housing in Epsom and Ewell is expensive; will building reduce house prices?

The average price for a home in 2014 was £480,000 whilst the gross average income for a full time working resident was £41,818. Building more houses is unlikely to bring down house prices; these are influenced by factors beyond simple supply and demand, including inflation, earnings, interest rates, land values and build costs. Similarly, building more new homes in the borough is unlikely to devalue existing property prices. In fact development often uplifts prices due to perceived confidence in an area but also the additional infrastructure that larger housing developments bring.

New market homes can also help deliver affordable housing through planning contributions. These new affordable homes will benefit residents who are waiting on the housing register and those wishing to buy their first home.



Green Belt

Frequently asked questions

What is Green Belt and why do we have it?

The Green Belt aims to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open and undeveloped. Its original purpose was to halt the outward and uncontrolled spread of London following the 1920s-1930s building boom as a result of railway expansion. It also prevents neighbouring towns merging into one another and assists in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. It is not an environmental policy that seeks to protect biodiversity or landscapes.

The Epsom and Ewell Green Belt is a critical part of the borough. It has an important function and contributes to the borough's character and appearance. It also provides a wide variety of publically accessible open spaces.

The Green Belt policy has been highly successful; not only has it stopped uncontrolled urban sprawl it has also ensured the continuous regeneration and renewal of London.

But isn't the Green Belt sacrosanct?

The Green Belt is not sacrosanct. However, Green Belt land is heavily protected from development, except in very special circumstances by national and local planning policy.

Can the Green Belt be altered?

Yes, Green Belt boundaries can be amended, national planning policy states that this should only be in 'exceptional circumstances' as part of the review of a local plan. Government will shortly be clarifying what might be considered to be 'exceptional circumstances'.

The current advice is that the boundary should only be amended once all other reasonable options for meeting identified development needs have been fully examined, these include:

- **Making effective use of brownfield land**
- **Making use of underused land, including surplus public sector land**
- **Optimising density of development**
- **Exploring whether other boroughs can help to meet some of the identified development requirement.**

We have looked at these very carefully when considering our supply of housing sites. Options 1 & 2 address these points. Additionally, there are fewer than 300 (1%) empty homes in the borough and even fewer truly long term empty as some are in probate or awaiting development or refurbishment. This is significantly lower than the national average.

There is very limited public sector land available within the borough. The majority of what we do have, has already been identified as having housing potential.

Our Green Belt boundary has not changed since the 1940s when it was originally drawn. Previous local plans have never had to contemplate making changes to the Green Belt. However, we are now under increasing pressure to consider changes because there are 'exceptional circumstances' of housing need, particularly affordable housing need, which have never been experienced before and there may be no other reasonable option to accommodate the amount of new housing required.

The Green Belt was introduced to constrain growth, the boundary has stood for more than 70 years and needs to be reviewed to ensure it is fit for this generation and the next.



What should we do?

We already have a plan for up to 2026; why not simply continue with it?

The Local Plan no longer conforms to national planning policy. Consequently there is a high risk that, in its current form, it will carry limited weight in planning applications and appeals for new development in the borough.

We could find ourselves unable to resist unacceptable development proposals or refused applications being granted on appeal. This could result in unplanned development in unsustainable locations.

Typically unplanned development fails to take account of the cumulative impact on our infrastructure, such as schools and roads. This reduces our ability to ensure that growth fairly contributes to the delivery of essential new infrastructure needed to support development.



The government has made it clear that all local authorities must have an up to date local plan and failure to do so could lead to intervention. **This could mean that the government steps in and imposes a plan on the borough.**

Failure to ensure a plan-led approach to growth can lead to outcomes that will not benefit our borough. We want to remain in control to ensure that we continue to plan positively for sustainable growth.

Why not build the homes elsewhere?



Most of our neighbouring Councils are in a similar position to us. They are affected by similar constraints, including extensive Green Belt land and the demand for homes is just as great with similarly limited supply of housing land. They too are facing the difficult decisions that we are.



We are talking to neighbouring councils to see how we might work together to accommodate new housing.



Whilst we have a duty to co-operate with our neighbours this does not extend to them having to agree to take our unmet housing need. In any case, the opportunity for them to do so is limited just as it would be for us to accommodate theirs.

FULL

However, should we decide not to plan positively for growth, other councils could challenge us for failing to co-operate effectively and place even greater pressure on us to find land for development to meet their needs too.

The reality is that we cannot simply say that our borough is full and that the shortfall in new homes needs to go somewhere else. So what should we do?





Option 1-Urban intensification



Build high



Use employment land for homes



Reallocate open space

Option – Continue to develop the urban area and meet all housing need by:

Making our housing land deliver more

- Increase the development density across all potential housing sites.
- To meet all of the need in the urban area we would need all potential housing sites to deliver 200 homes per hectare which would mean tall buildings of at least 6 storeys.
- Reduce minimum room sizes, garden sizes and parking standards to create more space for extra housing.

Increasing choice of housing sites

- Give up places where people work to housing. This could include redeveloping industrial estates and encouraging the conversion of office space to flats.
- Make land swaps by building homes on open spaces, play pitches and allotments and re-provide these within the Green Belt.
- Allow development on garden land.

Advantages

- Continues to direct development to the urban area.
- Moves to meet housing need in full.
- Relocation of parks, play pitches and allotments could mean greater open space use of Green Belt land.

Limitations

- Few locations across the borough are suited to high density and tall buildings. Typically, the average density is 45 homes per hectare so higher densities would appear alien.
- Higher density development will inevitably be flats which would not deliver the range of housing types needed, primarily 2 and 3 bedroom homes.
- Loss of green space, green infrastructure, biodiversity and wildlife habitats in the urban area.
- Changes to the character and appearance of the borough as it becomes more urbanised and built up.
- Garden land developments can often lead to contrived and substandard residential development.
- We have no surplus employment land so there would be a change in the economic profile of Epsom and Ewell- our town centre would suffer and we would become a dormitory town.
- Difficult to fit in the required improvements to existing infrastructure or find land for new facilities such as schools and roads.





Option 2- Release some Green Belt land for new homes



Search the Green Belt land for areas suitable for new homes



Boost supply of new and affordable homes



Preserve existing character and jobs within the urban area



Ability to build 4,400 homes with the necessary infrastructure is unknown

Option – Extend the urban area where it's most suitable to do so and meet housing need shortfall by:

Reviewing Green Belt boundaries to meet long term housing need

- Create a number of new areas for housing by undertaking a detailed review of our Green Belt to identify areas potentially suitable for new homes and supporting infrastructure. See Broad Areas of Search for more detail.
- This review could also include adding other land into the Green Belt.

Advantages

- Maintains existing character of the urban area and protects employment land and green spaces.
- Moves to meet housing need in full.
- Protects environmental designations, such as Epsom Common and Horton Park Nature Reserve.
- Boosts supply of new and affordable homes with the supporting infrastructure like schools, especially on larger sites.

Limitations

- Some loss of Green Belt. Risk that the new Green Belt boundary no longer serves its purposes; such as preventing future unrestricted sprawl of the built up area or the merging of neighbouring towns.
- Pressure on infrastructure. The costs of delivering the necessary infrastructure will be very high and could prove too expensive to build.
- Questionable that house builders would be able to deliver the number of houses planned for.
- Risk of failing to meet future housing targets.

Further work

- Additional work would need to be done to identify suitable sites, the number of homes that could be built as well as the infrastructure requirements.



What are Broad Areas of Search?

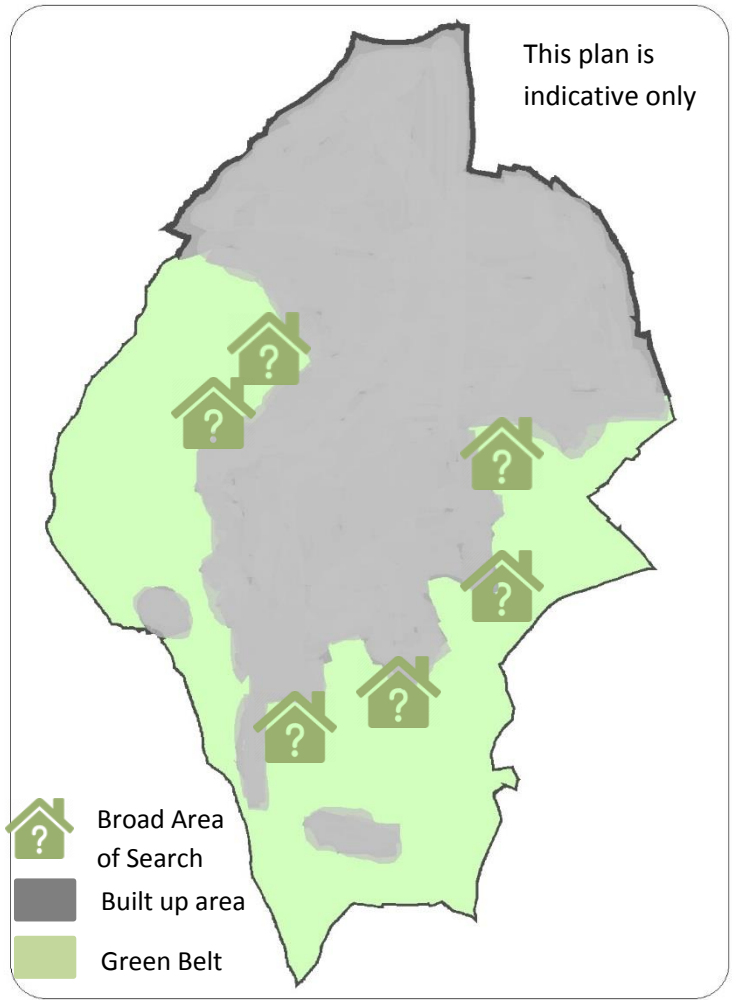


We want to protect the integrity of the Green Belt for its intended purpose but also to ensure that it continues to contribute positively to the borough's character and appearance; contributes towards biodiversity; helps mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change; provides world class horse racing and race horse training facilities and provides publically accessible open space uses for the borough's residents and others.

A study of the [Green Belt](#) has indicated that the majority of Green Belt land is performing its Green Belt functions well.

However, the need for more housing is great and we need to ensure that the Green Belt boundary set 70 years ago is fit for purpose for this generation and the next.

Therefore, we need to consider if there are any parts of the current Green Belt that could be suitable for new homes and infrastructure. If so, we would need to be sure that we could release this land without undermining the purpose of the Green Belt or damaging the appearance of the Borough.



Create new areas for housing From 300 up to 1,000 new homes

Often located on the edge of the urban area to maximise existing infrastructure capacity but unlike a collection of individual housing sites they have the critical mass to secure the provision of new infrastructure where it is not already available.

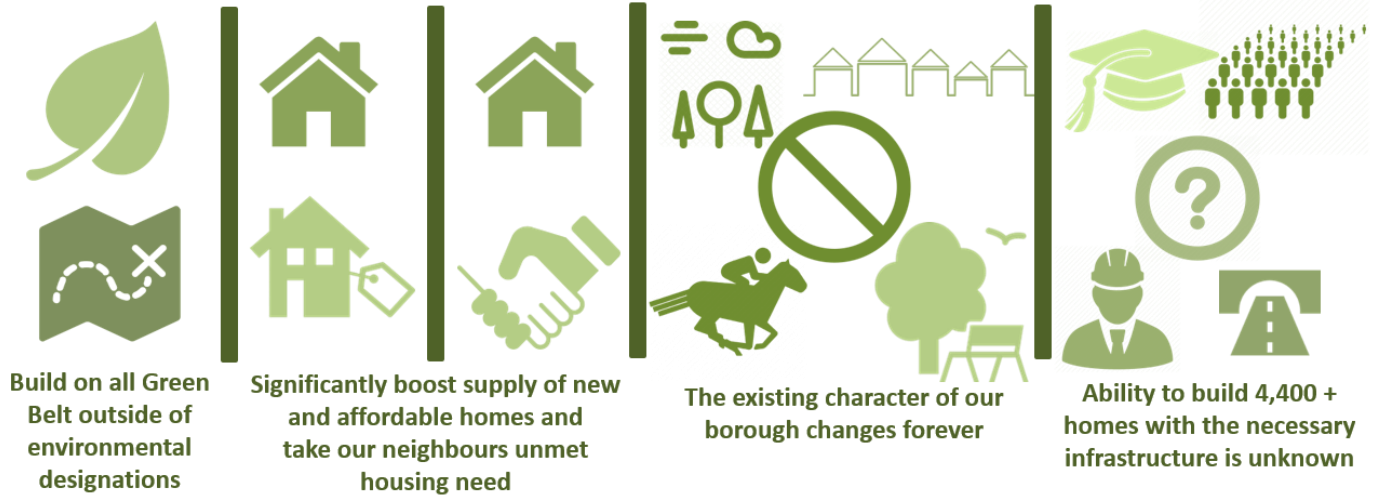
Up to 44% of the Green Belt is covered by environmental designations, called [Primary Constraints](#) which restrict development (i.e. areas like Epsom Common). We think we should look first at land not affected by the Primary Constraints, these will be our Broad Areas of Search. We will need to undertake further work and assessments to see if there is land within the search areas that might be suitable for new neighbourhoods.

At the same time as considering whether to re-draw the boundary of the Green Belt to allow for new development, we should also consider whether there are any areas that should be included in it that are currently outside of the Green Belt.





Option 3- Significant Green Belt release to meet all our housing need and more



Option – Meet all housing need shortfall and more by:

Reviewing Green Belt boundaries to meet all long term housing need

- Seek to extensively amend the Green Belt land not protected by environmental designation ([Primary Constraints](#)).
- Release enough Green Belt land to meet the large majority of the new homes needed.

Seeking to take some of our neighbours unmet housing need

- This option could provide more than sufficient land to accommodate our housing need as well as creating space for new homes beyond the next 15 years or perhaps accommodate some of our neighbours' unmet housing need.

Advantages

- Protects the existing character of the urban area.
- Meets current housing need in full and perhaps could assist our neighbours in meeting their unmet housing need.
- Protects environmental designations, such as Epsom Common and Horton Park Nature Reserve.
- Considerably boosts supply of new and affordable homes for the borough and neighbouring areas.

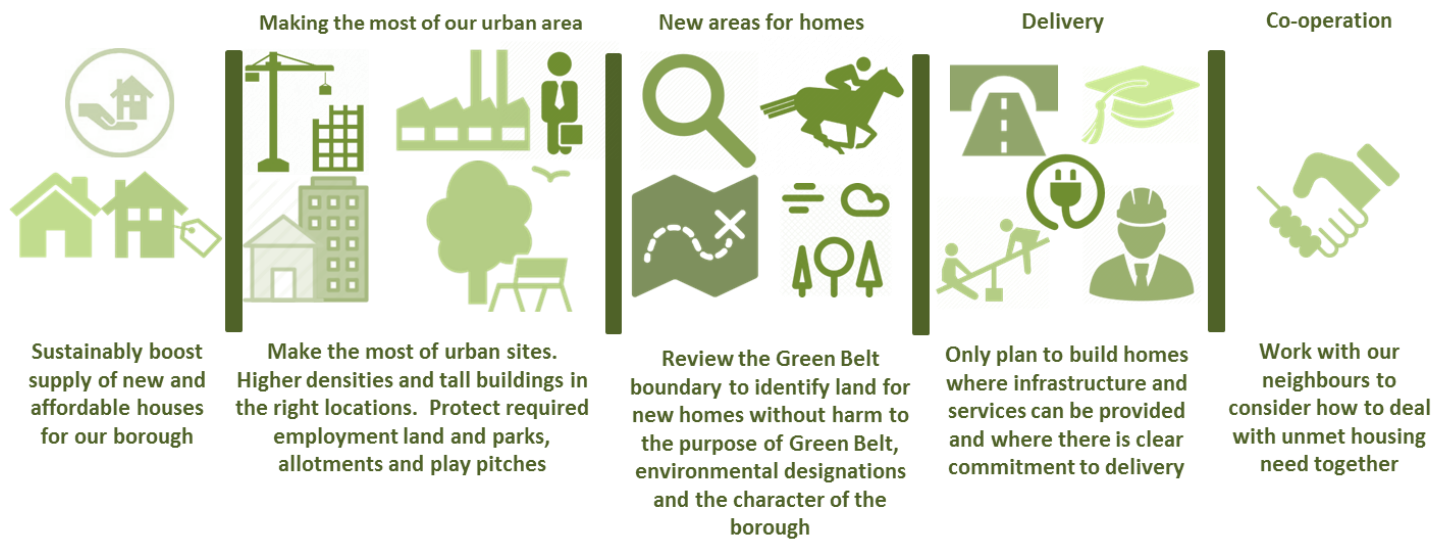
Limitations

- Significant loss of existing of Green Belt land. Risk that the new Green Belt boundary no longer serves its purposes; such as preventing future unrestricted sprawl of the built up area or the merging of neighbouring towns.
- Fundamental changes to the overall character of the borough.
- Significant pressure on infrastructure. The costs of delivering the necessary infrastructure such as roads and schools, will be very high and likely too expensive to build.
- Highly questionable that house builders would be able to deliver the number of houses planned for in the plan period. Greater risk of failing to meet future housing targets.





Option 4-Finding the balance



Option – Seek to sustainably boost the supply of new and affordable homes by:

Making the most of our urban areas

- Continue to build on previously developed sites over the next five years.
- Increase densities and building heights on sites in accessible locations, where it will not negatively impact on character.
- Continue to protect employment land, parks, allotments and play pitches.

Reviewing Green Belt boundaries to meet long term housing needs

- Create a number of new areas for housing by undertaking a detailed review of our Green Belt to identify areas potentially suitable for new homes and supporting infrastructure. See **Broad Areas of Search** for more detail.
- This review could include adding some land to the Green Belt.

Co-operating with neighbours

- Work with our neighbours to come up with a strategy for managing the shortfall in homes.

Advantages

- Maintains existing character of the urban area.
- Less likely to lose employment land and green space.
- Protects the most important parts of the Green Belt ensures that new boundaries can be safeguarded long term.
- Boosts supply of new and affordable homes with the supporting infrastructure such as schools especially on larger sites.

Limitations

- Limited loss of existing Green Belt land for new development after the next five years.
- Will not meet all housing needs and will mean reliance on working with neighbours to meet the shortfall.

Further work

- Additional work needs to be done to identify suitable sites, the number of homes that could be built as well as the infrastructure requirements.



Questions

Question 1: Should we adopt Option 1 and rely on urban intensification using high densities?

Yes
No

Question 2: Should we follow Option 2 and review our Green Belt boundaries in order to help meet our long-term housing needs?

Yes
No

Question 3: Are there any areas that should be added to the Green Belt?

Yes
No

If yes, where?

Question 4: Would you be willing to support Option 3 – using extensive areas of the Green Belt?

Yes
No

Question 5: Would you be willing to accommodate the housing needs of other areas outside the Borough?

Yes
No

Question 6: Would you support Option 4 – a balanced approach where much of our need is met within the urban area but some is allocated to land currently within the Green Belt?

Yes
No

Question 7: Where should higher density or taller buildings go?

Town centre by train stations everywhere nowhere other

Question 8: Do you have an alternative suggestion to significantly boost housing and meet our housing need?

Question 9: Would you like to promote any particular site or location for development?

Question 10: If you don't particularly like any of the four stated options, which one, in your opinion is the least bad?

Option 1 Option 2 Option 3 Option 4



Getting involved and next steps



How can you get involved?

We are asking you to consider some big and difficult issues on how we plan effectively for future growth and where new homes should be built. It is not simply a matter of 'yes' or 'no' to new homes but an opportunity to shape the future direction of the local plan and identify the matters that are most important to you.

For more information and to give your views go to www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/localplan and complete the E-form.

To keep up to date on progress with our Local Plan, register by emailing your details to: localplan@epsom-ewell.gov.uk.



Promoting land for development

Earlier this year land owners, agents, communities and other interested parties had the opportunity to promote sites for future housing and any other uses. We have already had some positive feedback.

If you have yet to put forward a site, we would encourage you to do so at this early stage so it can be fully considered. To discuss promoting a site, please contact us at: localplan@epsom-ewell.gov.uk.



How long is it going to take?

This issues and options consultation will run for 6 weeks. After that and informed by your views and the evidence gathered to date, further work is to be undertaken to produce detailed plans and proposals that will form the update to the local plan.

We will be undertaking further consultation during 2018 so this is only the beginning of a process of which you will hear more in due course before the more formal stages leading up to the final approval the new Local Plan in 2019.



Contacts us

If you have any questions you wish to ask before completing the questionnaire, please email us at: localplan@epsom-ewell.gov.uk. Officers are available to discuss matters face to face upon request. Alternatively you may wish to contact your local Ward Councillor- details of your Councillor can be found on our [website](#).

We are happy to provide information in other languages, large print, Braille or on audio tape. Please contact our Customer Services team on 01372 732000 if you would like this service.

