



Surrey Tories bouncing back already?

15 October 2024



The Conservative election turnaround in Surrey shows no sign of slowing after the party beat the Liberal Democrats, Labour and independents to take two more seats at the October 2024 by-elections.

Voters in Elmbridge backed the Tories in both seats contested on Thursday, October 10 – holding on to Weybridge and winning Hersham Village.

The polls were called following the death of former Conservative councillor and “community champion” Charu Sood, who died after a cancer battle in August, and the resignation of Chester Chandler.

The two victories build on other Tory wins in Surrey with the party winning in Waverley Borough Council following a huge 19 per cent swing and victory in Runnymede where they doubled Labour’s vote share.

The wins have left the Conservative group leader on Elmbridge Borough Council in buoyant mood and talking up the possibility of going into coalition with the residents groups to offer “a better approach”.

Councillor John Cope said: “We’re back, after a couple of difficult years it’s amazing to see the council group grow again.

“I think it was a combination of two factors.

“Firstly there was a very clear rejection on the door of what the Liberal Democrat council has done.

“The Hersham community has been treated really poorly.

“There’s been the closure of the community centres, still not fully reopen and there was a lot of concern around high rise buildings going up on the town centre – and the council not getting a local plan in place leaving us open to development.

“Secondly. there was a real anger at the new Labour government, winter fuel coming in, and talking down the economy, I think that was why we saw such a dramatic turnaround.”

Elections in Elmbridge take place every year, with the fourth year left free for the county council ballot.

The Conservatives had not won in Hersham since 2021. Cllr Cope put the reversal in fortune down to the popularity of their candidate whom he dubbed “Mr Hersham”.

In Weybridge, the party held on to narrowly hold the seat, in what was their first victory there since 2022.

The new council now comprises 21 Liberal Democrats, easily the largest party, 13 Residents Associations Group members, 11 Conservatives, two Hinchley Wood RAG and one independent.

It leaves the door open for a change of control at the top should the residents associations go into coalition with the Conservatives, something Cllr Cope said he would look to do.

Cllr Cope said: “We would welcome going into coalition with the residents associations and change the council for the better.

“I would be more than happy to talk to the residents’ associations to see if they would prefer a different approach.”

Weybridge St Georges Hill results in full

- Colin McFarlane: Conservative Party 608 votes, 46.0 per cent (Elected)
- Andrew Kelly: Weybridge and St George’s Independents 598 votes, 45.2 per cent
- Brittany Johansson, Green Party, 116 votes 8.8 per cent

Turnout 19.7 per cent

Hersham Village

- John O'Reilly. Conservative Party 1029 votes 55.4 per cent (Elected)
- Vasha Khodiyar, Liberal Democrats 736 votes 39.6 per cent
- Francis Eldergill. Labour Party 94 votes 5.1 per cent

Turnout 27.1 per cent

Newly elected Elmbridge Borough Councillor Colin McFarlane and John O'Reilly (image John Cope)

Fly-tippers force closure of Surrey recycling centre

15 October 2024





A Surrey recycling site will permanently close due to persistent fly-tipping at the site.

The Mound car park in Tattenham Corner has been repeatedly hit by high levels of dumped rubbish, despite CCTV cameras being installed at the site. Reigate and Banstead Borough Council has said.

The centre's final day will be October 17.

Councillor Hannah Avery, executive member for neighbourhood services said: "When fly-tipping at one of our recycling sites blights the local area and prevents us from recycling all the waste that we can, it is doing more harm than good."

"It reduces the environmental benefits, increases the financial costs of waste disposal and takes our Cleansing team away from other work to keep the borough clean."

"I want to thank the majority of residents who are recycling their waste responsibly and especially those that are going the extra mile to arrange local clean ups."

"I want it to be easy for Reigate and Banstead residents to recycle as much of their household waste as possible, but I also want them to be confident that their recycling gets recycled properly and has a positive environmental impact."

All collection bins with the exception of the clothes banks will be removed with the vacant space turned over for car parking.

According to the council, its recycling sites can be magnets for large amounts of non-recyclable fly-tipped rubbish - a quarter of all reported tips last year were at the Tattenham Corner site.

Overall the council says it clears 300 van-loads of dumped waste from The Mound each year.

A spokesperson for the council said that in an effort to stem the flow they used mobile CCTV and issued 16 fixed penalties for fly-tipping and a further 12 for littering at the site so far this year since, while in March new signs informed visitors that ongoing misuse could lead to the facility being closed without further notice.

It did not reduce the number of fly-tips - including from both commercial and trade waste.

The spokesperson added: "The council estimates around 70 per cent of the dumped waste is made up of items that cannot be recycled, which contaminates the recyclable waste that people are disposing of responsibly."

"As a result, the Tattenham Corner recycling site, which is on Royal Drive, will close permanently on Thursday, October 17."

"The Mound car park will close for one day on October 21 to allow for the creation of additional car parking spaces."

Image: Royal Drive Tattenham Corner Fly-tipping (RBBC)

Surrey Cop demoted for racist texts

15 October 2024



A Surrey Police sergeant who shared racist texts and a video of a man attempting to take his own life has been stripped of his rank - but will continue on active front line duties.

Daniel Hebborn admitted to sending a series of WhatsApp messages to friends in 2019 and 2020 which included a video which showed a man attempting to take his own life by jumping from a high rise building. The video showed the male with "devastating injuries" on the floor, a police misconduct panel heard.

During the two-day police misconduct hearing this September, the former sergeant accepted the messages were inappropriate, breached of the standards of authority, respect and courtesy. The panel said his behaviour had the "obvious potential to cause serious harm to the reputational standing of the Surrey Police and national policing in general and undermine public confidence".

The messages also included an image deemed an "inappropriate racist joke" showing a photo of an elderly black man with his arm around the shoulders of an elderly white man with the accompanying title 'is this a mugging?'. In a separate message, the officer was asked whether he "beat a guy like you did when you arrested him for littering" to which the officer responded "he was white".

He also shared an image of an empty articulated lorry trailer with the heading "Trailer for sale, serious offers only, sleeps 39 people", followed by "Guess my favourite restaurant will be short staffed again too".

Hebborn continued to serve as a sergeant with Surrey Police in the years between sending the racist messages and the conduct hearing.

The report read: "There was some concern that the 'banter' contained in the WhatsApp messages may have extended beyond the private group and into his position as a sergeant and role model to those in his team or station, based on comments made in his own submitted character references including; 'Dan's sense of humour is best described as pushing boundaries that are deliberately controversial but always intended as a joke'."

The panel determined that the multiple breaches of the Standards as admitted, amounted to gross misconduct and were arguably so serious as to justify dismissal. However Hebborn avoided being sacked and was instead given a final warning and reduced to the rank of constable.

The report reads: "A clear message had to be given that where an officer behaved in a way demonstrated by the conduct in this case, such conduct was not tolerated within the police service. There was a strong need to build and maintain public trust in the police."

The report added that action had to be taken in order to maintain public confidence and respect especially when it came to the police "tackling issues of racism within their forces."

Head of professional standards, Chief Superintendent Andy Rundle, said; "Surrey Police expects a high level of professionalism from our officers and staff and we will take action when these standards are not met."

"The hearing heard that former PS Dan Hebborn had admitted to the offensive and inappropriate messages and shown significant remorse for his actions. Due to their historic, non-work-related nature, as well as his previous record of service, on this occasion the panel has determined that reducing his rank to PC is an appropriate course of action."

"This decision carries a financial impact as well as potentially impacting any transfer request and future career development. Surrey Police is committed to being an anti-racist organisation, where all forms of discrimination are entirely unacceptable. We place immense value on serving and protecting all our communities with fairness and respect as well as ensuring those who work within our Force enjoy a sense of belonging and respect from their colleagues."

"Earlier this year, we shared our anti-racism statement across the organisation. Our expectation is that all officers, staff, and volunteers uphold the commitments outlined in this statement to challenge injustice and uphold anti-racist principles. We are developing training to deliver to officers and staff that will support the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to ensure respect for all in the service we deliver. In September, we began a series of training sessions that all leaders are required to attend which include a focus on race equality and guidance on how to ensure an inclusive team environment."

Surrey Police ethics print on wall at Mount Browne HQ. (Credit: Emily Dalton/LDRS)



Hampton's Jolly Boatman has more to be jolly about

15 October 2024



Hampton Court and its historic views will be forever changed after the secretary of state approved controversial Jolly Boatman plans to build 97 homes together with an 84 bed hotel and restaurant on the banks of the River Thames.

The landmark ruling on the long-running saga was confirmed this week when Lisa Nandy, Secretary of State for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport published her formal decision on Friday, September 27.

The decision comes as welcome for developers who have been battling to regenerate the area around Hampton Court station but is a slap in the face to the campaigners who have fought for decades to stop it.

It comes at the end of a nine week consultation that ran between April and June this year in call for new evidence.

The majority of responses focused on the impact the huge development would have on Hampton Court Palace and surrounding area given its cultural status.

However, much of the evidence presented had already been considered during an earlier planning appeal when inspectors overturned Elmbridge Borough Council decision 2022 and green lit the development, Mrs Nandy said.

Instead the focus on the government's decision related to changes in planning law and the listed statuses of Cigarette Island Park and the Coal Office - as well as arguments over maximum heights of buildings on railway land.

Issuing her decision, the Secretary of State for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport said she gave "consent to build the residential-led mixed use scheme on land around Hampton Court Station, specifically the former Jolly Boatman and land adjoining Hampton Court Station, Hampton Court Way, the Western part of Cigarette Island, east of Jolly Boatman and Hampton Court Station site."

She said that since the appeal, Elmbridge Borough Council's supply of deliverable housing had declined, and failure to proceed with the site would be make the problem worse.

The government also considered the council's local heritage listing of the land opposite the palace was not a sufficient reason to not approve the development and plans.

The former Jolly Boatman site is next to the River Thames and overlooks the palace.

Elmbridge Borough Council rejected the original application which received more than 1,800 objections due to "excessive height and bulk" and "harm to numerous heritage assets".

However, its decision was challenged and overturned after the planning inspector ruled it fit with surroundings while the hotel, retail units and riverside restaurant would improve the experience for those using the station to visit the palace.

The inspector added that the plans would also support the rest of the town.

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Dorking refurb: "it's behind you"!

15 October 2024



Dorking's "sleeping beauty" will wake up in time for the busy panto season - it has been confirmed.

Dorking Halls closed in June 2024 for refurbishment work that could cost up to £11 million - with the initial focus on replacing the 1930s plaster ceiling in its grand hall as well as much needed mechanical and electrical work.

Mole Valley District Council this week confirmed work was on schedule and Dorking's flagship theatre is on track to welcome the public through its doors from Monday, December 9.

Councillor Nick Wright, cabinet member for leisure and tourism said: "The pantomime is Sleeping Beauty and I like to think of Dorking Halls as a sleeping beauty that will wake up on December 9."

With the first stage of work set for completion, the council cabinet agreed on Tuesday, September 24, to release the remaining £6.1m needed to complete phase 2, set to take place next summer.

Cllr Margaret Cooksey (Liberal Democrats; Dorking South), said: "It's really exciting that we have a date.

"There is a program and everybody is going to be welcomed back into our favourite venue and it won't be how we have been used to it.

It will take some time to get the hang of it, but it's an exciting prospect."

In addition to the new ceiling, guests will notice enlarged toilet provision, a draft lobby and new fire alarms.

Next year's work will mostly consist of replacing electrical and mechanical installations that are near the end of their useful life.

The meeting heard that new seating, bigger bars and improved accessibility remained a pipe dream for the foreseeable future unless new revenue streams or grants are found.



Instead, the work has been to ensure Dorking Halls continues to meet health and safety standards, with improved visitor comfort and better energy efficiency "while meeting the changing technical requirements for future shows and events".

Cllr Wright added: "Dorking Halls is a tremendously important part of Mole Valley's community life.

"It not only serves as a key cultural and arts hub, but also provides opportunities for residents and visitors to gather and celebrate local, British and International talent.

"This beautiful art-deco building, which has served us for so many years, has reached a point where significant investment is needed to continue its community mission.

"I'm pleased that the proposed budget has been approved by Cabinet, and the important upgrades to the building can continue to move forward."

Shows that had been scheduled to be held at Dorking Halls were shifted to Leatherhead Theatre, the Green Room Theatre and Pippbrook House.

Dorking Halls (image Google)

Surrey Tory MPs against school fees VAT

15 October 2024



Special Educational Needs families should be exempt from Government plans put VAT on independent school fees, six Surrey MPs have said.

Claire Coutinho, Jeremy Hunt, Ben Spencer, Rebecca Paul, Greg Stafford and Lincoln Jopp argue in an open letter to the chancellor Rachel Reeves, that VAT on school fees misunderstands the sacrifices many families make to give their children a better life.

They said the 20 per cent increase would force parents to send their children to state schools and increase pressure on the system - applications from parents "transferring from independent schools" in Surrey jumped from 116 between November 2022 to August 2023, to 382 the following year when Labour's VAT plans on private schools gained traction.

The Conservative Surrey MPs said price rises disproportionately affect educational needs pupils as 93,000 children at special independent schools do not have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP).

If their parents are unable to afford the increases, they argue, children would have to attend schools less able to cater to their complex situations.

The Treasury argues that ending tax breaks on private schools will help recruit 6,500 new teachers while children in local authorities where their needs can only be met in private schools will not have the fees apply to them.

East Surrey MP, Claire Coutinho, said: "One in four children in Surrey attend an independent school.

"Their parents are saving the Government money by paying for their independent school, and paying for a state school place through their taxes.

"To penalise them for this and increase pressure in the state system is wrong.

"As a former minister for special educational needs, I am acutely aware about the impact that Labour's tax changes will have on children with special and complex needs.

"These families, who have often faced uphill battles to find a school that meets their child's needs, will now be taxed and many children who have settled in a school environment will be forced to move.

"Labour must reconsider this ideological policy and introduce an immediate exemption for SEND children."

The Government argues that it has carefully considered the impact ending VAT will have on pupils, families and schools across both the state and private sector.

Ending tax breaks on private schools, it said, would help raise revenue to change education..

The Government does not expect significant numbers to move to the state sector part way through the academic year, citing the stable number of children in independent schools since 2000 - despite a near 75 per cent "real terms increase" in average private school fees over that time.

Pupils in independent schools, funded by local authorities because their needs can only be met privately, will not have the fees apply to them as the council's will be able to reclaim the VAT.

A government spokesperson said: "We want to ensure all children have the best chance in life to succeed. Ending tax breaks on private schools will help to raise the revenue needed to fund our education priorities for next year, such as recruiting 6,500 new teachers."

"Fees for students with an Education, Health and Care Plan that states their needs cannot be met in the state sector will have their private school fees paid by the Local Authority that can then reclaim the VAT they pay."

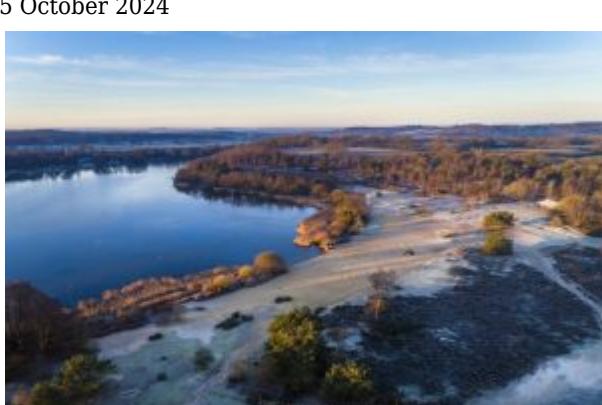
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Claire Coutinho MP for East Surrey

Surrey's outstanding beauty expanding?

15 October 2024





The Surrey Hills could be made significantly larger as Natural England considers expanding the borders of the county's "iconic and beautiful" landscape.

Each year millions of people are drawn to Surrey's "views and beauty" as they search out rare habitats and ancient woodlands - not to mention locations from Hollywood hits - and now moves are afoot to protect even more of Surrey's cultural heritage.

A consultation has been launched on expanding the Surrey Hills, with up to 27 new areas brought under the label, that could result in the area of outstanding natural beauty being made up to 30 per cent larger.

That figure includes the potential 13 "minor areas" that could be removed from the protection afforded by the designation.

An area of outstanding natural beauty are protected by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to conserve and enhance natural beauty. Any planning proposals submitted in these areas must have regard for the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Surrey Hills.

Nature England area deputy director Allison Potts said: "If the proposed areas are added to the Surrey Hills National Landscape, this could bring many benefits including conserving and enhancing the natural and cultural heritage, as well as the views and beauty of the area.

"It will give improved access to nature for the benefit of people's health and wellbeing whilst boosting economic growth and local tourism and safeguard a nationally important landscape for future generations.

"All on the doorstep of London."

The Surrey Hills, described by Natural England as "an iconic and beautiful landscape encompassing rare habitats from acid and chalk grassland to extensive ancient woodland" is enjoyed by millions of residents and visitors.

It stretches across the county and includes the chalk slopes of the North Downs from Farnham at its furthermost western point to Oxted in the east. Its southern boundary stretches to the densely wooded Greensand Hills around Haslemere.

The consultation features an online survey as well as a series of roadshows to help Natural England consider whether to approve a draft designation order to include new land within the national landscape.

It is the first time the Surrey Hills boundary has been reviewed since its original designation in 1958 and comes after a number of borough and district councils began designating areas bordering the Surrey Hills as Areas of Great Landscape Value in recognition of their value at a county level.

Natural England, after a formal request by the Surrey Hills National Landscape Board, will now consider whether these and others should be included within the designation.

If successful it would still require approval from the secretary of state for environment, food and rural affairs.

In 2023, more than 1,500 individuals and organisations responded to the survey to express their views on the future of the Surrey Hills.

Of those, an overwhelming majority supported the extensions, Natural England said.

Ms Potts added: "If the proposed areas are added to the Surrey Hills National Landscape, this could bring many benefits including conserving and enhancing the natural and cultural heritage, as well as the views and beauty of the area.

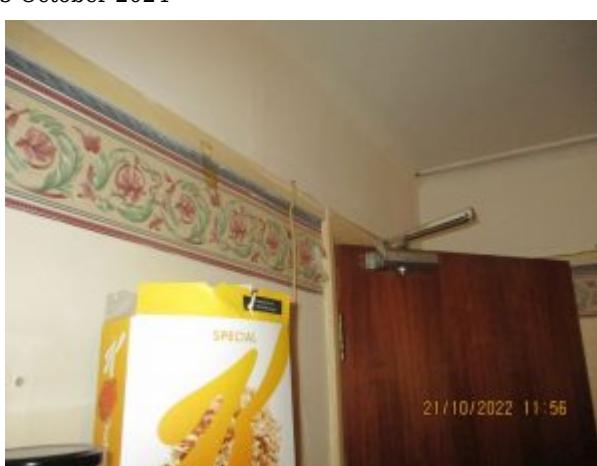
"It will give improved access to nature for the benefit of people's health and wellbeing whilst boosting economic growth and local tourism and safeguard a nationally important landscape for future generations. All on the doorstep of London."

Areas under consideration include Wey Valley Hogs Back Cranleigh Waters, Hatchlands and East Clandon as well as Headley Hill Limpsfield, Betchworth Hills and Mole Valley

Image: Surrey Hills National Landscape, Frensham Ponds (Image Natural England/ LYDIA2)

Epsom landlord fined for neglect

15 October 2024



A bedsit landlord who repeatedly ignored warnings to fix flats dubbed "cold", "damp", "filthy", and a "firetrap" has been hit with a court bill approaching £32,000.

Epsom Pars Limited, which runs a 21-room house in multiple occupation (HMO) near Epsom Downs was ordered to pay the fines and costs by Staines Magistrates' Court after they pleaded guilty to 48 criminal charges.

The case was brought forward by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council after the landlord repeatedly ignored warnings to carry out improvement works to the property.

Councillor Rich Michalowski, executive member for place, planning and regulatory services said: "This case underscores the importance of landlords being held accountable to ensure tenants are living in safe, well-maintained homes.

"Reigate and Banstead enforcement teams, armed with legal powers, will continue to take action against those who fail to meet the legal standards, ensuring that unsafe and unfit housing has no place in our borough."

The company was ordered to pay fines, costs, and a victim surcharge totalling £31,840. The charges included various forms of disrepair and fire safety offences, the council said.

The prosecution comes on the back of months of exchanges between the landlord and the council.

During that time officers from the private sector housing team were said to have repeatedly warned the landlord against its continued non-compliance that left people living in "cold", "damp", "filthy" "firetrap" of a property.

During sentencing, magistrates spoke of the "repeated, unacceptable non-compliance" and noted that the problems identified had put tenants at risk, according to a council statement.

Image RBBC

Would members of Epsom's H band stump up?

15 October 2024



People living in homes in the top council band will be asked to help the community after plans to ask Band H homeowners to voluntarily pay into a council-run charity were approved. **Waverley Borough Council's** executive committee launched the drive in the hope of encouraging people to support community projects.

Though a "voluntary tax" is a contradiction in terms, is it a good idea for Epsom and Ewell Borough Council? Plenty of H band properties in the Borough and plenty of urgent causes for the Council to support locally? Let us know your views. Epsom and Ewell Times.

The Voluntary Council Tax Initiative is based on a similar scheme running in Westminster Council which brings in an additional £300,000 each year to the London borough. Council's have to provide certain services by law but community projects such as leisure centres, parks, mobility buses and homeless schemes are considered to fall outside that bracket and are under increased pressure from budget cutbacks.

Waverley Borough Council hopes the new voluntary scheme will help save deeply important resident services and will now ask Band H rate payers first, if they back the idea, and second, for input into which community groups to support. The money, the council made clear, is not for potholes or street lighting.

Councillor **Tony Fairclough**, deputy leader of the council, said that Westminster talked about support for the homeless and that any money Waverley raised would likely follow suit. He added: "The first and most important thing is that this will be a voluntary scheme and indeed that is one of the key points of the consultation.

"It will invite residents of Band H properties to make a voluntary contribution to local projects or the provision of local services. We will consult with the residents of those Band H properties to ascertain whether they are minded to support this scheme and assuming that they are, which type of projects or services should be supported by the revenues generated from it.

"This is a concept that has proved to be very successful in Westminster and in many ways, in my opinion, it actually addresses a slight flaw in government policy, namely that council tax bands are probably a bit too limited. Going out and speaking to Band H homeowners, this is an ideal opportunity for us to, on a voluntary basis, secure revenue for the sort of projects that this council is minded to do."

The smallest homes, those in Band A, pay about £1,500 a year in council tax, while those in the very largest homes (Band H) pay between £4,500 to £4,900. The criteria was set in 1991 and has not been updated since, leading to some to criticise the system as being regressive in nature. Councillors during the meeting on Wednesday, September 3 suggested the voluntary contribution could help redress any imbalance.

Westminster has used the money to fund youth services, tackling rough sleeping and helping those who were lonely and isolated, Cllr **Liz Townsend**, portfolio holder for planning said. She added: "We're all hearing about the black hole in Government, the £22billion black hole, so we are fairly pessimistic about the amount of money that local government perhaps will attract from central government. So we do have to be innovative in the ways we raise additional funds for discretionary services."

Cllr **Kika Mirylees** said: "People must realise that if they are putting this money in, it's not going to go to potholes and things like that. It will go to the benefit of the community. It's not going to be there for your trees or hedges to be trimmed. It's really there to benefit people who are in need of support and it's much more to do with homelessness, because it would be nice for the people to have a home who don't have one."

Image: Jacob Jordaens - Rich man giving to the poor.

Surrey police to move to Epsom and Ewell constituency

15 October 2024



Surrey Police purchased the featured premises in Cleeve Road, Leatherhead, in 2019 for over £20 million. The address is just over 5 miles from Epsom High Street and is in the recently expanded Epsom and Ewell Constituency. Will the intended move reported below improve policing in our area?

Surrey Police's plan to move 400 officers from Reigate to Leatherhead has triggered calls for guarantees on response times and street presence from the area's MP.

People must not be made to suffer longer police response times or fewer officers on the streets over the police's decision to permanently move its eastern headquarters from Reigate to Leatherhead, the East Surrey MP has said.

Surrey Police vacated Reigate Police Station last year and shared offices with Surrey Fire and Rescue after dangerous aerated concrete, known as RAAC - which can collapse without warning - was found throughout the base.

It has now taken the decision to permanently move out of the borough with up to 400 officers and staff moving across - although a long-term site within Reigate and Banstead for its Safer Neighbourhood Team is still being sought.

It says the move demonstrates the force's commitment to retaining an operational base in the heart east Surrey and will allow it to maintain a visible presence in the communities it serves, fight crime and protect people.

East Surrey MP Claire Coutinho has written to the force demanding assurances it can deliver on those promises.



She said: "While the RAAC issue at Reigate Police Station must be resolved, residents in the east of the county will want assurances that a move to Leatherhead will not cause longer response times or less police presence on the streets.

"I have written to Surrey Police to get these assurances for residents and I will be discussing what this means for our area when I meet local officers in the coming weeks."

Surrey Police had to leave Reigate Police Station permanently after RAAC was found throughout the building, and in October 2023 it moved staff into Wray Park, Reigate, on a temporary basis with Surrey Fire and Rescue.

From there it began its search for a long-term solution including the demolition and rebuild of Reigate Police Station.

Surrey Police said the decision to refurbish its Leatherhead site, bought in 2018, was "based on operational requirements, partnerships with other public services, best value for the residents of Surrey, and long-term viability for the Force itself."

The former Electrical Research Association and Cobham Industries site in Leatherhead was bought when Surrey Police had planned to sell off its Mount Browne headquarters in Guilford and relocate its main HQ across the county.

Instead the force decided to close its central Guildford police station, refurbish Mount Browne, and offload the Leatherhead industrial site but the enforced closure of Reigate Police Station has meant a rethink about its East Surrey division and the new plan hatched.

This recommendation was approved on August 6 at the Estates Strategy Board.

Tim De Meyer, Surrey Police's chief constable, said, "The desired move to Leatherhead shows our commitment to retain an operational base in the heart of the East of Surrey where we can maintain a visible policing presence in the communities we serve, to fight crime and protect people.

"This is an opportunity to build a new divisional headquarters which will be operationally fit for purpose and serve the east of our county for many years to come."

Surrey's Police and Crime Commissioner, Lisa Townsend, said, "This is exciting news and if we get planning approval gives us a unique opportunity to build a bespoke divisional HQ that is fit for purpose for our hard-working police teams on the east of the county.

"The situation with RAAC at Reigate Police Station has presented us with some difficult and unexpected challenges and I would like to pay tribute to all those officers, staff and volunteers for their patience and understanding over the last year.

"I am well aware of the importance Surrey residents place on local policing, and I want to reassure people living in Reigate and Banstead that the neighbourhood presence in their communities will not be affected by these plans.

"There have been some tough choices to make but I believe that Leatherhead presents us with the best option in providing both value for money for Surrey residents and an eastern HQ that is fit for a modern police force."

Councillor Paul Kennedy, Mole Valley District Council's cabinet member for internal services and security, said: "While any proposals remain subject to planning permission, this potentially signals yet another boost to the town, alongside the progress of our Transform Leatherhead initiative.

With the addition of an HQ and around 400 members of staff comes the promise of a boost in footfall into the town centre and a positive impact on the local economy."

Surrey Police said it is still committed to having a presence in every borough and district and that there will be a minimum of one front counter facility in each.

They added that, while locations will be reviewed, there will be no reductions than we currently provided, and no reduction in service.

Image: Premises bought by Surrey Police in 2019 for £20,485,000. Google street view.