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Leatherhead residents call for more policing

25 April 2024

A serious assault that left a man fighting for his life has left a community in shock – with some saying there aren't enough police officers and others calling for greater CCTV provision.

On Sunday night (April 21) a man was attacked near a Leatherhead nursery by up to four teenagers.

Surrey Police has said an 18-year-old man and a 17-year-old boy have been arrested on suspicion of attempted murder with enquiries ongoing to identify and locate two other people.

Surrey Police say they do not anticipate a wider risk to the public at this time.

The violent attack, in Cleeve Road, comes on the eve of the May 2 Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner elections. with people able to cast their vote on how crime is tackled and to make sure the police provide a good service.

The Local Democracy Service visited the town to get people's views on whether they felt safe, and if they planned to vote in the upcoming ballot.

If the 2021 election is a fair guide then the candidates have their work cut out to get their message to the public with the winning candidate getting 155,116 total votes, out of a Surrey population of 1.19 million,

As a percentage that figure is low but overall it makes them the individual with the highest single vote total in the county, more than any MP.

Leatherhead is one of the main towns in Mole Valley and lies near the M25. This good connectivity has brought its own issues, particularly transient crime.

One shopper in the town felt the area was no different to anywhere else, saying: "It's the same as in most towns. You get young kids. There was a robbery the other day at Leatherhead Station which is worrying, especially if you get a train on your own."

She added that she wasn't aware that elections for the Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner were due to take place on May 2.

After the Cleeve Road attack, residents took to social media calling for better CCTV, an issue that has taken greater prominence after it emerged that 77 public-space cameras in Mole Valley were left unmonitored when Reigate Police Station closed due to dangerous RAAC.

Jen Royal said she wouldn't be voting in the elections as she was unaware of who was running or what they stood for, but was not happy with the direction of travel the force was going.

She said: "Policing on the whole….People call them out and it doesn't matter if it's small crimes or big crimes and they don't appear to get a lot of response."

One shopper who has lived in Leatherhead for 50 years was more aware of the four candidates standing for the position.

She told the LDRS: "It's not safe to go out in the evening. That's why I take a stick".

She says the area has changed a lot in that time with many of the smaller shops disappearing, adding "it's like a ghost town…you never see any police officers.

"We used to see them walking down the road and quite a few cars going by, but now nothing. It's a shame. There should be more police on the streets."

Asked if she had heard of the upcoming elections, she said she already voted before suddenly opening her bag saying "thank you for reminding me, I need to post it, I'm carrying it here in my bag."

The Sunday assault happened at night in the north of the town and the victim was taken to hospital and is in serious condition.

According to the most recent published data there were 41 crimes reported in February in Leatherhead, including 11 instances of violence and sexual offences, eight for anti-social behaviour and six for public disorder.

Olive Lee was on her way to the Fairfield Centre in Leatherhead, somewhere she sees as a real asset to the town and where she visits regularly. Some of the people the LDRS spoke with wished north Leatherhead had similar facilities for younger people.

Olive said: "Some of my friends in the centre are worried about going out in the evening but I like Leatherhead as a place.

"I moved in with my daughter about six or seven years ago, I had retired to Cornwall, or so I thought, and I am quite happy here as a place. But I don't go out in the evening."

She said she was undecided about voting though as the polling station was too far from home, though she admitted it was an important election.

Olive added: "I think it makes a difference, who is running the police, but I don't know too much about the candidates."

The Police and Crime Commissioner is responsible for holding the Chief Constable and Surrey Police to account – on the public's behalf. They are also tasked with overseeing how crime is tackled and ensuring Surrey Police provides a good service.

All British, Irish or EU citizens, as well as qualifying Commonwealth citizens with permission to enter or stay in the UK, can vote so long as they are over 18 and registered in Surrey can vote, unless legally excluded.

The general feeling in the town is one where it feels safe, particularly compared with London, but Leatherhead is not without its issues.

A woman said: "It feels safe in the town and you don't hear about too many of these things bar a few very serious incidents and they are very few and far between.

"I don't know about the Police and Crime Commissioner elections but I will vote, I just need to find out (about the candidates and what they stand for).

"Another worry is always anti-social behaviour but I don't see it. If you come in in the evening it's fine."

The vote takes place across Surrey with the count taking place the following day with the result expected to be announced between 3pm and 4pm.

Related reports:

Surrey's next Police and Crime Commissioner will be?

Epsom and Ewell candidates dominate Police Commissioner election

Jen Royal Leatherhead (Image Chris Caulfield)

Not in Epsom and Ewell but other Surrey elections test the water...

25 April 2024

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The fate of 116 council seats in Surrey are up for grabs as voters head to the polls on Thursday, May 2. There are 11 boroughs and districts in the county, with widespread voting taking place in six – Elmbridge, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead, Runnymede, Tandridge and Woking. There is also a bye-election for a single seat on Waverley Borough Council.

There are no local council elections this year in Epsom & Ewell, Guildford, Spelthorne, and Surrey Heath Borough Councils.

With a general election less than a year away, this vote will be viewed in some quarters as a significant bellwether for the race for Downing Street. Counting will begin on Friday May 3.

The first results area expected to come out of Woking Borough Council at 4pm, followed by Runnymede and Tandridge at 5pm. Mole Valley and Reigate and Banstead councils are predicted to declare by 6pm with Elmbridge tellers expected to be wrapped up by 6.30pm.

Do I need photo id? Yes -you need to bring valid photo identification in order to vote this year. Valid IDs include expired official documents such as passports that still have a strong resemblance. Voters without an accepted ID can apply for the free Voter Authority Certificate – a fast track card that will allow people to vote.

Elmbridge Borough Council

Number of seats up for election: 16
Election result expected: 6.30pm Friday, May 3.
Largest party: Liberal Democrats

There are 48 seats in total on Elmbridge Borough Council with 16, one third of the total, up for grabs on May 2. The Liberal Democrats have 20 councillors, Residents' Associations, 16, and the Conservatives, 12. The Liberal Democrats became the largest party in the borough, overtaking their coalition partners – Residents' Association – last year in a borough that has been historically Conservative.

The Esher and Walton parliamentary constituency largely covers Elmbridge and is represented by Dominic Raab, who resigned from the cabinet on April 21. He later announced he would quit as MP at the next general election.

Mole Valley District Council

Number of seats up for election: 14
Election result expected: 6pm Friday, May 3.
Largest party: Liberal Democrats

A boundary review last year led to all out–elections across the borough, delivering a sweeping victory for the Liberal Democrats. This year, Mole Valley District Council reverts to electing its members by thirds across its 13 wards. In Capel, Leigh, Newdigate and Charlwood voters will be sending two representatives, bringing the total elected this year to 14 as they replace the seat formerly held by Lesley Bushnell, In total there are 39 councillors in the district.

The council is currently controlled by the Liberal Democrats who have 29 elected members. The opposition is formed from six informal independents and three Conservatives. At a national level the Conservative Mole Valley MP since 1997, Sir Paul Beresford, said he will not stand in the next general election.

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council

Number of seats up for election: 16
Election result expected: 6pm Friday, May 3.
Largest party: Conservative

The Conservatives, with 22 councillors, are the single largest party in Reigate and Banstead but do not have overall control of the borough council. In the 2023 election, the Tories lost seats to the Green Party, which now has 11 councillors and Labour, one. The rest of the authority is made up of five Residents' Association, three Lib Dems, two independents.

Voting takes place across in each of the borough's 15 wards with one person elected in each. The exception is in Tattenham Corner and Preston where, to fill a vacancy, two members will be elected.
Conservative MP for Reigate Crispin Blunt announced in 2022 that he would not run for re-election, having first won the seat in 1997.

In January Mr Blunt was re-bailed until April after his arrest on suspicion of rape and possession of controlled substances.

Runnymede Borough Council

Number of seats up for election: 15
Election result expected: 5pm Friday, May 3.
Largest party: Conservative

Runnymede Borough Council went to no overall control in 2023 but has had a Conservative leader ever since it's formation in 1974. Going into this May's election there are 18 Conservative councillors, six Runnymede Independent Residents Group, five independents, four Labour, four Liberal Democrats, two Green Party, and one Reform UK – after former Tory and current deputy mayor Robert Bromley crossed the floor.

Runnymede is one of the three Surrey councils, the others being Spelthorne and Woking, to rank in the top five nationally for local authorities with the largest average debt per resident.

The MP for the area – which also includes Weybridge in neighbouring Elmbridge, is Ben Spencer. He was elected in 2019 with 54.9 per cent of the vote, ahead of Labour candidate Robert King, 20.6 per cent.

Waverley Borough Council

Number of seats up for election: 1
Election result expected: Early Friday, May 3.
Largest party: Liberal Democrats

Waverley Borough Council has 50 councillors across 24 wards that are voted for in an "all out" elections where every seat is decided. This year however is the much smaller matter of the race for the vacant Witley and Milford Borough seat in a May 2 by-election. The last all out vote was in 2023 when the council remained in no overall control.

The Liberal Democrats are the largest party with 22 councillors and are in coalition with the Farnham Residents' 13 members, Labour's two officials and the single representative of the Green Party. There are 10 councillors on the Conservative opposition and a further two independent members.

The MP representing the greatest number of people who call Waverley Borough Council home is the chancellor Jeremy Hunt. The 57-year-old MP was first elected to the Southwest Surrey constituency in May 2005.

Woking Borough Council

Number of seats up for election: 11
Election result expected: 4pm, Friday, May 3.
Largest party: Liberal Democrats

Woking Borough Council votes in thirds -with one councillor elected in each of its 10 wards. A by-election to fill the vacancy in Hoe Valley to bring the total number of seats decided up to 11. Voters in Woking began to turn their backs on the Conservatives after its financial problems became clear. The borough had a Tory leader from 2007 up until 2022 when the Liberal Democrats took control. Going into the May 2024 local elections the Lib Dems hold 19 of the 30 potential

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seats on the council with the four Conservatives making up the official opposition group.

The rest of the council is made up of four independent members, two from Labour and one vacant seat.

MP Jonathan Lord, who assumed office in 2010, was given a vote of confidence by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to hold his seat in the next General Election.
Tandridge District Council

Number of seats up for election: 43
When is the election result expected: 5pm Friday, May 3.
Largest party: Residents' Alliance

Every seat on Tandridge District Council will be decided when voters go to the polls on May 2. This year there will be 43 councillors returned to 18 wards, up from the current number of 42 – after the Local Government Boundary Commission for England redrew the electoral map. Previously the council elected its members by thirds.

Currently Tandridge Distrcit Council is led by the Residents' Alliance, which holds 18 seats. The Liberal Democrats, 11, Conservative nine and Independent Group, four, comprise the rest of the council.

The nearest matching parliamentary constituency is East Surrey, currently held by the energy secretary Claire Coutinho after she was elected in 2019.

Just not cricket to replace Banstead pavilion?

25 April 2024

A long-standing cricket club's ambitious plans to construct a modern pavilion and expand its facilities have sparked a debate from people that live in the area, saying it would "ruin the village feel".

A centuries old sports club wants to modernise its facilities, in part due to the massive growth of the game among girls and women, although some warn its ambitious plans overstep the mark.

Banstead Cricket Club has applied to demolish its current clubhouse, which it says was only every designed to last 10 years but has stood for 60, and replace it with a new modern facility that conforms to "Sport England and the sports governing body standards".

It is also seeking to refurbish its pavilion to create a dedicated changing space for women and girls. While opponents to the plans aren't arguing against its need to modernise, and would like to see the 182-year-old cricket club get a new clubhouse – they say they are worries about the size and location of the plans. They feel the potential increase in social events at the site, could have a negative impact on people living near the ground.

The club, however, told the Local Democracy Reporting Service that they are "not trying to just suddenly become an events business" and that "the most important thing to stress is that Banstead Cricket Club is a cricket club". The application has already had 252 comments with the majority (151) backing the plans and 91 objecting.

Club chairperson Neil Bowman said: "We need something bigger and we need something that has more than one room. We need to have other areas where people can hang out, or have a team meeting. We didn't design it as a wedding venue, and we do appreciate the neighbours' concerns, there was a concern about creating an event venue, and all the additional traffic, noise.

"I can entirely understand people's concerns, but we are not trying to do that, we are trying to build a modern clubhouse." The club said that Sport England and the England and Wales Cricket Board have been consulted in terms of the most ideal sighting for the new building and it's the internal layout.

Its new location will allow people to take in matches from either of the club's two pitches. The club has also said it will re-lay its car park with an environmentally friendly solution. Project head Ian Rusbridge said: "We are not trying to just suddenly become an events business, that's not our game.

"We don't foresee (a surge in) event hire, there may be a little bit more during the summer – because at the moment we can't hire it out at all. The other thing to stress, is that the cricket club is run by volunteers, who have full time jobs, and lives and children. They haven't got the capacity to run a cricket club let alone an events business. " Adding to that, in terms of the design the architects we employed, their speciality is sport pavilions."

The club has a licence until 1am but says it is rarely used and that the events held usually stop serving alcohol at 11pm. It said it did not see this changing in the future. Among the objections however include the increase in traffic around the green belt area, noise that would come from an expanded pavilion, and the determination visual impact it would have.

One objector wrote that the scale of the two-storey building was "far too large" and would "ruin the village feel" of the site. He felt the current buildings were perfectly adequate and would support plans that improved and updated the facilities within the same space.

The Local Democracy Reporting Service spoke with another resident who has also written in to object. Robert Garbut lives off Park Road, near the club, and challenged the size of the plans, its impact on traffic and neighbourhood fears the site could become a late-night venue.

He said: "It's massive. It's a 350 per cent increase over two floors, on another field that had never been built on before. Earth-moving trucks that will have to move into the park – I'm sure people just don't realise what is happening. Having said all of that, the cricket club has been there for a hundred years, it's hugely successful, they need more changing rooms.

"We assumed they would knock down the old clubhouse and build an all-singing all-dancing version of that. They also own the practice field adjacent to that – that's where they want to build, you can understand that as it makes sense to build it on your own land rather than land owned by Reigate and Banstead Council.

"All of our objections are about the superscale of this social venue, nobody but nobody wants to be mean spirited. We want the club to be a great building not the ramshackle thing they're in now."

The planning application is still with Reigate and Banstead Borough Council's planning team. A date has yet to be set for when it will be determined.

Image – visualisation of new pavilion and current inset.

Surrey Councils holding unclaimed tax refunds

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Council	Value of refunds owed	Number of accounts owed
Epsom and Ewell Borough Council	Failed to share the requested data	
Elmbridge Borough Council	Failed to share the requested data	
Tandridge District Council	Failed to share the requested data	
Guildford Borough Council (rolling)	£323,769.96	1,095
Spelthorne Borough Council	£307,273.08	1,245
Mole Valley District Council	£249,459.01	802
Reigate & Banstead Borough Council	£218,883.91	765
Waverley Borough Council	£157,452.49	566
Woking Borough Council	£148,046.16	566
Surrey Heath Borough Council	£83,060.34	293
Runnymede Borough Council	£5,777.17	4

Councils in Surrey are holding nearly £1.5million in overpaid tax that can be claimed back. People who moved to a different borough after paying their tax are supposed to be sent a closing bill. If an account is in credit, overpayments are refunded.

When this is not possible, for example if the council does not have a resident's forwarding address, the overpaid cash can sit in a pot until a claim is made – or the residents return to the borough.

In Surrey, that figure is a combined £1,493,722.12 for eight of the 11 councils. As for the others (Elmbridge, Tandridge and **Epsom and Ewell**) their figures remain unclear.

The three most common reasons for overpayments are when someone moves out of their house and has already paid, changes to a property's tax band, or when residents forget to cancel standing orders when they move.

The two biggest stockpiles are held by Guildford and Spelthorne Borough Councils, and account for more than £600,000. This is according to data released under Freedom on Information to Money Saving Expert.

Tax not claimed back can be written off by a council – to balance the cost of bad debts – however Guildford Borough Council said it reinstates the money if a resident comes forward to claim the credit.

Guildford Borough Council told the Local Reporting Democracy Service it has refunded 12,793 people on both closed and open accounts with a total value of £4.4 million, since April 2021. It says nearly a third of these were refunded through MyGuildford online accounts.

A spokesperson for Guildford Borough Council said: "It's important that we are provided with a forwarding address so we can send closing bills or retrospective bill changes.

"If a refund is not claimed, the money will remain on the account until the resident claims it or becomes liable for council tax in our borough again." They added: "To be transparent, we roll over overpaid council tax every year. If other councils have already written off credits, their credit value will be reduced."

Guildford council added that they don't have a specific deadline for claiming overpaid council tax. But to avoid fraudulent claims, they ask residents to provide proof of the overpayment. The older the claim, the more proof is needed.

A spokesperson for Spelthorne Borough Council said: "Tax refunds occur for a number of reasons, for example if a resident has moved from the borough or they have paid a bill in advance and Spelthorne Borough Council proactively issues any council tax refunds which are due.

"Where accounts are in credits, statements are sent with refund application to the last known address, if we hold bank details refunds are refunded directly back to the bank account that they were paid from. Where accounts are constantly paying in credit, copy bills are sent to prompt a response from the payer to claim the overpayment back.

"Residents can keep track of their council tax bill by registering for the self-service customer portal online or call the team on 01784 451499."

Elmbridge Borough Council, which did not respond to the FOI, said it refunds overpaid council tax if a resident's account is in credit and does not owe any other amounts of tax.

People who move within the borough will usually have credits from their previous address transferred across, while those leaving the area can arrange a refund.

[Nationwide the London Borough of Newham holds the highest of £9,539,750 and Surrey's Runnymede fourth lowest of £5,777.]

Contact your local authority for specific advice on claiming it back, as this is likely to differ.

Floods with silver linings for Guildford's housing targets?

25 April 2024

Guildford has been given the "biggest opportunity" to transform itself in a century. The Environment Agency is looking into an expanded flood prevention scheme that would save homes and businesses from rising waters – and open up previously unusable town-centre land for new housing. Supporters say the upshot of this is huge.

Councils have to identify land for housing in order to meet Government set targets, but Guildford Borough Council had to recently disregard 50 sites because they were subject to flooding – 30 of which were in the town centre, the Local Democracy Reporting Service was told.

If the expanded flood alleviation scheme goes ahead it would instantly increase the amount of land in the town and in a swoop take pressure off green belt villages.

Former councillor John Rigg said that the town has been waiting affected by floods for almost 100 years and that it would only get worse if nothing was done. He said: "The Environment Agency's planning period anticipates a 72 per cent increase in rainfall in the Guildford area. Not steady rain, big downpours."

He said the problem was compounded as towns upstream – for example in Waverley – pressed on with their own developments.

Mr Rigg said: "When the Government said Guildford had to deliver 10,000 homes, they had to all go in the green belt and the villages, because nobody got the flooding scheme underway and released the brownfield sites. When Guildford was looking at land for development as part of its local plan, there were 50 sites that had to be disregarded because they were subject to flooding, 30 of them in the town centre."

Among those are the Millmead and Millbrook car parks.

He said: "We have got to get the flood alleviation plan adopted. The EA has said there is £7bn allocated to areas that deliver economics and social benefits. This ticks all the boxes. It's an important town, it's a county town and it needs homes and businesses. The previous scheme was a minimum, just to stop a couple of streets flooding, but this does it properly, it frees up brownfield sites. It's the biggest opportunity for Guildford since about 1900. Last week, by the cinema it flooded, it was up to people's knees, as far as this town is concerned, they need to wake up."

Guildford has a long history of flooding from the River Wey, and the Environment Agency, working with the borough council and Surrey County Council, are looking to reduce the high level of flood risk to the town centre.

The project is still in its appraisal stage, but the EA has confirmed it is looking to create a larger protection zone than initial plans from 2018. It expects to take up to three years to finalise the scheme as it undertakes assessments, surveys and public engagement – the first of which takes place at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre on Thursday April 18, from 2pm to 7pm.

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Jon Mansbridge, Guildford Flood Alleviation Scheme project director at the Environment Agency, said: “The feedback we gather from communities during our engagement is really valuable in helping to inform the preferred option.” He added: “The flood defences will be visually integrated into existing and regenerated areas of the river corridor, reducing flood risk to even more of the town centre.”

Councillor Joss Bigmore, former co-leader of Guildford Borough Council said: “Finally the Environment Agency is supporting the council by backing a flood alleviation scheme. “We’ve been patient, nobody has the money to do these things, and its positive that we are at the top of the queue.

“Hopefully we can come up with a comprehensive solution and hopefully we can eradicate the risk of flooding for the centre of Guildford for the next century.” He added: “For existing residents it very important – and if there is a solution it will unlock a lot of regeneration opportunities on former flood risk areas.”

Flooding in Guildford Feb 2020 (image Environment Agency)

Big employment hub coming to Leatherhead

25 April 2024

The future of a possibly major employment hub in Leatherhead has been given a huge “vote of confidence”.

Four new buildings and 13 industrial warehouse units will be built in the north of the town after decision-makers backed plans to modernise part of the Cleeve Road Business Park Research Area.

Three “rather tired” buildings, Alpha, Beta, and Cetec, will be torn down to make way for modern facilities that meet the “expectations of employers and businesses today”.

The decision, backed unanimously at the Wednesday, April 3 meeting of Mole Valley’s Development Committee, had widespread support within the room given the area was already earmarked as a business park by the borough’s planners.

Councillor Keira Vyvyan-Robinson (LD, Leatherhead North) said: “I am broadly in favour of this.

“I think it is a sort of vote of confidence in the industrial unit there, and the site, and the future of it, which is a really good thing.

“I’m pleased to see investment being put into that area.”

Cllr Chris Hunt (Ind, Ashtead Lanes & Common) said: “I really think this application is good.

“I love the mix in the size of the units, I think that appeals to firms throughout.”

He said the noise, lighting and access were all positive and added: “ It’s the right site at the right time.”

Among the comments received during the planning process were concerns over the loss of existing pedestrian and cycle access.

Councillors did urge the developers Stefania Chancerygate (Leatherhead No. 1) Limited, to keep these throughways, particularly for those who work at the site as they would benefit from easy routes into town – but were told it was not a planning matter.

The meeting heard the site had good access to the M25 and that “strategically” this was where the council would direct this type of development “as it would boost employment and promote growth”.

The new plans include 112 parking bays, of which at least 50 per cent must have fast-charge sockets before any of the units are allowed to open for trading.

Cllr Phil Hammond (LD, Fetcham): “The employment land strategically for the district is really important and this is a big area but it’s got rather tired and it’s not really meeting the expectations of employers and businesses today.

“It needs upgrading, it’s important employment, we need that in north Leatherhead and we need that in the north of the district.”

Image: Leatherhead Business Park (Mole Valley Planning Portal)

Tree felling foul of the law

25 April 2024

The culprits who illegally chopped down more than 100 protected trees and damaged seven others have been fined nearly £20,000, Woking Borough Council said.

A landowner, together with its contractor were prosecuted and fined for the unauthorised felling of the trees near Upshot Lane, Pyrford, after pleading guilty at Guildford Magistrates’ Court.

Burhill Development Ltd admitted it ignored a tree preservation order on its land and was made to pay £15,140, comprising fines of £11,000, a victim surcharge of £2,000 and costs of £2,140.

Their contractor, P&A Services, which carried out the work, also pleaded guilty to the unauthorised felling and causing damage to the protected trees and was ordered to pay a total of £2,900; fines of £1,000; a victim surcharge of £400; and council costs of £1,500.

The action was taken against the two firms by Woking Borough Council. The original hearing took place in October 2023 with the judge issuing sentence in March 2024.

Speaking about the prosecution, Beverley Kuchar, Woking Borough Council’s strategic director for place, described it as an “important case” and welcomed the decision.

She said: “Whether you permit or cause wilful damage to our environment we will take legal action wherever necessary.

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“It is important that landowners and their contractors take the necessary steps to understand what consent is required before commencing tree works.

“The status of the borough’s trees can be checked quickly and simply online. If in doubt, our arboricultural team can provide advice in advance of any works commencing.

“There is no excuse and, as in this case, failure to do so can lead to a criminal prosecution and significant fines.”

Tree Preservation Orders protect specific trees, groups of trees, or woodland that benefit the wider community

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Was County HQ sold for a song?

25 April 2024

Surrey County Council faces scrutiny over its £25 million sale of a former headquarters site after it was revealed it could have a gross development value of £250 million once revedelopment is completed. The new owner of the former HQ has listed the site for sale with a gross development value of 10 times more than the council got when it sold the historic building in 2021.

The huge gap between the two figures led to the county council to be challenged on whether it got the best deal for residents although the lead member for property said it secured a “good deal” and would sell it again at the same price. The 5.2 acre site in Kingston is being marketed by Savills. It is described as a “landmark opportunity” with “stunning former County Hall buildings” and has planning permission for 254 private apartments, 16 shared ownership apartments, and 20 affordable rent apartments.

Rob Pollock, Savills director, London development, said in a statement promoting the sale: “With its scale and heritage, Surrey County Hall offers the opportunity to deliver a truly unique development in southwest London that might seem more at home in central London, and consequently appeal to buyers across the city. With world famous attractions like Hampton Court and Wimbledon Tennis Club in striking distance of the property, combined with the obvious curb-side appeal, we expect that the ultimate developer of the property will set new record for pricing in Kingston.”

The sale was discussed during the Tuesday March, 19 meeting of Surrey County Council. In March 2021 Surrey County Council sold the site for about £25m to RER Kingston Limited, according to officers although it was suggested the figure may have been “in excess” of that.

Councillor Robert Evans (Lab Stanwell and Stanwell Moor) asked: “When Surrey County Council was selling County Hall, its former Kingston headquarters, developers RER issued a release stating it had a guide price of £20m. This week Savills has issued a press release stating the site now has a Gross Development Value of £250m.

“Can the council tell us exactly how much it got for its former Grade 2 listed site, and whether it feels this was best value for residents seeing as it now has the potential to bring in hundreds of millions of pounds for its new owners?”

In a written response, he was told the council sold the site for £25million, on a subject to contract only basis, following “an extensive open marketing campaign for which best value was secured”. Since the sale, RER (Kingston) Ltd has been holding the 300,000 sq. ft site vacant, while pursuing a planning application through the Royal Borough of Kingston to convert much of the former complex into residential units.

The official council response read: “Costs would have been incurred for empty business rate liability, which would have been circa £700,000 per annum alongside security and other holding void costs. “Although planning consent is now expected, RER have placed the complex on the market through Savills.

“Whilst the agents suggest a potential value post development, it should be noted that when fully sold or let, this is not the value that a market bidder will pay for the asset today. A value bid would consider the cost, timing and risks of the development, the capital investment needed to complete any approved scheme (heritage build costs, consultant fees, ongoing security, void costs, finance costs at elevated rates since 2021) and the marketing period to sell or rent all units once converted.

“This could be a further three to five year project”. As part of the sale agreement the council negotiated a contractual position to secure any excess of value that might arise from any future development “if the quantum of development exceeded a certain level”.

When asked to elaborate on this, cabinet member for property, waste and infrastructure, Councillor Natalie Bramhall said the developers had spent £700,000 a year on empty rates, had to cover the cost of security, and that planning application costs would have been in excess of £1m.

She added that to get to the full £250m they would also need to spend ‘hundreds of millions” to bring it forward. She said: “Residual land value with planning persimmon is between £35m and £40m.

“Somebody is going to have to spend hundreds of millions of pounds bringing that forward and I would suggest that as the purchaser is trying to sell at this time in the market which is probably at the bottom they spent far more on this site then they probably expected already. I actually think we secured a good deal and would again sell at that price.”

Image – former SCC HQ County Hall in Kingston. Surrey Live

Cancer patient getting the right royal treatment

25 April 2024

The first cancer patient set to undergo a revolutionary new procedure that could cut treatment time to almost a quarter said it was a “ privilege” to be given the opportunity.

The **Royal Surrey NHS Foundation Trust** is taking part in a new clinical trial led by the **Royal Marsden** into prostate cancer. Currently, patients are treated with radiotherapy over a minimum of 20 treatments which lasts four weeks or more. Under this new process, that time could be reduced to one and a half weeks.

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Michael Robson, 78, is the first patient to be part of the trial in Royal Surrey. He was diagnosed in December 2023. He said: “One of my friends was diagnosed with prostate cancer and he said I should get a test so I had a blood test and I was called by my GP and sent for an appointment at urology. I was fortunate enough to meet Dr Philip Turner who gave me the options and went through everything. Everything has been explained to me in a way that is easy to understand and made the journey so much easier to deal with. All of the staff I couldn’t complement them highly enough. They have been fantastic.”

Michael was given options for treatment and was asked if he was interested in taking part in the clinical trial and he agreed straight away. He added: “It’s been fantastic here. I feel very privileged to be the first patient. The service has been first class from everybody concerned.”

Patients with low and intermediate risk disease who took part in a trial called PACE-B demonstrated that the process would work in the tighter time frames. This new study is to determine whether those considered high-risk would get the same benefits. The trial, called PACE-NODES, was opened at The Royal Marsden and was designed jointly by investigators from Queen’s University Belfast and The Institute of Cancer Research, London.

Dr Philip Turner, consultant clinical oncologist and principal investigator for the trial, said: “We are delighted to be opening the PACE NODES trial in Royal Surrey. This is part of our drive to give Surrey patients access to the very best oncology clinical trials from across the UK and indeed from across the world.

“The benefits with regard to timing are enormous – the standard of care for these men is a minimum of four weeks of daily visits which is very disruptive to life. The rates of side effects are low. Crucially, the five fraction treatment appears just as safe as conventional 20 fraction treatments which we have been using for years very safely.”

Chief executive Louise Stead said: “Royal Surrey has a long and proud tradition of being a premier centre of UK oncology research and we are determined, with the support of our patients and other partners, to ensure as many patients as possible have access to ground-breaking research close to home. If successful, this could make a huge difference to patients receiving treatment for prostate cancer.”

L-R: Radiographer Kate Maltby, Michael Robson, Dr Philip Turner

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Surrey Borough running ahead on bio-fuel

25 April 2024

The first Surrey council to switch its entire vehicle fleet from diesel to waste fats and cooking oil said the move could cut emissions by about 90 per cent. **Runnymede Borough Council** said the decision, unanimously approved by its environment and sustainability committee last week, will stop about 650 tonnes of C02 from being released into the air each year.

The shift to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) is expected to take place over the coming months as about 80 of the council’s refuse trucks, minibuses, vans, street sweepers and other vehicles make the switch.

It makes Runnymede Borough Council the first in Surrey to go all in on HVO with the change expected to make greater inroads into reducing the council’s operational carbon emissions than any other initiative explored to date.

Details on how much it will cost have been kept private and confidential but the day-to-day operating costs of moving over to HVO are expected to be higher than with diesel, the council confirmed, but said it had set aside an additional £100,000 to cover fuel costs.

A statement issued by the council said it demonstrated the desire “across all parties to make an effective and lasting positive impact on Runnymede’s climate and environment”.

Committee chair Councillor **David Coen**, said: “It is great to know that in the coming months our fleet, from our bin lorries to our road sweepers, will continue to provide the same high level of service whilst producing less harmful pollution into the environment and people’s lungs.

“We’ve committed that by 2030 all our council operations will be carbon net zero. Switching over to HVO has the potential of hugely reducing the council’s overall carbon emission.”

HVO can be used with the council’s existing fleet without the need for engine modifications or new machinery.

Cllr **Don Whyte**, leader of the Liberal Democrat group and member of the environment and sustainability committee added: “It’s a positive move. Runnymede is very late coming to the climate crisis declaration. This is a small step, but it’s an important thing.”

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