#### **Drills in the Hills lawful**

Oil drilling near the Surrey Hills can proceed after the Court of Appeal dismissed a legal challenge to stop fossil fuel extraction from Dunsfold.

Climate emergency campaigners are still hopeful that the fight is not over - despite running out of road as far as court challenges are concerned.

UK Oil and Gas (UKOG) originally applied for planning permission to sink exploratory wells into land next to the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 2020. The plans were refused by Surrey County Council but overturned by the Secretary of State the following year.

The legal labyrinth continued when a further appeal, launched by Waverley Borough Council and Protect Dunsfold, won the right to a Judicial Review in March 2023.

When this failed to overturn the decision, Protect Dunsfold applied for permission to appeal the findings. On Tuesday, January 9, a judge found they had no chance of the decision being changed and refused them the right to carry on appealing through the courts.

Oil firm UKOG hailed the decision as being "fully in keeping with the government's hydrogen, energy security and net zero strategies".

Its chief executive Stephen Sanderson said: "We are pleased that Lord Justice Stuart-Smith has once again dismissed the legal challenge to our Loxley project and has confirmed that its planning consent is entirely lawful, as the company and its counsel has maintained. We believe that a successful project will be beneficial to local and national level energy and economic interests and is fully in keeping with the government's Hydrogen, Energy Security and Net Zero strategies."

Law firm Leigh Day represented the campaign group. Their solicitor Ricardo Gama, said: "Protect Dunsfold are extremely disappointed by the Court of Appeal's decision not to allow their appeal to go ahead. Their appeal would have tested whether a government minister was right to grant planning permission for gas exploration in Dunsfold when on the very same day he refused planning permission for gas exploration in Ellesmere Port because of the amount of greenhouse gas that would be emitted

They say that that decision makes a mockery of the planning system because Ellesmere Port would involve less greenhouse gas emissions than Dunsfold.

Though defeated in court, if may not be the end of the battle as the some of the access land surrounding the site is owned by Waverley Borough Council and any moves to make it wider – in order to accommodate large vehicles needed to drill and transport oil could need council permission.

Waverley Borough Council has consistently expressed opposition to plans for oil and gas exploration at Loxley Well - which is home to Red Listed birds and other protected species.

The council has also said drilling at the site would have "disastrous consequences for the community, local wildlife and the wider landscape".

Councillor Steve Williams, Waverley Borough Council portfolio holder for environment and sustainability, said: "At every stage in the long and tortured history of this planning application, local people have demonstrated their overwhelming opposition to any exploration for hydrocarbons at Dunsfold. If drilling goes ahead there will be damaging impacts on the landscape, wildlife, local businesses and residents, while nothing to the local economy.

"More importantly, it simply kicks the can of the climate emergency further down the road. We are living through a time of unprecedented climate impacts and need an immediate shift in national policy away from fossil fuels. We are either serious about addressing global heating, or we're not."

Councillor Paul Follows, Leader of Waverley Borough Council, said: "Onshore extraction of fossil fuels is totally incompatible with the Climate Emergency declared by Waverley Borough Council, Surrey County Council, and our national government. The UK needs to rapidly increase our investment in renewables, where we are in danger of losing our position as genuine world leaders.

"We should focus on energy generation by cost effective and sustainable methods such as solar and offshore wind, and stop ripping up the Surrey Hills in pursuit of oil and gas. The judgement today is bad for local communities, bad for the local environment, very bad for the planet and sends a message to future generations that we simply don't care about them."

Image - illustration only

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## **Dorking Halls to get refit**

The "jewel in Mole Valley's crown" is set to shut over the summer as it undergoes a £3.24million safety refit. Dorking Halls has been recommended for the "minimal" amount of work needed to fix its most immediate problems. A decision on an £8m modernisation of the venue with improved seating, bars, toilets, and sound proofing will be taken next year.

Councillor Nick Wright, cabinet member for leisure and tourism, told overview and select committee at Mole Valley District Council: "The halls are a very important part of Mole Valley's cultural infrastructure, with over 114,000 tickets sold in 2023. They are used by residents from across the district and beyond.

"The halls are sorely in need of repair and refurbishment and the particular concern is over the state of the 90-year-old fibrous plaster ceiling in the great hall itself.

"This has to be dealt with urgently as a health-and-safety issue and it also costs us a lot in inspections and remedial patches. We absolutely have to avoid any chance of a forced unscheduled closure of the halls for safety reasons."

Initial studies into the work began in 2022 with three ideas put forward. The first is the minimal safety work, the second an enhanced program to upgrade stages, access and bar areas. The final, which was ultimately not considered, was an aspirational complete remodelling.

The halls would need to close in summer 2025 as well; if the council agrees to go ahead with the second phase of works. The primary focus of the first phase will be to make the ceiling safe. Critical ceiling failure has been identified as a risk. If no work is done, there is the potential that the fibrous plaster in the Grand Hall becomes so unstable that the halls are forced to close at short or no notice.

Any collapse, regardless of whether the public were in attendance, would likely lead to a fine. The report read: "The priority is to address the ceiling at the earliest opportunity, to avoid the risk of being forced to close the Grand Halls to the public at short or no notice, with the associated reputational damage, and financial consequences of cancelling events, refunding ticket sales, and compensating for loss of profit."

It has been about 30 years since the halls last underwent a large-scale refurbishment, when the building was extended and the current layout created.

The cinema was made digital in 2010 with other minor works also carried out. Cllr David Draper described the work as well deserved and necessary.

Officers told the meeting the site is compliant but that it "struggles to accommodate some shows" with adjustments and limitations enforced which often means performances are restricted, or not the full versions performed in other venues.

The meeting on Wednesday, January 3, heard: "We have to cut things to make it safe and workable so it's not presenting a danger, it's just a bit limiting and we're only just managing." Cllr Wright said: "Dorking Halls is the jewel in the crown of Mole Valley but its getting a bit tired, it needs a polish, and it needs to look much better than it does at the moment."

The plans were then signed off later that night during a brief, 30 minute long, extraordinary cabinet meeting.

## Homeless child will have his day in court

The High Court has granted a judicial review into Surrey County Council's decision not to house a "child in need". In 2019, a 17-year-old who was known to Surrey's social services team was on the verge of being made homeless.

Surrey County Council caseworkers, who the judge praised, said the teen required the highest level of intervention together with a co-ordinated multi-agency approach. These are reserved for cases where children are in serious need. However, when he applied for emergency accommodation, the council's housing team said they were forced into a "snap judgement" – something the judge dismissed.

Mr Justice Calver rejected the county council's claim that their decision was made against the clock and found they had a "duty to provide him with accommodation". The judge said he was "well known to Surrey County Council with his history of children's services involvement", and that the council had already made considerable enquiries about his needs and welfare.

He added it was "clearly the case that... suitable emergency accommodation...was required, whilst his full needs, including his need for continuing accommodation and support, were further assessed."

Following the county council's decision the teenager, now 22, began to "sofa surf" between friends and family until he eventually ended up homeless and living on the streets.

Justice Calver's judgement read: "Despite this, Surrey County Council inexplicably failed to provide (him) with any accommodation and indeed failed to take any steps to assess his case at all until September 18, 2019, being five days later, which is highly regrettable." He wrote: "It is plain in my judgement that as at September, 18, 2019 it was or ought to have been clear to Surrey County Council on the facts as known to them that he could not return home, and did not otherwise have stable, suitable accommodation. Instead it merely recommended a referral to its targeted youth support."

Justice Calver also said that, given the background of the young man's situation, and how well known he was to Surrey County Council it was "extraordinary that on October 28, 2019, Surrey County Council nonetheless closed his case."

The judge said that while there was "no doubt" he had a "caring and diligent social support worker" it was "clear that Surrey County Council as an organisation seriously failed" him. He said: "I do not accept the submission of Surrey County Council that no purpose would be served now in granting the relief sought by this claim," adding "the support he receives from his supported accommodation key worker is being stepped down over time, and is accommodation-based.

"He still requires but cannot access support to return to college, access vocational training, plan his future and manage his social anxiety, all practical challenges which he struggles with owing to the lasting effects of his childhood."

The judgement, handed-down on Friday December 15th granted the man permission to bring his claim forward for review.

A spokesperson for Surrey County Council said it does not comment on active court proceedings.

## Surrey social landlord downgraded by regulator

Problems with repairs, service charges, complaints, damp and mould, contributed to one of Surrey's largest social housing landlords being downgraded by regulators for failing its tenants.

The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) found that issues at A2Dominion had "crystalised over a breadth of areas" which "resulted in poor outcomes for its tenants".

The report, published on Wednesday January 3 said A2Dominion had been working to make improvements but had not yet been able to deliver the changes required. This led to poor quality data, poor reporting, and the board not having effective oversight.

Harold Brown, senior assistant director for investigations and enforcement at RSH, said: "We found significant issues with A2Dominion's data and its business planning, risk and control framework, leading to a failure by the provider to manage key risks effectively. A2Dominion is working with us to address these issues and we will continue to monitor the provider as it works to return to compliance."

The group owns and manages more than 38,000 homes across 79 local authority areas in London, the South East and Wiltshire. The majority of its housing stock is for general needs. It also has significant levels of shared ownership housing as well as supported or sheltered accommodation. A2Dominion, as a charitable housing association, must meet certain regulatory standards

over how it is run.

Its new board took over in September 2022 and referred itself to RSH following concerns over the quality of some services, as well as its financial position. A2Dominion was then under review for three months while it was investigated for potential noncompliance.

n a letter to stakeholders, CEO Ian Wardle said: "We know that outcomes for some customers have been poor. Earlier this year, we issued an apology to customers who had been adversely affected. While we have made some improvements, work is still underway to fully resolve issues with repairs, service charges, complaints, damp and mould, latent defects and the roles and responsibilities with managing agents. We also know that our services aren't as responsive as they could be. In some of these areas, we aren't always delivering the high standards we set ourselves and customers expect."

The regulator downgraded A2Dominion from G1, which means a provider meets governance requirements, to G3 where there are issues of serious regulatory concern which the provider is working to improve. It's financial position is unchanged. The new grading does not affect services and it will continue to deliver its day-to-day operations as normal.

Mr Wardle said: "Over the past few months, we've been in positive and constructive discussions with the regulator following our self-referrals. We've welcomed the opportunity to identify further steps that we can take to make improvements for our customers and the communities we serve. "The regulator has confirmed that it has assurance that we have an adequately funded business plan in the short term, sufficient security in place, and is forecast to continue to meet its financial covenants.

"Since I joined in September 2022, we've had a new chair of the board appointed, many new board members, and changes to our management team. All our colleagues are passionate about what we do. However, in far too many instances, colleagues haven't had the resources and processes to fully deliver outstanding customer service. It is my job to fix this, and we've made improvements throughout 2023, with more planned in 2024.

"At the same time historic decisions on development schemes, tougher trading conditions and rising costs have affected our finances, but we will weather the storm. We've already made a number of significant improvements in relation to customer complaints and have prioritised our commitment to social housing as the core of our business, including our exit from care services and fine tuning our development strategy so we can focus on getting things right first time for our customers. We also remain financially strong, with an A credit rating from Fitch, £3.6 billion of assets, and over £300 million of undrawn available facilities.

"I look forward to continuing to work closely with the regulator following their decision, and will collaborate on the steps we need to take to return to our previous rating."

Image: A2dominion Home

## Surrey braces for doctors' strike

Hospitals and health services across Surrey are bracing themselves for the longest "and most difficult" strike in NHS history. Junior doctors, who make up about half of the medical workforce, will walk out for six consecutive days starting Wednesday, January 3, after negotiations broke down following the Government's offer.

Health chiefs are warning people to expect significant disruption as urgent, emergency, trauma, maternity and critical care are prioritised during the work stoppages over routine and scheduled appointments.

It comes as hospital services are already stretched with the NHS experiencing one of its busiest periods.

In December, Royal Surrey County Hospital issued a plea to only attend in cases of life-threatening situations or serious injury after its accident and emergency department reported its busiest ever day.

Matt Jarratt, chief operating officer at Royal Surrey NHS Foundation Trust said: "Our junior doctors have our full support, whether they choose to participate in industrial action or not. But we know this strike action will put more pressure on frontline services and our staff, who are already working incredibly hard.

"We are again asking members of the public for their support in using services responsibly and appropriately, thereby helping us keep our emergency departments and 999 for those who need them most. We are also asking people to be patient, particularly if services are busier and waits are longer than usual or if outpatient or planned procedures need to be rearranged, as our frontline teams prioritise critical services and work hard to make sure people get the care they need."

The long-running dispute has meant hospital trusts have developed emergency plans to cover disruption but the timing has made

this walkout even more challenging.

Dr Charlotte Canniff, joint chief medical officer for Surrey Heartlands Health and Care Partnership and Surrey GP said: "We have well-rehearsed plans in place to manage these periods of disruption, working together across health and care organisations. However, due to the timing, and with this being the longest period of planned industrial action the NHS has ever seen - taking place over six consecutive days - we expect this to be the most difficult period of action yet.

"During the last period of strike action, just before Christmas, at its peak, on December 21 we saw 497 junior doctors from Surrey Heartlands taking part in planned action. With junior doctors making up around half of all doctors, a reduction of this scale has a significant impact on the services our frontline teams can continue to provide – so we do expect significant disruption to routine appointments and planned procedures as we prioritise urgent, emergency, trauma, maternity and critical care for those who need us most.:"

Dr Rob Laurenson and Dr Vivek Trivedi, are the co-chairs of the British Medical Association's junior doctors committee. In a joint statement, they said: "It's incredibly disappointing that we've had to call this strike – no doctor ever wants to have to take industrial action. Junior doctors face the brunt of the decade of underinvestment that has undermined the NHS frontline.

"The record-high waiting list and chronic lack of resource are pushing many talented doctors to the brink; as a profession we are exhausted, disenchanted, and questioning whether we want to stay in the health service at all. Add to this years of pay erosion, and it's no wonder that morale on the frontline has never been lower.

"Patient safety is our top priority at all times, including during strike action, which is why we not only give trusts adequate notice to arrange appropriate cover, but also have an established process with NHS England, which we have successfully used over the previous eight rounds of strike action, to constantly review staffing levels and act appropriately, including derogating staff back to work when absolutely necessary.

"Of course, these strikes don't have to happen. We've been clear that it is the government that cancelled talks and we would still at this late hour encourage Government to put forward a credible offer so that we can stop this strike and get back to doing what we really want to do - care for patients."

Junior doctors in England will be taking strike action from 7am on Wednesday January 3 until 7am on Tuesday January 9.

The NHS will prioritise urgent and emergency care as consultants cover for junior doctors, but has said people should continue using urgent medical services as normal.

For minor problems, general practices, community pharmacies, and dentists are not expected to be affected.

Dr Timothy Ho, chief medical officer, Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust, said: "These strikes come at a time that will cause huge disruption to the NHS, with services already feeling the strain of winter pressure. All health and care partners are working together, and we have drawn up contingency plans but we are concerned as this round of industrial action will see junior doctors on strike for six days.

"We are working closely with partners to ensure we prioritise urgent and emergency care for patients, but we do need the public to continue to support us and use the right health service to meet their needs.

"Routine appointments may be rescheduled. If you have not been contacted by the Trust, we would advise that you attend your appointment as planned, but please continue to check for updates."

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#### Underinvestment hits most vulnerable

The "most vulnerable" people in Woking will be made to find new homes after their extra care facility failed vital fire safety checks and was "all but condemned". Brockhill Extra Care Housing, in Clifton Way, has space for 48 apartments over two floors with a waiting list to get in.

In February this year **Surrey Fire and Rescue** conducted a review of the home prompting Woking Borough Council to introduce a Waking Watch – where trained people continually patrol a building and its perimeter to detect fires and raise alarms.

The facility changed its emergency procedures from Stay Put to Evacuate. The council also upgraded its fire detection systems. Many still can't evacuate the building fast enough, leaving the bankrupt council with the decision of spending £5.8 million on a complete refit, or closing the fire trap.

A meeting of its executive committee, on Thursday, December 14, concluded the home open was no longer viable, regardless of the council's finances, and residents, families and other stakeholders would be consulted over the closure of the Brockhill Extra Care Housing scheme. According to papers presented to councillors, the building appears to have had limited investment with only minor works carried – meaning it now requires "major capital works over the next two years and beyond".

Its' boiler failed a year ago causing "considerable inconvenience and discomfort to residents and staff" and is beyond repair.

Residents currently rely on a temporary heating but the entire system is "aged and in poor condition and requires upgrading and renewing. Since then, no new people have been allowed to move to the home, occupancy has dropped to 68 per cent and, where possible, the council has tried to moved residents to the ground floor to aid evacuation.

The anticipated total capital expenditure required on Brockhill over the next 10 years is forecast to be about £5.8 million, according to the report.

Deputy leader of the council, Cllr Will Forster, said: "The fire risk assessment has all but condemned that building. Particularly with the clients that we have in there. They are just so vulnerable, they have to leave the building so quickly in the event of a fire, because of the type of building it is. And that's just not humanly possible for them."

Any decision around Brockhill will have implications and put additional cost pressures on adult social care budgets with the council admitting that this will be difficult and upsetting for people living and working Brockhill, as well as the families of residents living there.

Leader of the Council, Cllr Ann-Marie Barker said: "Its obviously heartbreaking for me to see this.

"I know what a well loved and valued facility it is." She added: "But we have had a significant fire risk arising from a fire brigade assessment. We've known some of this work was needed we've been working in the last year we've done work on fire doors fire alarms, having a waking watching place to protect residents but the fire services have now determined that its just not safe for the most vulnerable and it's so urgent that those most vulnerable people do need to move as soon as possible."

Cllr Ellen Nicholson (LD, Mount Hermon) said: "The residents there are some of the most vulnerable in Woking and I find it incredibly sad that the chronic underprovision and the legacy of mismanagement has led to these fire risks and these safety risks for these incredibly vulnerable people."

Image Brockhill care home - Google

# Surrey Borough running up big debts

**Runnymede Borough Council** has been served formal notice over its "significant debt" and an over reliance on commercial income to support its services. The Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has written to the council after the borough borrowed 71 times its core spending power to fund an "investment strategy that produces a less than 1 per cent return".

DLUHC's Best Value Notice was issued after the Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy raised concerns in July. The council can still receive, and be awarded, government funding while under the 12 month notice.

Writing to the Runnymede Borough Council (RBC) was Suzanne Clarke, DLUHC's deputy director of finance. She said: "Ministers remain concerned as to Runnymede Borough Council's capacity to comply with its Best Value Duty under the Local Government

#### Act 1999."

Mrs Clarke added: "The authority has significant debt relative to its size, as of March 31, 2023, it had borrowing 71 times their core spending power, which has been used predominantly to invest in the authority's property portfolio. This level of debt poses the authority with capacity challenges, particularly in asset management, commercial and regeneration activity.

"Commercial income represents a substantial revenue source for RBC and is used to support both core and discretionary services, which exposes the authority to significant financial risks should anticipated income fail."

She said the borough has engaged constructively and openly with the accountants and indicated it was taking steps to address the concerns raised in the review.

Responding to the notice, Councillor Tom Gracey, Leader of Runnymede Borough Council said: "It is right that effective scrutiny must be in place around investment and spending decisions to ensure value for money. I am proud of the track record we have delivered in Runnymede in not only providing investment in our social housing, regeneration across communities, and funding services valued by our residents, but also in our sound risk and financial management."

Andrew Pritchard, chief executive of Runnymede Borough Council said the notice reflected the next step in their ongoing and positive dialogue with DLUHC and that most borrowing had been locked in while interest rates were at an historic low. He added: "This borrowing enabled us to fund a mix of commercial investment, improvements to our social housing stock, and complete the regeneration of Addlestone and Egham – all of which now benefits residents."

Councillor Don Whyte, group leader of the Liberal Democrats told the Local Democracy Reporting Service that the council had been waiting a considerable time for DLUHC's decision. He said: "The decision removes a degree of uncertainty and provides some clarity of what it needs to do. The areas that Runnymede are specifically charged with improving are justified, most notably decision making and scrutiny processes, and capacity and capability.

"An example of this is that the Conservative administration have always ensured that the chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is a Conservative, marking their own homework, and not one of the opposition which is deemed best practice in local government."

He added that the Government needed to "take a significant amount of responsibility for the position" local authorities are in "given that loans amounting to billions of pounds were provided by the Public Works Loans Board with minimal due diligence".

Cllr Robert King, Labour group leader, said: "Runnymede can not go on throwing good money after bad at underperforming investments".

He added that questions had been raised about "the investment strategy which produces a less than 1 per cent return" with only "partial plans" for "paying back the debts principle, not just the interest. Something which should have been reviewed long ago, and not just now or with a future peer review from the Local Government Association".

 $Image: Cllr\ Thomas\ Gracey\ (image\ Runnymede\ Borough\ Council)\ and\ Runnymede\ Borough\ Council\ (Grahame\ Larter)$ 

## Tory leader pleads with Tory Government

Taxpayers in Surrey are likely to be hit with a 5 per cent rate rise because the one-year Government funding package won't cover the county council's £13.5 million budget gap, its leader said.

**Surrey County Council** will need to make tough decisions on services as it tries to protect money for children, adults and roads, because they "matter most to residents".

In November the county council passed its draft budget which showed the huge gap between income and the cost of providing services. Leader of the Council, Councillor **Tim Oliver** had hoped to convince government officials of the need to increase funding to local authorities that suffered a decade of austerity. The Government's decision means the county council must now "see how it gets to a point where its budget is balanced".

Cllr Oliver, speaking at the Tuesday, December 19 executive committee, said: "It had been my hope and expectation that money would have come from the Government in the form of new money. That would have enabled us to have delivered the services that we want to deliver. The improved service."

He said the Government's offer of a 6.5 per cent increase would normally have been "very welcome" but that it had been an "unusual year". He told the meeting "I'm afraid for the foreseeable future things are going to be considerably more difficult than

they have been."

Much of that was due to the double-digit inflation figures, huge increases in demand for services, and wage growth which have seen council costs surge. He said: "We are now faced with the situation where we have the £13.5m gap and I'm afraid the consequence of that is we will no longer be able to restrict council tax increase by 3.99 per cent which was the proposal in our budget last month.

"We will now have to raise council tax by the maximum we are allowed to do which is 5 per cent, 3 per cent on the base and 2 per cent for social care precept. There needs to be recognition from this Government, and indeed any future Government, that the services we provide are the services that are the most in demand."

Council tax in Surrey is made up of three parts, the largest goes to the county council, with an additional amount paying for policing. About 12 per cent of the overall bill goes to the borough or district councils. If the county council were to raise its share by 4.99 per cent it, a Band D property would jump from £1,675.08 to £1,758.67.

That would mean residents in Woking, who are facing a potential 10 per cent increase in their local share would have to pay about £2,338.65 - before any increase from the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Cllr Oliver said there simply needed to be more money going into the system, adding: "We are talking about services for the most vulnerable in our communities. I would implore this government to recognise the issues we have raised. I would implore them to sit down with us and re-evaluate exactly what our needs are. These are issues that are outside of our control and we can not go on with this hand to mouth approach." Further investment, he said, simply won't be possible.

Related reports:

Surrey County chief talks to the BBC

County CEO's pay rise triggering strikes?

## Catalogue of errors - death inquest

A Woking family has spoken of their "incredibly difficult time" after losing their son saying "there is nothing that can take away the pain". Their comments came after an inquest concluded a catalogue of failures by Surrey County Council and other bodies contributed to the death of 18-year-old diabetic Jake Baker.

Jake, who also had learning disabilities, died on December 31, 2019, while visiting his family home.

It was the first time he had stayed away from his care facilities for more than two nights in a row, since being placed in the care of the Surrey County Council when eight years old, his family lawyers said.

The teenager arrived home on Christmas Eve, became unwell on December 28 and was found unresponsive on New Year's Eve by his mother and stepfather, neither of whom had been trained to recognise or seek medical advice for a deterioration in Jake's diabetes.

According to the family's lawyers, Coroner Carolyn Topping said Jake's death was avoidable and, if he had been admitted to hospital any time before 5pm on December 29, he would have been successfully treated.

They added that the coroner said there had been "a systemic failing on the part of Surrey County Council to adequately train and oversee personal advisers about their legal obligations in preparing pathway plans for children leaving care".

In a statement, the family said: "Losing Jake has been incredibly difficult for our family, especially as he died in our home at what should have been a happy time. We trusted Ruskin Mill Trust with Jake's care, and we have been let down by them in the worst possible way. Jake was an enthusiastic and determined young man who always put his mind to things. He was happy to help out in the garden or with DIY.

"He had a kind soul and would get very excited when meeting new people. He loved dogs and playing pranks on his brothers and sisters. Jake wanted to be more independent and was keen to learn but to anyone who met him it was clear that he needed help, particularly in handling his diabetes.

"Before Jake turned 18, he had a key worker that we trusted and who he had a great relationship with. We were able to spend time together as a family safely, knowing that Jake was well supported by the staff at Burbank children's home. This changed when Jake moved from Burbank to Ruskin Mill College. We were told it would be his road to independence and from this point on

we didn't have much contact with the people who were supposed to be supporting Jake. We were never made fully aware of how severely his diabetes could affect him, or how he should be managing it.

"As a family we did all we could to make sure that Jake was looking after himself and was well taken care of, but those that were put in charge of his care didn't give us the information necessary to ensure Jake's safety. There is nothing that can take away the pain of losing Jake, but it is our hope that lessons will be learned from his death so that another tragedy is prevented."

The cause of death was given as diabetic ketoacidosis.

Jake had been living at a residential college run by Ruskin Mill Trust in Stroud, for 15 months.

The trust is a charity that provides specialist education for young people with learning difficulties and special educational needs.

The coroner also said the trust failed to ensure Jake's safety when he went home for contact with his family. Following his death Transform Residential Limited, the body responsible for providing care services to Ruskin Mill Trust, was ordered to pay a total of £22,721.04 at Staines Magistrates' Court, after pleading guilty to causing a resident avoidable harm, the Care Quality Commission said.

Jake had been a resident at Glasshouse College since November 18 2019. Previously he lived at Ruskin Mill College, run by the same provider.

According to the family's lawyers, the coroner said Jake lacked the ability to be wholly independent in managing his diabetes and was not given any information about the dangers for him to have unsupported contact if his blood sugars became imbalanced.

They added that Ms Topping said those involved in making decisions for Jake, from the Surrey Care Leavers team and Children's Services, failed to ensure Jake's safety when he went home for overnight contact from March 2019 and that Ruskin Mill Trust failed to ensure Jake's safety.

Anna Moore, who represented Jake's family, said: "The coroner's detailed investigation and critical findings illustrate a catalogue of failings that led to Jake's death. Jake's family welcome these conclusions and hope that lessons will be learned from his death. What is particularly important is that those authorities entrusted to look after children and support them through their transition to adulthood are doing so properly.

"The evidence heard at the inquest showed that no one with current responsibility for Jake had a clear picture of needs and what support he required. Very worryingly, those at Surrey County Council who were meant to be supporting Jake into his transition to adulthood were not aware of the scope and extent of this important role. This needs to be urgently addressed so that children and young adults, and particularly people like Jake with additional needs, are given the support they need when they turn 18 and beyond."

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning at Surrey County Council, said: "Our deepest sympathies remain with Jake's family and friends at this difficult time. The services provided to Jake fell short of what he and his family needed to keep him safe, and we are very sorry for our part in that. We have taken a number of actions over the past four years to improve our support for young adults leaving care. While we have already made changes, we know there is still further to go and we will carefully consider the coroner's findings as we take our next steps."

Ruskin Mill Trust took over responsibility for residential care from Transform Residential Limited in August 2020. A spokesperson said: "Jake's death was heart-breaking and our thoughts remain with his family. He was well known to our staff and his loss came as a profound shock to everyone here. We deeply regret that in this instance some key measures that should have been in place for his visit home were overlooked. We aim to provide the highest standards of care.

"Since this tragedy occurred, the overnight risk assessment protocol has been fully reviewed and we have taken steps to strengthen practice, policies and procedures to ensure this kind of incident never happens again."

### Gatwick 2nd runway sneaking in?

Protesters against the expansion of Gatwick airport have said a new consultation on planning changes is an attempt to "sneak" a second runway through the back door.

Gatwick Airport is polling residents about changes it wants to its multi-billion pound expansion plans.

The operator wants to double capacity and create the equivalent of a second Heathrow Airport in the south east by creating a fully functioning two-runway airport capable of handling 75 million passengers a year and space for an extra 100,000 flights.

The bid is due to be examined by planning inspectors during a six-month hearing, expected to conclude in June 2024. These last minute tweaks by the airport will be submitted it says after the public has its say.

Critics however argue the changes are anything but minor and the timing of the changes could result in people who have already had taken part thinking they have played their role.

The Campaign Against Gatwick Noise Emissions (CAGNE) said: "These are not minor changes to the application for a new runway and Sussex Gatwick. CAGNE feel they should consult all who have already registered an interest with the Planning Inspectorate. This added consultation would appear to be a way for the airport to implement changes that could be sneaked through due to people believing that they have already passed judgement on the plans for a new runway.

"What is proposed could see a vast increase in lorry movements by replacing an incinerator with a waste sorting plant, not included in the Development Consent Order, traffic modelling or air quality, an incinerator that at the time of obtaining planning permission was meant to heat the north terminal.

"We do not accept that a reed bed will deal with the flooding issues that a new runway will create with significant increases in new construction field side and with a new highway and the ever-increasing heavier rainfall predictions by the Met office."

"CAGNE, the umbrella aviation community and environment group for Sussex, Surrey and Kent, has requested that they be permitted to be party to this consultation but as yet Sussex Gatwick management have not responded favourably."

The airport is proposing three separate changes.

The first is to increase the North Terminal International Departure Lounge southern extension; the second to reduce the height, and change the purpose, of the replacement Central Area Recycling Enclosure; and the third is to revise Surface Water Treatment Works.

It will be for the Planning Inspectorate to decide if the changes can be made to the application and included in the examination. The consultation will close at 11:59pm on January 21 2024.

Airport operators say expansion would create around 14,000 new jobs and inject £1 billion into the regional economy every year.

Tim Norwood, Chief Planning Officer, London Gatwick, said: "Our engagement with the public and stakeholders to date has been invaluable in helping us shape our Northern Runway plans. However, since the submission of our DCO application we have identified a number of small improvements we would like to make to our proposal. "We are therefore asking for views on three discrete changes to our plans and would welcome any feedback people may want to make."

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