## Cycle hub in Dorking development

A football academy, a 130-place children's nursery, and a cycling hub, have all been approved in Dorking as the Pixham Lane masterplan steps up a gear.

The site had been seen as an opportunity for a new Dorking Wanderers FC stadium but that was kicked into the long grass when it became clear the club's future was at Meadowbank.

Now, developers Stonegate Homes have been granted planning permission by Mole Valley councillors for three new community buildings as part of a grander vision for the site that could also feature a senior living home for about 200 people and 300 new homes.

The largest of the buildings approved last week is a 414 square metre nursery, which will be built over two floors, and have space for up to 130 children across four classrooms.

A new youth academy will be used by Dorking Wanderers Football Club and features classrooms for up to 40 students at any time.

The final building will become a cycling hub after the plans sailed through the Wednesday, September 6 meeting with only minor objections from councillors.

The council said it expected the hub to be a hit with cyclists as "a place to meet and relax, as well as a place to repair and purchase cycling equipment and accessories".

Speaking at the meeting was Councillor **Simon Budd** who questioned the need for a nursery after two had closed within the past year, suggesting a lack of demand and that "we would be much better building and SEN school rather than a nursery school".

The site is surrounded by Dorking railway station as well as a train line running north to London and south to Horsham.

The application site (measuring 0.68ha) lies to the south of Pixham Lane, just east of the A24 and north of Dorking; within the Built up Area. The site, which lies at the south-western corner of the overall 'AVIVA site', comprises car parking which served the former office use. The ground level is generally flat. The site is bounded to the south west by Dorking Railway Station and rail line running north to London and south to Horsham and beyond. To the south east is a public footpath whilst to the north is the remaining part of the Aviva campus. The site itself is in the Built-up Area; adjoining to the east is land designated Metropolitan Green Belt. It is broadly level throughout. Access to the site can be obtained from the eastern end of Lincoln Road.

Cllr **Rosemary Hobbs** said: "If anyone has visited this site and walked in from Lincoln Road, they'll know this is a particularly unpleasant looking, very messy looking, area of Dorking. It will greatly enhance the appearance of that part of the town and I think it is a good use of the land. The nursery will presumably get some business from the number of residents in the properties on the site."

Cllr **Chris Hunt** said: "The cycling hub, who can speak against that as a principle?"

The football academy, he said was also for sports, and a nursery would be used by new families moving into the area. He added – given the use of the site "I think its a good proposal".

**Mole Valley Borough Council** is currently preparing its new long-term planning bible, the Local Plan, which sets out the types and levels of permitted development in the area.

The council said it has been submitted to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and is currently under examination by an Inspector. The draft earmarks the site for 276 dwellings and at least three Gypsy and traveller pitches.

## Report against airport expansion

Airport expansion benefits a "small and wealthy subset of the British population" leaving the rest to deal with its environmental impact, according to a new report.

The paper, **Losing Altitude** the economics of air transport in Great Britain, was published just weeks before plans to double capacity at Gatwick were made public for the first time.

It argues that the "significant" environmental downsides that come with the growth in flight numbers is not matched by its economic benefit – and that data arguing otherwise is out-dated.

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However, while it says overall tourism in the UK is harmed by increased aviation, Surrey and the south east benefit.

**Gatwick Airport** says a second runway would bring an extra £1billion to the south east and that its "detailed economic analysis is robust and is based on UK-specific data".

It has submitted proposals to the Planning Inspector to add a permanent second runway to allow an extra 100,000 flights a year. A six-month enquiry is set to start later this year to determine the matter.

The report, by **New Economics Foundation**, read: "The Government continues to provide conditional support to air capacity growth on the, often tacit, basis that the economic upsides outweigh the negative impacts and future risks. "But, the economic assumptions that underpin this position favouring growth are dated and have not been reviewed for some years.

"Given the urgent and sizeable nature of the climate risk, it is imperative that the evidence, and relative balance, of the economic and environmental impacts of air transport growth are kept up to date and under constant review."

The last comprehensive Government review of the economic impacts of air travel was in 2012 and the industry has "changed dramatically" since then, the report argues.

Growth in business travellers has effectively ceased and new passengers are "exclusively from the leisure market" – in particular, "growth has been driven by wealthy British residents rather than foreign tourists or those on lower incomes". The pandemic, it says, accelerated the trend.

#### Welfare, jobs and wages, tourism.

It said the social benefits that access to international travel brings to UK residents can be vast but is "typically captured by a small and wealthy subset of the British population while, each year, around half of British residents do not fly at all. Furthermore, the welfare benefit must now be offset against welfare losses resulting from greater environmental damage; these are substantial".

On job creation, it said that aviation "supports a large number of British jobs, but the amount of employment created by growth has been diminishing over time" and has now become "one of the poorest job creators in the economy per pound of revenue" – due to automation and efficiency savings.

It also found productivity growth failed to translate into increased wages; after inflation.

On tourism it said there are now two decades of evidence showing air transport does not help the UK domestic tourism industry with cash instead flowing overseas.

The exception to this is in Surrey, London and the wider south east, where the majority of foreign tourists visit.

**Dr Alex Chapman**, senior researcher at the New Economics Foundation (NEF), said: "For years, this government has let the air travel industry balloon in size, based on dangerously outdated claims that it is boosting the UK's economy. The reality is declining business air travel, declining wages for air travel workers, declining job numbers, and declining domestic tourism spending in the UK.

"And that's before you consider the rise in noise, air pollution and dangerous emissions driven by UK airports. So who exactly is benefiting from ever more air travel? You needn't look much further than the highly paid executives, the private shareholders, and the wealthy minority of ultra-frequent flyers."

Cait Hewitt, policy director at the Aviation Environment Federation, said: "The question of whether or not airports should expand is often assumed to be about balancing environmental harms against economic benefits. This new analysis suggests we should think again; while flying definitely causes harm in terms of noise and emissions, it's uncertain if it actually brings any economic benefits.

"Obviously people benefit from going on holiday, but policies that support British tourism and leisure – rather than increasing travel abroad – would be good for the UK economy as well as the climate."

A London Gatwick spokesperson said: "We are aware of the... report and its claims, however our detailed economic analysis is robust and is based on UK-specific data. Our analysis shows that the Northern Runway plans would deliver 14,000 new UK-based jobs and inject £1 billion into the economy of the south east every year.

"Our plans would also benefit many communities across the south east by providing new economic and business opportunities as well as benefits for tourism and international trade.

"We recognise the climate emergency and the need for the whole aviation industry to act to reach net zero by 2050.

"To that end, we accelerated our plans to achieve net zero for airport emissions, Scope 1 and 2, by 2030 and will invest over £250

million so that we achieve this 10 years ahead of our previous target. The government is also committed to work with airlines to ensure they meet a trajectory of reducing carbon emissions to get to net zero, 2050, through measures including airspace modernisation; sustainable aviation fuel, electric, hydrogen and hybrid aircraft and setting carbon budgets for airlines."

Related Reports:

Gatwick expansion plans revealed

Gatwick to get 2nd runway?

Chance for Epsom and Ewell's say on Heathrow flights

## Gatwick expansion plans revealed

The first details of Gatwick's multi-billion pound expansion plans – to double capacity and create a second Heathrow Airport in the south east – have emerged.

Gatwick originally submitted its bid to create a fully functioning two-runway airport to the planning inspector in July, as it pushes to increase annual capacity to 78 million passengers.

The plans have now been released to the public ahead of an expected six-month hearing due to begin at the end of the year.

The airport's current annual capacity is 32.8million passengers. It wants to double that by building space for an extra 100,000 flights a year.

The project "would also include the development of supporting infrastructure and facilities to enable increased capacity at Gatwick airport to service 75 million passengers per year by 2038".

The plans include:

Repositioning northern runway so both can be used together Reconfigured taxiways
A new pier
Extensions to the north and south terminals
New hotel and office space
New car parks
Highways improvements

Opponents, including 10 neighbouring councils, and the **Communities Against Gatwick Noise Emissio**ns (CAGNE), said they were "disappointed" the application is moving forward as they had raised "significant concerns about Gatwick's approach towards engagement and consultation".

A spokesperson for CAGNE said: "Time and time again, airports that seek expansion and growth during the climate emergency use the same straplines to convince the government that it will be good for the country and that everything else can be mitigated. "Gatwick seems to have done the same."

They added: "The planet cannot afford this expansion. We are horrified that a government Planning Inspector would agree to a second runway when it impacts the wellbeing and house value of so many residents, as well as the planet."

The group said it was preparing a "strong legal team" to put forward a case against expansion. "The broken record keeps spinning as far as Gatwick's management are concerned. The Development Consent Order is a cheap way to significantly increase capacity, without having to pay for the infrastructure needed to support such vast growth", the spokesperson said.

Final sign off will be decided by the Secretary of State.

Tandridge District Council is a member of a consortium of 10 local councils in **Surrey**, Kent, East Sussex and West Sussex, which have come together to ensure their interests are represented.

A joint statement read: "We are disappointed that the Planning Inspectorate has this week decided to "accept" **Gatwick Airport Limited**'s development consent order application for dual runway operations through the routine use of the existing northern runway for its detailed consideration and examination.

"We had raised significant concerns about Gatwick's approach towards engagement and consultation with us and the wider local

community and felt that further, more meaningful consultation should have taken place before the application was submitted.

"Now the application has been accepted, we will engage with the Planning Inspectorate with the many outstanding issues that are unresolved and without agreement across a wide range of issues. We believe this challenging situation will require significant resources from the local authorities to present its case on the many and varied environmental and economic impacts arising from the development and the associated growth of the airport.

"It is hoped that engagement and provision of information by (Gatwick) will improve as we approach examination to give confidence to all parties about the impacts of the proposals and enable the Secretary of State to make a robust decision."

London Gatwick's chief planning officer **Tim Norwood**, said: "In coming weeks, the airport will let residents and other stakeholders know how they can register their interest in taking part in the examination stage of the planning process, so they can submit comments and feedback on our important proposals."

London Gatwick's DCO application is available on the Planning Inspectorate's website.

Those interested in finding out about CAGNE' fundraising can visit www.cagne.org.

Crawley Borough Council, East Sussex County Council, Horsham District Council, Kent County Council, Mid Sussex District Council, Mole Valley District Council, Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, Surrey County Council, Tandridge District Council, West Sussex County Council form the coalition of councils.

Related reports:

Gatwick to get 2nd runway?

# Surrey schools going solar

Schools across the county are having their outdated end-of-life gas boilers replaced with new solar heating systems to help combat "skyrocketing" energy prices.

The £6million project is split between time-sensitive Government cash coupled with **Surrey County Council's** "greener futures" fund which it says will be "effectively repaid' via £1.6m in overall savings from cheaper fuel bills – or through reduced energy tariffs to schools.

The work will be carried out over the summer and is scheduled to be completed before the start of the new school year. This is not only to minimise disruption but also because the Government contracts are time-bound, meaning if it is not used, the cash is lost.

**Surrey County Council**'s greener futures strategy says evidence that climate change is real is beyond doubt and its effects are already being felt.

It says an increase in man-made greenhouse gases will impact on the "health, wellbeing and finances of Surrey's residents, businesses, landscapes and biodiversity for many years to come" and as such, the county intends "to play its part by reducing its dependency on fossil fuels".

The Tuesday, July 25, environment meeting heard from lead councillor **Marisa Heath** who said one of the chosen schools told her they were "absolutely thrilled because they've got skyrocketing energy prices and can't even get the temperature right". She said: "They're really excited that we're working with them on this. It's a great program proposal. We need to move it on as we've been successful in getting government money."

The first set of schools to benefit from the new heating panels are: Beauclerc Infant School, in Sunbury, Kingswood Primary School, in Lower Kingswood, St Peters Centre, in Englefield Green, Worplesdon Primary School, in Worplesdon, and Park Mead Primary School, in Cranleigh.

Image - example of school with solar panels cc ZSM

# London Mayor confirms drive of ULEZ to Epsom border. ULEZ explainer.

**Sadiq Khan** confirmed today the Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) will cover almost all of Greater London, pushing it right up to the Surrey border.

The Mayor of London's decision was made within minutes of the High Court decision to rule against Surrey County Council and four London boroughs' joint bid to halt its controversial roll out.

The local authorities argued that the Labour mayor Sadiq Khan lacked the legal power to order the expansion. **Mr Justice Swift**, who heard the case, disagreed.

It means the new zone, where drivers of non-compliant vehicles will be charged £12.50 very time they cross the ULEZ border, comes up to Elmbridge, **Epsom and Ewell**, Reigate and Banstead, Spelthorne, and Tandridge.

#### How likely is it that ULEZ expansion will go ahead?

On July 28, Mr Justice Swift published his High Court ruling. He said the process to expand the ULEZ, including the public consultation, was thorough and the decision was completely legally sound.

The coalition of councils had been given leave to challenge the expansion on three grounds based on whether it was lawful for the mayor to extend ULEZ, the consultation process, and the scrappage scheme.

The Judge sided with the Mayor of London on all matters, prompting Sadiq Khan to say: "This landmark decision is good news as it means we can proceed with cleaning up the air in outer London on August 29.

"The decision to expand the ULEZ was very difficult and not something I took lightly and I continue to do everything possible to address any concerns Londoners may have. "The ULEZ has already reduced toxic nitrogen dioxide air pollution by nearly half in central London and a fifth in inner London. The coming expansion will see five million more Londoners being able to breathe cleaner air.

"I've been listening to Londoners throughout the ULEZ rollout, which is why from next week I am expanding the scrappage scheme to nearly a million families who receive child benefit and all small businesses with up to fifty employees. I will continue to look at new ideas to support Londoners.

"Nine out of 10 cars seen driving in outer London on an average day are already compliant so won't pay a penny – yet will still see the benefits of cleaner air. Air pollution is an urgent public health crisis – our children are growing up with stunted lungs and it is linked to a host of serious conditions, from heart disease to cancer and dementia.

"This unambiguous decision today in the High Court allows us to press on with the difficult but vital task of cleaning up London's air and tackling the climate crisis."

#### What does it mean for people in Surrey?

The extended zone will directly bring in a further 5 million people under ULEZ, this is in addition to the four million Londoners within the existing clean air zone.

According to the Mayor's office the decision to make ULEZ London-wide was "difficult and not something he takes lightly – and he continues to do everything possible to address concerns (people) may have.

Official figures say the "highly targeted scheme" will help take the the most polluting vehicles off the roads with estimates suggesting "nine out of ten cars seen driving regularly in outer London on an average day are already ULEZ compliant and will not pay a penny when the zone expands, while still benefiting from cleaner air".

Freedom of Information figures for people living within Surrey postcodes suggest there will be far more people impacted by the changes with as many as a quarter of a million cars potentially falling short of emission standards.

Meanwhile, the mayor's office estimates the £1million combined cost to councils for bringing the case would paid for more than 350,000 free school meals.

It could also impact the parents, teachers, and staff at more than 50 schools on the Surrey-London border from the next academic year.

Why does the Mayor and TfL want to expand ULEZ?

Air pollution is linked to asthma, cancer, heart disease and dementia among other conditions. Each year about 4,000 die in the capital prematurely due to causes linked to air pollution – this, the Mayor's office says – is even more prevalent in the outer boroughs.

At the same time every outer London borough exceeds the World Health Organisation's recommended guidelines for nitrogen dioxide and particulates. Since the introduction of ULEZ, the number of children admitted to hospital with asthma and other respiratory diseases has failed by 30 per cent in central London.

The RAC meanwhile has suggested other factors such as lockdowns, the cost of living crisis, fuel shortages, fuel prices, and the weather have all contributed to these reductions.

Others have suggested ULEZ is being used as a means of bridging TfL's £1.2bn funding gap.

#### Will I have to pay?

Vehicles that meet required Euro emissions standards do not have to pay. This means that the majority of petrol vehicles from January 2006 onwards and diesel vehicles from September 2015 will be exempt from the charge.

#### The standards are:

- Euro 3 for motorcycles, mopeds, motorised tricycles and quadricycles (L category)
- Euro 4 (NOx) for petrol cars, vans, minibuses and other specialist vehicles
- Euro 6 (NOx and PM) for diesel cars, vans and minibuses and other specialist vehicles

The majority of petrol vehicles that are less than 16 years old or diesel vehicles under six years old already meet standards.

People who are clinically assessed as too ill to travel to medical appointments on public transport may also be be eligible to claim back any ULEZ charge.

Not-for-profits that run community minibuses can register for exemptions until October 26, 2025. Grace periods also exist for people whose vehicles are registered with the DVLA as having 'disabled' or 'disabled passenger vehicle'.

#### **Scrappage**

The Mayor of London launched a £110m scrappage scheme to help people dispose of the highest polluting vehicles but this is currently only open to people living in London Boroughs.

#### What about if I decide to just not pay?

Transport for London will be using autonomic number plate recognition cameras to spot people entering the zones. People who fail to pay the £12.50 charge will be slapped with a fine of £160 – half if they pay it within 14 days.

#### Can I check if my vehicle is ULEZ compliant?

Transport for London has set up a website to allow people to check if their vehicles meet the emission and safety standards required to drive in London without having to pay a charge.

https://tfl.gov.uk/modes/driving/check-your-vehicle/?intcmp=52335

#### Related reports:

High Court gives ULEZ the green light to Epsom's borders

ULEZ court challenge begins

ULEZ driving old cars to Epsom market

Challenge to ULEZ gaining grounds

Many Surrey motorists will be paying the ULEZ charge.

**ULEZ** Court battle looming

## High Court gives ULEZ the green light to Epsom's

### **borders**

The controversial **ULEZ** scheme can now be expanded to the border of Surrey after a coalition of councils lost their High Court battle.

**Surrey County Council**, together with the outer London boroughs of Bexley, Bromley, Harrow and Hillingdon launched legal action in February over **Sadig Khan**'s proposals to extend ULEZ beyond the North and South Circular roads.

The local authorities' lawyers argued that the Labour mayor Sadiq Khan lacked the legal power to order the expansion.

**Craig Howell Williams** KC, for the councils, said there was an "unfair and unlawful" approach to collecting views on the plans and that "key information... was not disclosed" during previous consultation.

Today, July 28, the High Court ruled against them saying there was no legal impediment to the mayor's expansion.

Councillor **Tim Oliver**, leader of Surrey County Council said: "Whilst we respect today's court decision, it is incredibly disappointing. This has always been about protecting Surrey residents, many of whom will now be significantly socially and financially impacted by the Mayor's decision as they go about essential, everyday journeys, without any mitigation in place to minimise this.

"Our concerns, which have never been addressed by The Mayor despite our continued efforts, forced these legal proceedings to ensure we did all we possibly could to have the voice of our residents heard.

"We met with Transport for London on 14 July 2023 in the hope of agreeing mitigation for Surrey residents. Sadly, nothing was offered."

The councils said that, while the Mayor of London and Transport for London may now have the legal right to impose the scheme, questions remained over whether the public would agree that he had the moral right to do so – particularly in light of the Uxbridge by-election which they said was a "referendum on the expansion of ULEZ".

They argue that this shows a lack of realisation on the part of the Mayor of London and TfL over the "damage the extension will have to the lives of residents and businesses in outer London as well as those outside of its borders".

According to the the Mayor's office, air pollution causes thousands of Londoners to die prematurely each year and develop life-changing illnesses like cancer, lung disease, dementia and asthma.

Expanding the Ultra Low Emission Zone across all London boroughs will bring clean air to 5 million more people, it said.

The expansion of ULEZ is now expected to go ahead as planned on Tuesday August 29.

People driving non-compliant vehicles in the zone are expected to be charged £12.50 per day.

Related reports:

ULEZ court challenge begins

ULEZ driving old cars to Epsom market

Challenge to ULEZ gaining grounds

Many Surrey motorists will be paying the ULEZ charge.

**ULEZ** Court battle looming

## Sanity for the "mad mile"?

Lower speed limits along a notorious "high risk" danger road, dubbed the "mad mile", are to come into force from next year.

**Surrey County Council** has agreed to restrictions on the **A217 between Sutton and Banstead** in the new financial year after receiving a petition calling for greater safety measures.

The dual carriageway currently has a speed limit of 60mph which petition papers presented to the council said were "often abused" with cars even "racing" with "no heed to other road users".

This, it said, "led to severe accidents on that stretch, most of which could have been avoided if there was an imposed limit of 40 mph."

In March this year a woman died in hospital three weeks after a crash happened involving two cars along the A217. Both vehicles were travelling south from Belmont Rise roundabout towards the traffic lights at Fir Tree road.

Website crashmap shows the junctions at either end of the "mad mile" are particular hotspots.

The petition added: "There is no valid reason why this short stretch of road should allow a limit of 60 mph, when the rest of the A217 stretch has a limit of 40 mph."

**Ram Nandula** who led the efforts, addressed the Tuesday, July 25, cabinet meeting. He said: "We've seen how dangerous the road is because of the change over from 40 to 60 and then back to 40 as people git the road they start racing with each other on both lanes. It's a high risk road, and it's not safe for pedestrians or cyclists."

He added that the rest of the road was 40mph and changing this stretch would allow for "a smoother flow of traffic".

The meeting was chaired by cabinet member for highways and community resilience, Councillor **Kevin Deanus**. He said: "Yes we agree and we will do it. We've looked at the number of collisions, there are collisions at either end. Partially due to people approaching too fast. There are crossing points and a 60 mph dual carriageway is not a nice place for a pedestrian to cross the road."

He said that long term the council was minded to introduce a signalled crossing on the road and that speed data collected along the road backed up the need for tighter controls there.

The council understands the road "a history of collisions including some resulting in serious injury". As for time frames, Cllr Deanus said that highways money had been budgeted for so the new measures would be introduced and evaluated in the 2023/24 financial year.

According to the county council, its road safety engineering team has already allocated its central road safety budget on schemes across the county with a history of collisions.

The official response to the petition read: "Therefore, we would be able to tackle this stretch with our central budget to implement a lower 40 mph speed limit in the following financial year starting in April 2024.

"Once implemented we will undertake similar speed surveys to check on the success of the scheme and compliance with the new speed limit. This will inform on the need for any additional measures to manage speeds successfully on this stretch."

Mr Nandula said: "Thank you so much, I understand how important getting the budget is, and better late than never."

Related report:

Time for us all to slow down?

## Guildford Council to cut to the bone

The **Epsom and Ewell Times** has been reporting on the fate of Woking's and Guildford's Borough Councils. In contrast to Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, which recently proclaimed healthy solvency, Woking has been declared bankrupt and Guildford is close to bankruptcy. Valuable lessons are here for the role of our local Councillors, Council officers and the local media in reporting. Chris Caulfield reports:

Services will be cut back to the bone as **Guildford Borough Council** looks to carve out more than £18 million from its annual budget to avoid effective bankruptcy.

The level of cuts was agreed at the Thursday, July 25, full council meeting to address the authority's £300m debt. Councillor **Richard Lucas**, lead member for finance and property said, the borough would have to make "structural changes" and dispose of its assets if it wanted to get its house in order ahead of a revised November budget.

He told the meeting: "Our officers are trying to deal with the reality of the situation. We won't deal with this by pretending there is no problem. This is going to result in difficult decisions for the operational spending and capital disposal. This is not Section

114. We are taking action to avoid this. However, if we do nothing Section 114 comes into play which would pretty much make this council useless."

A Section 114 notice is when a council declares itself effectively bankrupt and can no longer run a balanced budget. It stops all but essential spending to ensure a council can continue to provide its legally obligated services to its most vulnerable residents.

The approved measures, however, are not too dissimilar after the council said that new spending would need the explicit agreement of its chief finance officer (CFO) until further notice, and that breaches would be "considered a disciplinary matter".

Recruitment and contract renewal has to be signed off by the corporate management board and the council's investment programme has been suspended immediately, save for existing contracts that need to be fulfilled.

This applies to all council services, including statutory ones. The only exemptions are the council-owned housing company North Downs Housing Ltd and the Housing Revenue Account.

These controls will remain until at least the 2023-24 financial year.

Cllr **Philip Brooker** (Con, Worplesden) said "we as a council must take immediate action to solve this" but called on it to be done in a way that minimises the impact on services. Cllr **Bob Hughes** (Con, Shere) said "it was doubtless services would go" and that people "would get hurt".

The authority will undergo radical change as it "reconfigures services so they can be managed within the financial resources available to the council".

Every service and budget, the bleak report read, would undergo a review to establish minimum viable service levels and options for savings and income growth.

The report read: "The council will no longer be able to afford to deliver the current range of services or maintain some services at existing levels and significant rationalisation of the current service offer will be required to live within a reduced financial envelope."

Services that protect the most vulnerable residents would be prioritised for protection with the remaining services transformed "to ensure they are as efficient and cost effective as possible".

The authority announced it had to impose a series of strict cuts to its budgets to cover an £18m deficit by the end of the financial year if it was to avoid effectively declaring itself bankrupt this autumn.

The deficit, council papers said, equates to 145 per cent of its net budget and "will fundamentally change the services the council delivers and will require political will and a step change in activity to reconfigure services accordingly".

Related reports:

Woking bankruptcy, far or near to us?

Guildford contemplates financial "Armageddon".

The knives are out in Woking

Woking's debt crisis explained

Council's financial reservations (report on Epsom and Ewell Borough Council)

# Surrey slips up on child's GCSEs

An autistic child missed her GCSEs due to the failings of **Surrey County Council**, a watchdog has found. The girl missed about 40 weeks of education, the local government and social care ombudsman said, with only limited provision – much of which was online – during this time.

The county council also failed to engage with medical professional involved with the girl, or provide any up-to-date notes to suggest what educational provision it considered suitable for the girl.

It led to the ombudsman to find fault with Surrey County Council for "failing to provide suitable alternative provision" and ordered the authority to apologise to the mother and child for the loss of education and support.

After the ombudsman investigated the mother's complaint, the council also agreed to pay £3,650 for the child's missed education and £2,823.50 to for the cost of the private tutors.

The council also agreed to fund the child's functional skills examinations to address her missed GCSEs.

In April 2021, the girl's doctor asked for her to be signed off from school because of her sensory and communication difficulties.

The following month the school referred her to Surrey County Council because of her low attendance - having been out of education for more than 15 days.

The girl's mother told the county council that her daughter had been signed off while doctors completed an Autism Spectrum Disorder assessment.

Work was being sent to the girl to complete but her mother expressed concerns over its suitability and had to search online to supplement this. That same month, her mother hired a private tutor for seven hours a week. By June ,she was attending half-days of school to see out the academic year. She began the new term after summer but stopped attending on September 13.

According to the ombudsman: "The law is clear that where a school does not make appropriate arrangements for a child who is missing education through illness or 'otherwise', the council must intervene and make such arrangements itself. The duty arises after a child has missed fifteen days of education either consecutively or cumulatively."

From September 13, 2021, to November 22, 2021, the child missed two further months of education during a key academic year, yet received no alternative provision during this time.

In total, during the period under review, the girl received the equivalent of 20 per cent of a full-time education.

The lasting impact of all this, the ombudsman found, was that the girl "failed to take any of her year 11 GCSE examinations and has left mainstream secondary education without qualifications. This will have a lasting impact on (her) future. (Her mother) has advised she wants (her daughter) to take functional skills examinations in maths and English."

Surrey County Council has agreed to fund these.

Councillor **Clare Curran**, cabinet member for education and learning apologised for the distress the family experienced. She said: "I am aware that the council has not always got things right and that the support and service that we give some children with additional needs and their families is not always of the standard that we would expect and I am sorry about that. We are working hard to improve our services.

"We are not able to comment on any individual children specifically, however we are constantly reviewing how we support young people who are unable to attend school, and are implementing our £180million capital programme to increase the availability of, and access to specialist provision. We also recognise the significant issues that confront the SEND system nationally.

"We have seen a 64 per cent increase in education, health and care needs assessment requests across Surrey since 2020, at a time of a national shortage of Educational Psychologists (EPs). We are doing our utmost to recruit more to meet this demand, and we are filling this gap as best we can, but we hope to see the shortage in trained EPs and other issues addressed soon through the government's improvement plan.

"We remain committed to improving our services and outcomes for children with additional needs so that they are happy, healthy, safe and confident about their future."

The girl is said to be due to enrol in her sixth-form college in September 2023, and will be able to take her GCSE examinations there.

Related reports:

Council pays £3,900 to mother of SEND child

Surrey County failed SEND boy

Surrey to SEND £40m for special schools

# RA and Green motion to improve Surrey's "Green"

#### 6th November 2025 weekly



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## motion

It could soon be possible to take a "pleasant walk or cycle" along a Surrey road without being "slapped" in the face by "brambles or nettles".

A motion calling on **Surrey County Council** to prioritise the maintenance of walking and cycling routes was passed with unanimous cross-party support – as long as the plans pass select committee.

Introducing the item at the Tuesday, July 11 full council meeting, was **Residents' Association** and Independents Group leader Councillor **Catherine Powell**. She said: "The travel choices people make will be driven by how convenient, safe, easy, and enjoyable the options are. These choices will also impact on the individuals carbon footprint, and their health and wellbeing."

Cllr Powell added: "We must make the most of the infrastructure we have already invested in, by proactively maintaining the surfaces, managing vegetation and prioritising the routes that people value most and use most. That will encourage others to use them too."

The motion, she said, would "ensure our residents are not put off from walking, cycling, scooting because of overgrown paths, poorly repaired surfaces or just the plain absence of a map that shows the cut-throughs through an estate".

The group hopes new and improved routes, in addition to the increased awareness from new maps – created with input from ramblers and cyclists – would reduce the dependence on driving as a default means of transport.

The motion was seconded by Cllr **Jonathan Essex**, leader of the **Green Party** group, who said it would ensure bus and cycle lanes, as well as pavements, were inspected more frequently.

He told the meeting it would "make it possible to do a pleasant walk or cycle without being slapped by brambles or nettles."

The motion will go to the council's highways select committee for approval following an amendment from Surrey County Council leader **Tim Oliver** who told the meeting decisions requiring policy and budget changes needed greater scrutiny and couldn't be made on the hoof- but he supported it in principle.

The motion says that increasing cycling and walking is a key objective of the Council, and forms part of Surrey's Community Vision for 2030 and Local Transport Plan.

All highways policies will be aligned with the council's transport vision but, the motion said, more still needs to be done to develop plans to encourage walking and cycling.

As such the council has agreed, subject to agreement from the select committee, to update transport plans to support a higher priority grading on routes for local walking and cycling journeys, – particularly in areas of high employment, schools, hospitals, and leisure facilities.

It will also ensure walking and cycling routes are not blocked by overgrown plants and that highways inspection, for things such as potholes, are extended to left-behind signs, debris on pavements and cycleways and blocked drains.

Image: Cycle paths beside Christchurch Road Epsom (Google image).