

Redhill developers make a towering mistake

24 January 2026



Two major landmark towers that would have dominated a Surrey town have been dismissed with campaigners claiming a major victory in their long-running battle. Developers Solum Regeneration had been hoping to build high-rises of 14 and 15 stories next to Redhill station, but were refused planning permission by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council in 2024. Undeterred, they dug in and challenged the decision through the courts forcing a long drawn-out process. Residents, however, galvanised to challenge the process.

Now, they are celebrating after the planning inspectorate threw out the bid to create Redhill's tallest buildings saying it would forever harm the town's character, blot out existing views of wooded hills outside Redhill, and create pedestrian safety risks. Redhill Residents Action Group (RRAG), formed to represent hundreds of residents and rail users.

The appeal, brought by Solum Development, a partnership between Network Rail and Keir, was opposed on planning grounds relating to design quality, impact on heritage and town character and the effect on access to a vital transport hub.

Jan Sharman, Campaign lead for RRAG said: "We have always believed this was the wrong development for such an important site. Redhill station should be embracing the future, with integrated rail, bus and active travel. "Developers need to think with vision and create places that genuinely work for communities."

Solum had insisted the development was needed for the town and would deliver 255 much needed housing to the area - particularly as the council is missing its targets. The scheme would have also revamped the railway station, and increased footfall to town centre.

The taxi rank would have been relocated to the back of the station, with most drivers and cyclists directed to the steep Redstone Hill entrance. Disability campaigners said this would shut those mobility issues out. The inspector however decided the sheer size of the scheme was just too much.

Jan added: "We fully recognise the need for more homes, particularly for younger people. But homes must be genuinely affordable, well designed and properly integrated into their surroundings. Building housing that people cannot afford, in the wrong place, helps no one."

The inquiry was held over September 2 to 5 and continued between November 24 to 28 last year. Planning inspector Joanna Gilbert issued her decision on January 19, 2026. She said: "The proposal would provide the benefit of 255 housing units that carries substantial weight. There would be other benefits to which I have afforded significant, moderate and limited weight. However, I have afforded very substantial weight to the adverse effects on the character and appearance of the area."

"There are moderate, limited and very limited levels of less than substantial harms to designated heritage assets and a moderate indirect adverse effect on a non-designated heritage asset. There would also be significant weight to the harm in respect of highway and pedestrian safety, including parking. Additionally, there would be moderate weight to the harm to living conditions for some occupiers of Quadrant House."

She added: "For the reasons set out above, the appeal is dismissed."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Redhill Train Station development 15-storey tower block distance CGI (Credit Solum planning documents)

Heathrow 3rd runway green-light by 2029?

24 January 2026



Heathrow Airport has begun working on its third runway planning application with the aim of getting the green light by 2029.

Last November, the Government indicated that the West London hub's plan, which involves re-routing and tunnelling the M25, would be the preferred basis for expansion.

A second, less disruptive, option that featured a smaller runway put forward by Arora was rejected.

Now, Heathrow has announced it will begin getting its blueprints in order - in what it has called a significant step forward for the UK's most important growth project.

The Government will still need to push through regulatory and policy decisions this year that will determine whether the £33billion 3,500m long runway project can proceed.

If built, it would increase the number of flights at Heathrow to 756,000 a year, with 150million people expected to use the airport. In 2024, the airport handled 83.9 million passengers while operating at 99 per cent of its annual flight capacity of 480,000.

Heathrow CEO Thomas Woldbye said: "Expansion is taking another significant step forward today as our board greenlights starting work on the planning application.

"This decision means we are on track to secure planning permission by 2029 and reflects Ministers' renewed commitment to expansion and progress made to speed up delivery of the project to boost UK economic growth.

"Heathrow expansion is a critical national project and a central part of our journey to make Heathrow an extraordinary airport, fit for the future. Maintaining momentum will mean the CAA and Ministers remain focussed on securing the benefits of the project by meeting vital milestones in 2026 that are essential to enabling the next phase of delivery."

Heathrow argues expansion would drive long-term economic growth and see billions invested into the UK while strengthening airline networks and enhancing the UK's global trading links.

Critics slam the plans for the devastating impact it would have on the environment and challenge the financial benefits saying they are both overstated - and with many of extra passengers being transit, the benefits would be felt elsewhere.

Others believe the airport is already too close to London and Surrey and the added noise would blight millions of lives.

The Government believes the project can be delivered while meeting national environmental targets.

The timetable for the complex project has the runway coming into operation by 2039.

Key dates to look out for before then include Spring 2026 when the Civil Aviation Authority is expected to provide clarity on early stage project costs.

In the summer the Department for Transport is scheduled to publish its draft Airports National Policy Statement.

In the autumn, Parliament will decide on the project's planning framework.

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3rd Runway Plans (image Heathrow)

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Surrey Police's AI powered face recognition cameras in the spotlight

24 January 2026



Surrey Police will continue to use AI-powered surveillance vans to scan thousands of people's faces in public locations despite fears over ethnic bias, said councillors calling for their use to be put on hold.

The Home Office is funding the use of new artificial intelligence powered cameras in Surrey to scan the faces of anybody who crosses their path.

On November 26 last year, the police brought the technology to Woking and recorded 7,686 people over a five-hour recording period - to cross reference them against known suspects.

The force has said the system was safe following a 2023 study that found previous bias in the system had been coded out - but more recent testing by the National Physical Laboratory suggests false positives are still happening too frequently among ethnic minorities.

The report read: "At the operational setting used by police, the testing identified that in a limited set of circumstances the algorithm is more likely to incorrectly include some demographic groups in its search results."

The Home Office has said will act on the findings and that a "new algorithm has been procured and independently tested, which can be used at settings with no significant demographic variation in performance.

The new algorithm is due to be operationally tested early next year and will be subject to evaluation."

It has led to calls from Woking Borough Councillors for the system to be mothballed until it has been thoroughly tested - something which Surrey Police has so far refused to do.

Speaking at a Tuesday, December 20, meeting of the borough's communities and housing scrutiny committee, Surrey Police Chief Inspector Andy Hill described the system as having the support of the Home Office and said it was a valuable tool "to keep Surrey safe."

He said: "It's a safe place but if we've got the opportunity to use the latest technology then we want to make sure that we are doing that." Early versions of the software created false alerts at a disproportionate rate among ethnic groups.

In London the Met Police is facing a High Court challenge after an anti-knife crime activist said he was misidentified and threatened with arrest. Surrey Police said it was confident in the system and that people are only arrested under suspicion, it does not mean guilt.

The technology is used in high footfall areas and is said to have a chilling effect on crime with notable falls in the following weeks after its deployment.

Any images that do not match those on its wanted list are instantly deleted. Matched faces are deleted at the end of the day. If the system thinks it has found a face on the police's wanted database officers at the scene are notified and it is up to them how to proceed.

Committee chair Cllr Tom Bonsundy-O'Bryan said: "I have very serious concerns about the proportionality of this. Are the pros, which feels pretty limited in one of the safest town centres in the UK, worth the cost of 7,000 free citizens having their faces scanned by this technology?"

"This doesn't feel like targeted policing, it doesn't feel like proportionate policing. It starts to feel like something more Orwellian in a kind of mass surveillance. With everything that you've said, all the facts about data not being stored, data not being used to train models

"It still feels like an overreach into people's privacy, people's rights fundamentally. Is there a point when it's not proportionate, how many faces should we scan? To me it already feels vastly disproportionate."

Chief Insp Hill said: "We are in the view that it is proportionate and it is appropriate and it is technology available to us. We don't feel like we are reaching into a technology space. The van is funded by the Home Office, it's why we want to continue using it but also keep it under review."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

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Ashtead Tennis Club gets set to expand

24 January 2026



Sport in Mole Valley is set to get a boost after plans for a new clubhouse, that will allow Ashtead Tennis Club to offer more to the community, was approved. The new larger facility will replace the existing block and will include accessible toilets, changing facilities and a larger social area.

The club plans to build its new Ashtead Recreation Ground headquarters with matching materials as its current block.

Officers at Mole Valley District Council's January 7 development committee said it would not harm the or overly impact the neighbourhood. The plans were widely praised as being good for Ashtead with the only real objections being three windows that faced a neighbouring property. The committee, however, heard these would be masked by fencing and trees

Councillor Chris Hunt: (Independent: Ashtead Lanes & Common) said: " The tennis club have obviously put an awful lot of work into this application. This is positive." He added: "Use of this new proposed clubhouse is an improvement to their current structure and most people will be looking towards the tennis courts rather than to the fence.

Cllr Phil Hammond (Liberal Democrat: Fetcham) said "Ashtead is a lovely place...so I'm sure the neighbours can resolve their issues. We give a lot of support to football, bowls, cricket and tennis clubs. We do a lot through our neighbourhood CIL. Updating their facilities is a challenge, getting accessible toilets and changing.

"The demographic of sports, the involvement of young people, women's sport; It's always changing and evolving and I think it's good that this council can support that. It's a good place, it's a busy place and I've seen what they do in terms of developing the sport but they also extend the sport with things like pickleball or easier forms of tennis. It's the sort of thing we need in our community."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Ashtead Tennis Club (image Google)

Mole Valley leaders look to their final year legacy

24 January 2026



We are entering the final full year for councils in Surrey before they are dissolved and merged into mega authorities - and the leaders know time is running out if they wish to fulfil any lasting ambitions. In October this year, the government announced that Surrey would change forever. From the ashes will rise two mega authorities that split the map effectively in two. People living in Waverley, Guildford, Woking, Surrey Heath, Spelthorne and Runnymede will soon be calling West Surrey home, while East Surrey will cover Epsom and Ewell, Elmbridge, Tandridge, Reigate and Banstead, and Mole Valley. West Surrey will be the larger of the two authorities, but will also have its share of financial challenges given the debt issues in Woking, Surrey Heath and Spelthorne.

Next year voters will go to the polls to elect their new representatives to sit in a shadow council before taking over in 2027. It means 2026 will be the last full year for councils to achieve any remaining goals. The Local Democracy Service asked council leaders what they hoped to achieve before this seismic shift in how services are delivered in Surrey.

Councillor Bridget Kendrick, leader of Mole Valley District Council, said: "I can't believe how quickly the past year has gone and how much we've achieved in line with our vision for a fairer, greener Mole Valley that provides opportunities for all." She said highlights included delivering their best-ever programme of holiday activities for over 1,500 children, signing a Poverty Pledge that recognises and builds on their support for vulnerable people across Mole Valley, and progressing the development of much-needed small business units and housing on the Foundry site in the centre of Dorking. Other milestones included submitting a planning application for the regeneration of the Swan Centre and Bull Hill. The leader also singled out the council's action on homelessness, which she said prevented 233 households from becoming homeless, delivered 36 emergency housing units and 72 new affordable homes.

She added: "It's with a sense of nostalgia that I recognise next year's annual plan as the final one from Mole Valley District Council as we know it. From April 2027, the new East Surrey authority will take over, but until then we'll continue

delivering for our residents and have a very busy schedule ahead. Our plans to refurbish playgrounds in Ashted, Bookham, Dorking and Leatherhead are progressing, with a destination playground planned for Riverside Park. We also have a very ambitious action plan for increasing biodiversity in Mole Valley, including rewilding, planting additional species and introducing additional ponds. The second phase of works for Dorking Halls is scheduled for this spring to ensure the venue is accessible and ready to welcome future visitors. Pippbrook House, our Grade II listed building, is growing in strength as a cultural hub with a packed list of events planned for the coming months and unique rooms available for community hire.

“We’re also pleased to confirm that funding has been obtained to continue the work of our incredible MV Employment Hub, delivering job advice and support to hundreds of residents. We’re planning another successful year of summer holiday activities, and our bursary scheme financially supporting children to access sports clubs’ membership is open for applications. Mole Valley Life team continues to support the most vulnerable in the district, providing lifeline alarms and support services via our Fairfield Community Centre. On a more practical side, parking improvements are planned for next year and we’re procuring a new waste contract to commence from June 2027 too. As we head into what I know will be a busy and productive final year for Mole Valley District Council, I’d like to take this moment to wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and a peaceful New Year.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Image: New Mole Valley District Council cabinet ,including leader Cllr Bridget Kendrick (front left) and deputy leader Cllr Claire Malcomson (image MVDV)

East Surrey gets new Police Station

24 January 2026



Surrey Police’s near two-year hunt for a replacement to its shut, dangerous, crumbly concrete riddled Reigate station is over - with people only needing to walk travel miles to the new one. The new base for the Reigate and Banstead area will give the force a permanent presence and front counter for the public, the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) said after securing a building at Perrywood Business Park in Honeycrook Lane in Salfords. It comes after the 2023 closure of its Reigate Station that left officers and staff stationed in Mole Valley and Caterham Police Station.

Commissioner Lisa Townsend hailed the purchase as great for policing presence in East Surrey and follows what she described as an extensive search in the Reigate and Banstead area. The new building was considered to be the only suitable site in the area and will be funded by selling Reigate Police Station. This station will run alongside the force’s new eastern division headquarters in Leatherhead, which was granted planning permission earlier this year. The PCC and senior officers wanted to find a secondary site in the Reigate and Banstead area specifically for a police station and front counter service for residents.

Surrey Police maintain a counter service during office hours in the Town Hall, The Parade. Epsom.

The Perrywood Business Park keeps the trend of police sites in industrial sites and will be just a three minute drive from the Surrey Custody Centre in Salbrook Road. Lisa Townsend said: “I know how much residents value their local policing presence so this is really fantastic news for our communities in the area. The discovery of RAAC and subsequent closure of Reigate Police Station has meant it has been a disruptive time for our hard-working teams in East Surrey. I want to pay tribute to their continued patience, professionalism and resilience in challenging circumstances. The search for a site in the Reigate and Banstead area has been extensive and Perrywood was the only building which met our needs so I am delighted that we have been able to secure the purchase. I believe that together with the progress being made on our new Eastern Division HQ in Leatherhead, this heralds a bright future for policing in East Surrey.”

Deputy Chief Constable of Surrey Police Mark McEwan said: “We believe this new building will provide sufficient space and facilities for our teams, be fit for purpose and enable us to continue delivering the high levels of service our residents expect. Whilst we are still at the very early stages, considerations continue into where individual teams across the Eastern division will be based in the future and we will provide updates as and when we have them. The safety of our communities remains our priority and there will be no change to officers.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Reigate Police Station (Image Google)

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Blockbuster cinema and 480 homes plan for Leatherhead town centre

24 January 2026



Hundreds of new homes in blocks of up to 12 storeys high, as well as a three-screen cinema, could be coming to Leatherhead town centre if newly submitted plans are approved. The Leret Partnership, a joint venture between Mole Valley District Council and Kier Property, has submitted its formal application to regenerate the Swan Centre and Bull Hill in Leatherhead. They want to build up to 480 new homes with 81 of those, spread between two blocks, classed as affordable. The site, already set aside for development as part of the council's local plan, would also get a cinema.

The plan has been submitted as a single build but is split across two distinct sites: Bull Hill and the Swan Centre. Detailed plans show Bull Hill will be converted into six blocks of 276 homes, 133 of which will be one-bed flats, with a further 133 two-bed apartments and 10 three-bed homes. The 81 affordable homes will be housed in blocks E and F. The private blocks will be six storeys high while block E will stand five storeys tall and block F rising to nine storeys. There are also further outline plans to go up to 12 storeys at the site to provide an additional 203 homes, office space and potentially a nursery.

The second part of the application covers The Swan Centre, which has served as Leatherhead's shopping hub since it was constructed in the 1980s. The plans want to demolish Leret House to open the space and create a new public square with a three-screen 239-seat cinema. "The Applicant has been in discussion with leisure agents and cinema operators and the building has been designed to accommodate other leisure uses (competitive socialising) should the occupier change in the future", planning documents read.

There are also plans to build a new multi-storey car park, office space, as well as a potential GP surgery, shops, and cafes and restaurants. The council described the submission of the planning application as a key milestone in its Transform Leatherhead regeneration and that, when built, it will bring more people into the town centre. It also expects to receive about £9m in developer contributions, which can then be used on infrastructure and community improvements elsewhere in the borough. Residents are able to submit their views to the council before its planning committee votes on the proposals.

Cllr Keira Vyvyan-Robinson, cabinet member for property and projects, Mole Valley District Council, said: "The submission is a significant milestone in the delivery of the Transform Leatherhead programme and a real step forward in boosting Leatherhead's unique position as the gateway to the Surrey Hills. The proposals will breathe new life into Leatherhead's town centre, rejuvenate the Swan Centre and deliver much-needed homes for the district, providing jobs and securing sustainable investment for the local community."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Image: Jv Planning Submission

Woking up to Surrey face recognition cameras

24 January 2026



Formal protests have been lodged against Surrey Police's use of facial recognition technology that scans the faces of every adult and child in a bid to identify known suspects. Surrey Police was given two live facial recognition vans from the Home Office in November and has since put them to use in Redhill and Woking. The surveillance cameras record the images of everyone who walks across their paths to see if they are a match for people on their watchlist. The force says it deletes anybody who does not match to "minimise the impact on their human rights", with watchlist images deleted within 24 hours. The police said there were known issues in the past with facial recognition technology, including potential gender and ethnic bias, but that developments and new AI-driven algorithms have reduced this.

Now, a group of 25 cross-party Woking Borough Councillors have written to the force demanding the cameras are mothballed until meaningful consultation with residents and their elected representatives takes place over how, or whether, they are used. The letter says that fundamental questions of governance and human rights should have been resolved before any decision was made - including accountability for wrongful stops or arrests from misidentification, whether cameras record continuously or selectively, and how and when data is processed, shared, stored and deleted. A resolution has also been passed by Woking Borough Council's Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee calling on Surrey Police and the Crime Commissioner to join its January 20 meeting to answer questions about the use of live facial recognition cameras in Woking. In the meantime, councillors want the cameras' usage suspended immediately, pending full consultation with residents, with a focus on young people and those from ethnic minority backgrounds and community groups, as well as a full independently led equality and human rights impact assessment.

Chairing the Tuesday, December 2 committee was Councillor Tom Bonsundy-O'Bryan. He said: "They were deployed in Woking on November 26 and in Redhill on November 13. They scanned the faces of more than 8,000 members of public; 99.9 per cent of those scanned were not arrested. Of the individuals explicitly flagged as alerts by the technology in Redhill, 60 per cent were ultimately not arrested; only two arrests were made. There are serious questions about the proportionality of this. Imagine the police standing down the road, and asking to see everyone's passport, checking their ID, just in case they are a criminal. It would be a ludicrous thing, we wouldn't stand for it, it would be outrageous, and that is effectively what this technology is doing. It scans the face of anyone, child or adult, walking down the street and compares it to a watch list. Everyone wants the police to stop criminals, to find and arrest the people responsible for crime, but is this technology really proportionate in being deployed here in Woking?"

A spokesperson for Surrey Police said: "The introduction of live facial recognition technology, which is already being used successfully by other forces in the UK, is a vital tool to help us investigate crime thoroughly and relentlessly pursue criminals. We meticulously planned the rollout of the technology to ensure our use is appropriate, proportionate, and that we are operating with transparency. As part of this, we appropriately engaged with a wide variety of stakeholders and have ensured all information, documentation and policies are publicly available on our website. Since the launch on November 13, we have successfully completed a deployment in Redhill where officers arrested a 69-year-old man for breaching his sexual risk order and conducted condition checks for a sexual harm prevention order and a stalking protection order. On a further deployment in Woking, a 29-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of rape and shoplifting and two women were issued community resolutions for shoplifting."

Police added that the technology has been extensively tested by the National Physical Laboratory and that the algorithm used "shows no statistical bias towards gender or ethnicity (as tested nationally)". They said officers are briefed before each deployment regarding any potential disparity relating to race, age and gender, and that "extra corroboration" is required before any action is taken. "It is our responsibility to use every tactic and innovation available to us to keep the public safe, deter criminal behaviour, protect people from harm, and locate the most serious of offenders - and the live facial recognition technology has helped us to do exactly that."

Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend said: "I want to make sure our communities are as safe as possible for Surrey residents which is why our police officers must have every tool at their disposal to track down criminals operating in our midst. I do understand that people may have concerns which is why it is important that the debate on policing technology reflects the facts, the safeguards in place and the clear benefits to public safety. These vans will be used proportionately and it is important to stress that law-abiding members of the Surrey public going about their daily business have nothing to fear by their use. The cameras will help our policing teams identify and detain those on a pre-determined watchlist such as violent criminals and sex offenders."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

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Surrey to get new recycling centre

24 January 2026



Bin lorries rumbling through Wentworth, Virginia Water and Chertsey could become a much more common occurrence after plans for a massive recycling plant on former green belt land just south of the Surrey towns was approved. The Kitsmead Lane site in Longcross will be capable of processing up to 100,000 tonnes of recycling each year – with 164 rubbish vehicle ‘movements’ every day. Most would be the bin lorries carrying recycling to and from the plant with the rest articulated lorries transporting the sorted waste off site.

Once built it would take recycling from the north and west of Surrey. Currently this gets shipped out to Kent, with a small amount dealt with in Leatherhead. The new facility will therefore mean fewer long journeys out of the county, but an intensification in lorries around the site. To minimise the impact, Surrey County Council’s planning committee has called for a transport plan to be drawn up, but admitted it would be difficult to actually enforce it. Officers told the Wednesday, November 26, meeting: “Understandably, there still have been concerns about the potential for this to add further vehicles through some of the more sensitive locations. To that end we are also recommending, as part of the travel-plan condition, more details on the exact routes that will be used and what measures are in place to minimise movements through sensitive places.”

Sight lines leading out of the plant are also poor, the meeting heard, so the speed limit along Kitsmead Lane would be reduced to 30mph. It’s the first new waste recycling plant application approved by Surrey in the last quarter century, due in part to its long-term relationship with Suez. Kitsmead will sort and separate co-mingled recycling collected from residents’ household bins and become the county’s second recycling plant – with Leatherhead being the other.

In 2026, Surrey County Council and the 11 boroughs and districts will be dissolved and reformed into two huge authorities for the entire region. The new site is expected to take waste from across the two new councils, East and West Surrey, although this has not been formally agreed. The plans were voted through unanimously after hearing the former green belt site was now classified as grey field – and had been designated in the Surrey Waste Plan. Runnymede Borough Council raised concerns over the size of the building and the impact on nearby residents. Its views were echoed in the 21 letters of objection from residents who were worried about the increased traffic, both in volume and scale.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Former landfill site in Trumps Farm, Kitsmead Lane, Longcross (image Google)

Surrey MP intervenes in local prison transgender issue

24 January 2026



The Member of Parliament for Reigate has called for biologically male inmates to be excluded from the women’s estate at HMP Downview in Banstead. **Rebecca Paul MP** argued that the presence of male-born prisoners in a women’s jail placed vulnerable female inmates at risk and reflected a wider policy approach that “put inclusion and ideology above safety and reality”. She made the remarks during a House of Commons debate on 24 November concerning the management of transgender prisoners at HMP Downview.

The debate heard that transgender women are placed at Downview primarily for their own protection and are escorted by guards when mixing with the wider prison population. MPs were also told that, since 2019, there had been no recorded case of a trans inmate assaulting a biologically female prisoner. Evidence was cited that transgender women held in the men’s estate themselves experience disproportionately high levels of sexual assault.

Mrs Paul said HMP Downview includes a dedicated E Wing “specifically for biological males who identify as women”, used for transgender women who, with or without a Gender Recognition Certificate, cannot be safely housed elsewhere in the female estate. She stated that between five and seven such prisoners had been accommodated in E Wing over the past year. Citing Ministry of Justice data, she said: “In 2024, of the 245 transgender males in prison, 151 — or 62 per cent — were convicted of a sexual offence, far higher than the 17 per cent rate for the overall male prison population. A similar pattern can be seen in 2023.”

She concluded that “the male transgender prison population poses a much higher risk to women and girls,” and urged the Government to “take action and protect women at HMP Downview and across the female prison estate”.

Responding for the Government, The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice **Alex Davies-Jones MP** acknowledged that transgender women had specific vulnerabilities, but said the allocation of prisoners required “thought and tact” to ensure fairness and safety. She emphasised that exemptions allowing transgender women into the general women’s population are granted only when there is a compelling reason, such as acute self-harm or suicide risk, and only when there is high confidence that the prisoner poses a low risk to others. No such exemptions have been issued recently.

The Minister noted that more than 95 per cent of transgender women are held in men’s prisons and that those placed in Downview are mostly housed on the stand-alone 16-bed E Wing unit, separated from biological women and situated within its own secure compound. The unit, introduced in 2019, was created because transgender women in men’s prisons face disproportionate levels of bullying, harassment, self-harm and sexual assault.

She told MPs: “There have been zero assaults and zero sexual assaults committed by transgender women in the women’s estate since 2019,” adding that she hoped the figures demonstrated the Government’s attempt to “strike a balance” in the placement of transgender prisoners.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

HMP Downview (image Google)

Leatherhead ruined recycling road repair

24 January 2026



A crumbling, pothole-ridden road that has been the source of countless insurance claims could be given a new lease of life. The North Leatherhead Access Road leading into the Surrey County Council recycling centre off Randalls Road has been slowly destroyed by years of heavy goods vehicles entering and leaving the site. Now, Mole Valley District Council has agreed to spend £60,000 to begin the process of repairing the heavily rutted road. The task is made more complicated as the road is co-owned by Surrey County Council and Thames Water, and it is hoped the initial work, from an overall £300,000 budget, will determine not just what needs to be done, but who pays for it.

Presenting the item to the November meeting of Mole Valley District’s cabinet was **Councillor Keira Vyvyan-Robinson**. She said: “Anybody who uses the recycling centre on a regular basis will be very familiar with the problems that road has. Obviously, it is heavily used by very heavy vehicles and over a period of time that heavy use has resulted in a lot of problems with the carriageway, with rutting in the verges and the channel blocks. That has resulted in increased insurance claims and also increased complaints. In February 2024, it was agreed that we would allocate just over £300,000 in order to improve that road. It is a complicated project because Mole Valley District Council owns about half of the road, the majority of the balance of it is the responsibility of Surrey County Council and Thames Water, so it’s necessary to liaise with them and reach agreements with them over the work that needs to be carried out. This budget is to start the full design and to get the proper costing, because at the moment it’s a provisional figure of about 300,000. The drawdown will enable us to finalise that, submit the planning application and reach the legal agreement with Thames Water and Surrey County Council over how much they will contribute towards the costs. For anybody who uses it, it’s quite plain that we can’t do nothing, as it’s such a detrimental situation at the moment and it will only get worse if we don’t.”

Cllr Gerry Sevenoaks, Independent member for Ashted Park and chair of the council’s scrutiny committee, said: “As a user of that road I know it very well. It’s dangerous, especially if you are going down there and two refuse carts are coming the other way. I say ‘let’s get on with it’.”

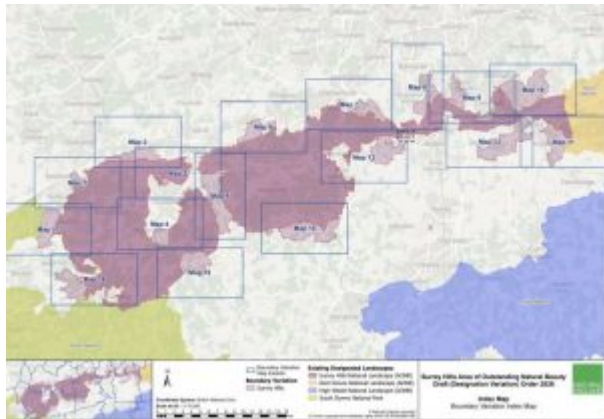
Cllr Caroline Joseph (Liberal Democrat, Fetcham) added: “There is a huge strength of feeling locally. It’s such a small thing but it makes such a huge difference to people. If we can get this moving it will be a very positive thing to Leatherhead, Fetcham, Bookham, Ashted, everyone locally.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Image: North Leatherhead Access Road (image Google)

Surrey Hills expansion

24 January 2026



The Surrey Hills could be expanded for the first time since it was first designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty almost 70 years ago.

The Surrey Hills National Landscape boundary has remained the same since it was first introduced in 1958 but throughout that time there have been calls locally to reconsider increasing the beauty spot's borders.

Some of the land that lies next to the Surrey Hills is currently classed as Areas of Great Landscape Value by councils to recognise its value at a county level.

Now, Natural England is exploring whether to formally include 129 square kilometres of these areas into the Surrey Hills National Landscape following a series of consultations on the proposed extensions.

The first took place in 2023 with 1,518 people taking part, a second held in 2024 received over 375 responses. Natural England's report read: "The evidence provided through the first consultation process presented strong arguments to include additional land in the Surrey Hills.

"Following the decision to add further land to the proposal a second round of consultation was required in accordance with our duties under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

"The second consultation was launched with stakeholders invited to provide a response on the changes to our proposals, including further additions, minor deletions and new land in East Hampshire. We received over 375 responses to the second consultation, the vast majority of which were supportive of the proposals."

The final review period, which the public can take part in, runs until January 14, 2026. The prime purpose of the designation is to conserve and enhance the natural and scenic beauty although it understands that the Surrey Hills is not a museum, and development may need to take place.

"A fundamental role of the local planning authorities is to ensure that the very features that make the Surrey Hills special and worthy of its designation are protected. This is achieved by strict development plan policies and through the vigilant exercise of development management powers.

"The Surrey Hills Management Plan seeks to ensure that both are applied in a consistent manner across the National Landscape. Development proposals should take into account any Landscape Character Assessments for the locality and the Surrey Hills publication", the Surrey Hills National Landscape website reads.

The draft Order 2026 relates to an area of approximately 129 square kilometres in the counties of Surrey, Hampshire and Greater London in and around:

- Wey Valley, Farnham (in Waverley Borough Council)
- Hog's Back (in Guildford Borough Council)
- Binscombe Hills (in Guildford Borough Council)
- Wey Valley (in Waverley and Guildford Borough Councils)
- Enton Hills (in Waverley Borough Council)
- Cranleigh Waters (in Waverley and Guildford Borough Councils)
- Hatchlands and East Clandon (in Guildford Borough Council)
- Headley Hills (in Mole Valley District Council)
- Chipstead Valleys (in Reigate and Banstead Borough Council)
- Happy Valley (in Tandridge District Council and London Borough of Croydon)
- Caterham Woods (in Tandridge District Council)
- Woldingham Valleys (in Tandridge District Council and London Borough of Bromley)

- Limpsfield (in Tandridge District Council)
- Godstone Hills (in Tandridge District Council)
- Betchworth Hills and Mole Valley (in Reigate and Banstead Borough Council and Mole Valley District Council)
- Ockley Low Weald (in Waverley Borough Council and Mole Valley District Council)
- Dunsfold Low Weald (in Waverley Borough Council)
- Whitemoor Vale (in East Hampshire District Council)
- Ludshott and Bramshott Comms (in East Hampshire District Council)
- Dockenfield Hills (in Waverly Borough Council and East Hampshire District Council)
- Minor boundary refinements (various)

Copies of the draft Orders and maps are also available for download online from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/surrey-hills-area-of-outstanding-natural-beauty-boundary-variation>.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Graphic: Surrey Hills (image Natural England)

Tunnel vision for Heathrow's 3rd runway?

24 January 2026



Heathrow Airport's plan for a third runway - requiring a major re-routing and tunnelling of the M25 - has received Government backing as the preferred option for expansion. A competing proposal for a smaller runway put forward by Arora has been rejected. Heathrow welcomed the decision to proceed with the 3,500m runway, arguing it would deliver economic gains and improved passenger experience. Critics have long criticised the plan, saying it undermines climate targets and that the motorway works risk repeating the chaos seen with the delayed A3/M25 junction upgrade, potentially bringing parts of Surrey to regular standstills. Heathrow insists the M25 realignment would be built on adjacent land, allowing the switch to the new carriageway to take place "in a series of carefully planned overnight operations".

A Heathrow spokesperson said the expansion would mean "more connectivity, increased trade, improved passenger experience and a huge economic boost for the British businesses that will help design and build it", but added that "further clarity" is required on regulation of the next phase. "We need definitive decisions from the CAA and Government by mid-December so that delay to the project can be avoided and we can get on with delivering this vital project for our customers and for the UK." The £33 billion scheme is expected to be entirely privately funded. Around £21bn would cover the runway works, including £1.5bn for the M25 realignment, with £12bn for new terminal infrastructure. Heathrow says it will also invest £15bn to modernise existing facilities, including a new terminal "T5X", an expanded Terminal 2 and three new satellite buildings.

In 2024 the airport handled 83.9 million passengers, operating at 99% of its annual flight cap of 480,000 flights. The expansion would lift these to 756,000 flights and around 150 million passengers. Heathrow's plan will now inform the review of the Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS), the framework on which the eventual planning decision will be based. The Government said Heathrow's proposal is the most deliverable and most likely of the options to be approved before the next general election. The Department for Transport stressed this is not a final decision; any changes to the ANPS will be subject to consultation and parliamentary scrutiny next year, with details such as runway length, layout and infrastructure impacts considered throughout the review.

Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander said Heathrow is the UK's only hub airport, supporting "trade, tourism and hundreds of thousands of jobs", adding that the announcement is "another important step to enable a third runway and build on these benefits". She said the Government is acting "swiftly and decisively" to realise the project's potential for passengers, businesses and the wider economy. Ministers also said the scheme must comply with legally binding climate obligations, while balancing economic growth, as well as air quality and noise requirements. The independent Climate Change Committee will be consulted to ensure compatibility with the UK's net-zero framework. A planning application is expected after the ANPS review is complete.

In a promotional video, Heathrow sought to reassure the public about the M25 works: "We understand people may be concerned this could cause congestion or delays. Following previous consultation with National Highways we have

developed a smarter solution. We build the future right next to the present. The vast majority of construction happens off-line. A new realigned section of the M25 is built on adjacent land while the current motorway operates as normal and the tunnels and bridges for a new runway are constructed while minimising impact on the airport or the existing motorway. Then in a series of carefully planned overnight operations, we make the switch. Traffic is transferred on to the new alignment with minimal disruption. Our approach also ensures local traffic and access for surrounding communities are kept moving with minimal disruption. This frees up the old route of the M25, creating a safe, traffic-free zone to build the final parts of the runway. The result is an upgraded and expanded M25, with new link roads separating M4 traffic from M25 mainline journeys, easing congestion and improving safety.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Heathrow shown with a third runway over the M25 (image Heathrow)

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Epsom and Ewell 5th least obese 10 year olds in the UK

24 January 2026



Year six schoolchildren in Surrey have some of the lowest obesity rates in the country, with Mole Valley leading the way. The figures were published as part of the Government’s National Child Measurement Programme, which covers mainstream state-maintained schools. Children in Year 6 are aged 10 to 11 and the data is based on the address of the child rather than their school.

Mole Valley, at 9.7 per cent, was the only borough in the country where fewer than one in 10 children were classed as obese. Three boroughs, Sandwell and Wolverhampton in the West Midlands and Knowlsey in the North West had rates above 30 per cent.

The complete top ten was:

- Mole Valley - 9.7 per cent
- St Albans - 12.0 per cent
- Richmond upon Thames - 12.1 per cent
- Cambridge - 12.7 per cent
- Epsom & Ewell - 12.8 per cent
- Elmbridge - 13.1 per cent
- Waverley - 13.1 per cent
- South Hams - 13.1 per cent
- Uttlesford - 13.2 per cent
- Guildford - 13.6 per cent

The remaining Surrey boroughs had the following obesity rates among year six children:

- Surrey Heath - 14.5 per cent
- Woking - 15.2 per cent
- Reigate & Banstead - 15.7 per cent

- Tandridge - 16.7 per cent
- Runnymede - 16.9 per cent
- Spelthorne - 18.2 per cent

Councillor Nick Wright, Mole Valley District Council cabinet member for leisure and community assets, said one of their priorities was to support residents to live healthy and fulfilling lives. He said: “These childhood obesity figures, which shine such a positive light on Mole Valley, are very encouraging for parents, carers and young people who live in our district. For our part in contributing towards these low obesity rates, we are proud of the work we do and the initiatives we provide which can only help participating children be healthier and more active. Examples include our popular free summer holiday activities programme, most recently run this past summer, and the wide range of indoor activities - such as the kids swim for a pound offer - available at Dorking Sports Centre and Leatherhead Leisure Centre, both run on our behalf by Better.”

“Our sports club access scheme also provides up to £250 per eligible young person to cover all, or part, of a sports club membership and free taster session at that specific club. “The Mole Valley parkrun and junior parkrun initiatives that we helped to establish also continue to go from strength to strength, most recently highlighted by the junior park celebrating its sixth anniversary. “The funding opportunities we provide, for example our neighbourhood fund, are available for sports clubs or other youth projects to apply for money to help improve existing and build new facilities which young people can benefit from.”

“Our commitment to improving our already impressive range of play facilities, including playgrounds and skate parks, across Mole Valley will always be a high priority for us, and a decision due to be taken by cabinet later this month could see several million pounds of Community Infrastructure Levy funding become available for a major parks and recreation ground enhancement programme.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS