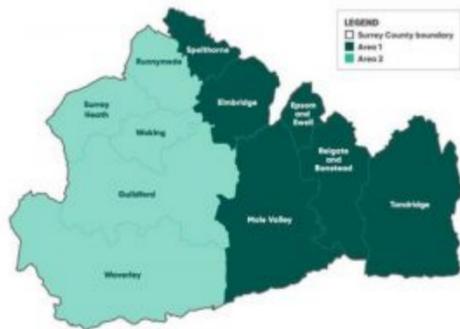


Last day to Stand for Surrey's Unitary Councils

9 April 2026



Today is the final day to get your name on a Surrey ballot ahead of this year's once in a generation election.

Surrey County Council was created in 1889 with the 11 boroughs and districts forming in 1974.

This year, they will be dissolved and replaced with two new mega authorities covering the east and west of the old county as local government moves from the old two-tier system, into two single councils.

This election, set for May 7, will be the first time people get to vote under the new system and today, Thursday April 9, is the final day for any would-be politicians to get their names on the ballot sheets.

The new councils, East and West Surrey, will be responsible for things that make everyday work, such as waste collection and recycling, planning and building control, as well as adult social care and children's services.

The idea is to move to two councils that are effectively responsible for everything, rather than 12 each with their own agendas. This, the hope is, will simplify local government and improve service delivery - and ideally make accountability clearer to residents.

Other big ticket items the councils cover include highways and transport, housing and homelessness support, environmental health, leisure and community services.

Basically it's where your council tax goes.

To stand for election you must be at least 18, be a British, EU, or a Commonwealth citizen, and be registered to vote or have lived or worked in the area for at least a year.

Those looking to stand as a member of a political party should contact their preferred groups while independents can reach out to the Local Government Association Independent Group for any tips.

Valid nomination papers must be submitted with at least two people, a proposer and a seconder, who have agreed you are a suitable candidate - these people need to be on the electoral register in the relevant ward.

Councillors elected in May 2026 will sit on shadow authorities for their new councils for the first year.

This will allow them time to develop budgets and service plans, agree staffing and governance arrangements, and prepare for the transfer of responsibilities from the existing councils.

The new East and West Surrey Councils will then formally begin operating in April 2027, when Surrey's 12 legacy councils will be dissolved.

To stand for election you must email or call the relevant existing council for the area you wish to stand.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council
Email: electoralservices@epsom-ewell.gov.uk
Telephone: 01372 732000

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Map 2.2 Surrey East West. (Credit: Elmbridge Borough Council)

Related reports

Two unitary proposal confirmed

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council agrees to submit proposal recommending three unitary councils for Surrey

County council set to propose two unitary councils for Surrey

Box Hill's Zig Zag Road Leads to Straight Ban on Antisocial Riding

9 April 2026



Motorcyclists near Box Hill are being targeted despite the “vast majority” who visit the Surrey beauty spot being “considerate people who behave respectfully”. A Public Spaces Protection Order is being introduced around the National Trust site following efforts from residents in Mickleham and Westhumble over what they said was excessive noise and acts of anti-social behaviour. Mole Valley District Council then carried out consultation on whether to make certain behaviour an offence within the defined area.

This includes, revving engines, keeping engines idling, speeding, stunts, driving in a convoy, exhaust popping or backfiring, racing, for sudden or rapid acceleration. The area covered includes the world famous Zig Zag road and the roundabout near Denbies wine estate.

The decision was taken by the council’s March executive committee after 603 people, 62 per cent of those who took part in the consultation, backed the measures – compared with 29 per cent who were against and nine per cent who were undecided. It will remain in place for three years unless renewed with the council estimating it will come into effect this summer once necessary signage is installed.

Councillor Caroline Joseph (Liberal Democrat: Fetcham) said: “The consultation revealed a polarised view about whether a PSPO should be introduced ranging from citing behaviour that it disrupts residents’ lives and threatening safety to viewing it as unenforceable and being harmful to local businesses and long-standing biker traditions. “Motorcycle riding at Boxhill and the surrounding area dates back to at least the 1920s from early racing and trials, and the Surrey Hills area remains a popular destination. “It is important to recognise that the vast majority of motorcyclists in this area are considerate people who behave respectfully.”

Bike groups are concerned it will impact their long-standing enjoyment of the area and groups. She added: “It’s not aimed at spoiling those traditions but it’s meant to encourage less antisocial behaviour by those who don’t respect the traditional activity of bikers in the area. “The purpose of the order is only to prohibit the behaviours that cause a public nuisance.” “The introduction of the PSPO will benefit visitors to the local area and those residents and businesses whose quality of life has been affected by vehicle noise all while not affecting responsible and considerate drivers and riders who use Mole Valley’s roads.” The council said it was open to extending the order’s coverage but would require further consultation – which would need to be done outside the upcoming election period.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Zig Zag Road (image Google)

Epsom’s Rainbow Centre former operators drive up Leatherhead Leisure Centre visitor numbers

9 April 2026



BBC reports: Visitor numbers are booming at Leatherhead Leisure Centre on the back of major investment to rebuild the site’s reputation, staffing, and facilities. GLL Leisure (former Rainbow Centre contractors) took over management of the centre last year – which at the time had just three full-time staff. Knowing this would be a major issue, the company began recruitment months before the contract took over – leading to it having full management staffing from day one. That, and investing “well over” what they bid on refurbishing the site, together with timetabling tweaks, has seen memberships soar with almost double the amount of visits on last year.

The encouraging figures were presented by GLL Leisure staff to Mole Valley District Council’s March 24 external scrutiny committee. The first phase had been to turn the ship and rebuild reputations. They said: “Leatherhead Leisure Centre had a poor reputation under the previous leisure contractor in respect that the building had deteriorated – and the preservation of the building was the first priority. We also wanted to make sure that we had enough staff to run the

building as previously there was a lack of staff. There were literally two lifeguards that we took on and one manager.”

So far the numbers have shown the effort has been worthwhile with memberships at Leatherhead at 4,600 – up 1,800 in just a single year. Visitor numbers soared as well from 260,000 per year in 2024 to 508,000 last year. They believe a similar approach at Dorking Leisure Centre – which GLL Leisure also run, should see similar results.

They added: “We knew Leatherhead was a destination many many years ago and we wanted to get that back. We invested well over what we put in the bid but we had real confidence that it was going to work, and it really has. A lot of people have come from private health clubs to come and use the leisure centre, as part of the new gym development so that’s a real good indicator that people are coming back to public centres rather than spending over the top on private health club provisions.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Image: Leatherhead Leisure Centre (Image Google)

Related reports:

Epsom’s Rainbow Leisure Centre Places new operators

Gold star at the end of the Rainbow

Pot of gold for Rainbow?

“It’s my meeting”: Cllr Dallen stops questions about his role in alleged Rainbow “cover-up”.

Epsom and Ewell Council transparency row erupts as council backs publication of urgent decisions

Cllr Dallen accused of £1/2 m Epsom & Ewell Council cover-up

GLL used to operate the Rainbow Centre but were replaced in October 2025 when Epsom and Ewell Borough Council awarded the contract to Places Leisure. In the coming weeks Epsom and Ewell Times hopes to complete an investigative report on circumstances surrounding the management contracts between Epsom and Ewell Borough Council and the Rainbow Centre operators.

Woking bankruptcy sell off

9 April 2026



Woking Borough Council is selling off its flagship regeneration projects – including the town’s new Hilton Hotel and shopping centres to private investors to claw back public money – branded a “sad” and “sobering” reality of the bankruptcy. The small council gained infamy when it went bust in 2023 as the most heavily indebted borough in the country. It has dragged itself through huge job cuts and service reductions to address its £2.6 billion black hole and now come some of its costliest investments.

It’s leadership has agreed to market Victoria Square, Wolsey Place, Alexander House and energy company Thameswey Milton Keynes Ltd, in an effort to claw back some of the public money torpedoed into its doomed ventures between 2016 and 2019. Speaking at the Wednesday, March 18 executive committee was the portfolio holder for finance, Councillor Dale Roberts. He said: “The work of understanding and unravelling the council’s commercial structures has weighed heavily at times and that is in large part because of the scale of what we inherited. Hundreds of millions of pounds of public money invested through complex commercial structures. At times it has felt like we’ve been asked to work on the world’s most expensive jigsaw puzzle. Being able to bring these matters forward openly, with proper governance and transparency is therefore both a relief and a sign of the progress the council has made. It quickly became clear the first task was not to make immediate decisions about assets and companies but to ensure we had the right governance, reporting, controls in place to understand what we owned and how those companies and those assets were performing.”

Victoria Square Woking, including the Hilton Hotel where the council paid for its cutlery, will be sold off – although the car parks will be split off and retained by the council. Wolsey Place Shopping Centre, together with Wolsey Walk residential units, Alexander House and Export House, and units owned by Victoria Square will be combined into another single entity to maximise value. The council’s energy company – which supplies exclusive power to Victoria Square – will also be sold, with officers confident a specialist company could successfully fold the firm into an existing operation. A key element in the Thameswey sale is a debt for equity swap that will convert the council’s existing loans into shares but banks a historic loss of about £42m associated with the investment.

Cllr Steve Greentree (Liberal Democrats: Knaphill) said: "It's sad to see the £42m loss in a venture that should never have been put at risk by a local borough council in a geography that is no way related to Woking." Cllr Ian Johnson, portfolio holder for housing said: "My overwhelming feeling is that of disappointment. Finally we will rid ourselves of something that has been a drain on our resources." He added: "It's fairly sobering isn't it but it's the right thing to do."

The sales had long been expected as part of the Government's effective bailout programme where it has already pledged about £500m to the borough. Further help has been held back until the Government knows what the council banks in asset sales. Borough leader, Cllr Ann-Marie Barker said: "It's been a very long-term ambition of this administration to sell Thamesway. It's costing us money, it's not contributing to our role as a council to deliver services for local people." Final approval of any deals will need the approval of full council.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Image: Hilton in Woking (Google)

Related reports:

Residents sigh of relief if Government bail out bankrupt Woking

Strip Woking's debt-man of his OBE MP says

Government bailout to ease Woking's debt burden

Who will be saddled with Spelthorne's and Woking's £3 billion debts?

Three beers for Dorking

9 April 2026



Beer fans will be pumped to know that Dorking Halls will be able to offer customers a greater variety of booze after planning permission was secured to convert storage units into cellars. Antique hunters may be less than thrilled however. Mole Valley District Council has given itself the green light to convert the units at the northwest of the halls so they can be used by the town's flagship theatre. The block had been in long-term use by Dorking auctioneers P F Windibank to keep its wares and will force the company, which been based there for over half a century, to move elsewhere. Officers, who recommended the conversion be approved, said it would support the "popular leisure and cultural facility", Dorking Halls, and help its long-term viability.

They told the March development management committee: "They consider they need more (space), to provide a greater variety of drinks and they need more storage for beer kegs. The proposed change of use would support Dorking Halls and the wider town centre economy. Dorking Halls is an important venue for Mole Valley, it provides opportunities for leisure and recreation both for those living within and outside the district."

John Collins, speaking on behalf of the application, said the increased storage was needed due to the scale of activities and that revenues generated through bar sales underpinned the venue's viability. He said the Dorking Halls was cherished by the community and added: "The current cellarage was simply not adequate and more space needed to improve back of house operations and comfort within the facility. Being able to have a comfortable welcoming place with a decent bar is all part of that experience."

Councillors at the meeting expressed concern over how it would impact the town's antique scene - although that lies outside the committee's remit. Cllr Claire Malcomson (Liberal Democrat: Holmwoods and Beare Green) said: "I know Dorking Halls is an extremely precious asset that we have but I do also think this is going to (impact) some of the trade in Dorking. So I am not going to pass judgement or anything but I wanted to make that comment because I think this could be quite a loss for us." Cllr Kirstie Havard (Liberal Democrat: Capel, Leigh, Newdigate and Charlwood) added: "This application is causing great harm to that business they have been there for 80 years. It's arisen after the first phase of Dorking Halls (refurbishment) was completed and it was decided that space was needed, and I understand the reasons, but I'm very worried about Windibank and what they are losing, and it is very harmful to their business."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Dorking Halls (image Google)

Green light for MRI scanner at Leatherhead Leisure Centre

9 April 2026



Surrey will get a new MRI machine at Leatherhead Leisure Centre after councillors were “all in favour” of building the musculoskeletal scanner. The new machine will be housed in a temporary building, with the aim of bringing accessible, community-based imaging technology to the area.

The idea has been in motion for the past 18 months after it emerged there was a significant shortfall in MRI access and missed waiting time targets. Leatherhead Leisure Centre, in Guildford Road, Fetcham, was identified as the ideal location to help cut travel distances and relieve pressure on NHS hospitals, papers presented to Mole Valley’s March development management committee said.

The application was not without obstacles as the centre sits on green belt land where new buildings are normally considered inappropriate unless exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated. In this case, the pressing need for new medical facilities available to all patients, together with the temporary five-year nature of the development, proved compelling enough.

Officers told the meeting: “The centre lies within the green belt but in this case the very special circumstances - the need for this type of medical facility and the proximity to the centre, with its car parking space - are strong.” Originally the building was to be navy blue but a change of provider means it will now be white. Two staff members will occupy the site at any one time, with space for a waiting room and a separate scanning area.

Councillor Roger Adams (Liberal Democrat: Bookham West) said: “I am all in favour of additional health facilities in this area.” The plans were approved by nine votes in favour, with no objections and two abstentions.

Questions were raised about whether the land might be reclassified as previously developed green belt land after the temporary building is removed, amid concerns this could open the site to future development. Officers said the five-year nature of the scheme, together with its valued community use, would see the site revert to its original protected status.

Members also pushed for the building to be finished in a colour less likely to show wear and tear, but were told the appearance was determined by the materials available rather than a simple paint choice

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Leatherhead Leisure Centre (Image Google) - the padel centre will be built behind the facility

Dorking housing plan rejected again over affordable homes shortfall

9 April 2026



Plans to build even more homes on the former Aviva site in Dorking have been thrown out after developers failed to include enough affordable housing. It is the second time the application has been before councillors after the original plans, which included no affordable homes, were deferred in November.

Then, Mole Valley District Council’s planning officers had recommended the application for 69 homes at the Pixham Lane site be approved - despite there being no affordable housing included. The updated plan, which included 15 affordable units, was later recommended for refusal because it again fell short of the council’s 40 per cent target, and independent assessors believed a higher proportion could feasibly be delivered.

Developers Stonegate Homes (Pixham) maintained it was economically unviable to include any more affordable homes

and warned that rejecting the proposal could result in no homes being built. They told councillors: “We genuinely understand this is a very important topic. However, critically no two sites are ever the same and while the overarching policy targets are in place the amount of affordable housing each individual site can deliver will be different.”

They said three different affordability consultants had reached different conclusions about what the site could support, arguing this showed there would inevitably be disagreement. “Within four months we’ve gone from the council’s own retained affordability consultants supporting zero affordable housing to the most recent ones concluding that 40 per cent is achievable. With respect this must not be the case of asking the same question until you get the answer you want,” they said.

The developer added that their proposal would still make a significant contribution locally. “Our offer is above what would be required at appeal and would provide 23 per cent of the council’s annual affordable housing in one go. Refusal would not help address shortfalls in affordability.”

There have already been a series of planning applications approved on the site, which was originally earmarked to be a new stadium for Dorking Wanderers FC. Around 300 new homes across the Pixham Lane development have already been granted planning permission.

Residents speaking against the latest proposal said developers were prioritising profit over community needs. “The developers are clearly trying to maximise the amount of space that is income generating while minimising the amount that isn’t,” they said. They also warned about the cumulative impact of development in the area, adding: “Residents are really concerned about the serious cumulative impacts that all these applications for the Aviva site, plus the developments close by at Station Approach and Lincoln Road, will have on the local environment. The overall total of around 300 new residential units on this site that have already been agreed is more than sufficient.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Former Aviva site in Pixham Lane, near Dorking (image Google)

Related reports:

[Will sale of Dorking offices compromise housing plans?](#)

[Cycle hub in Dorking development](#)

- .
- .
- .
- .
- .
- .
- .
- .
- .

Affordable housing scheme approved on Leatherhead green belt

9 April 2026



Greenbelt land in north Leatherhead will be built on after a 100 per cent affordable housing estate was granted planning permission.

Mole Valley District Council’s development committee approved the proposals despite fears it could open the door to others looking to pick off valued sites. The 47 homes by developer Carmen Corp will be built in Oxshott Road, Leatherhead, next to the Tesco store after officers said the need for affordable housing outweighed damage done to green belt.

The site lies on rundown land near the M25 and its condition raised concerns with those opposed to development who argued it could encourage others to let greenbelt land fall into disuse to ease planning. Those in favour suggested the 47 affordable homes was too good to pass up – particularly as it was surrounded on three sides by development and currently looked like “no-man’s land”.

The plans were passed by seven votes in favour to four against.

Claire Malcomson (Liberal Democrat: Holmwoods and Beare Green) said: "Just because it's degraded land is not a reason. We welcome affordable houses, we really don't want people to think we don't.

"This piece of land has been used badly for flytipping, and yes it would be wonderful if it hadn't been. But I am concerned about this and I do feel that developers might be sort of almost trying to twist our arms just because it's affordable."

Others argued the site, derelict and surrounded on three sides, was exactly what was meant as grey belt. Its location next to a large Tesco store, as well as the affordable housing offer, meant the majority backed the plans.

The developer told the March 4 meeting the site suffered from historic misuse, flytipping and ecological decline - and highlighted the housing shortage in the borough. He also addressed questions on affordable housing, saying extra houses could only be occupied if they were made available at below market rates - such was the basis of Homes England funding.

Cllr Monica Weller (Liberal Democrats: Bookham West) said: "We need to be honest about what this site actually is now. Is this pristine, untouchable countryside or is it more, I hate to say, a wasteland?"

"I felt that I was going into no-man's land. Let's not joke or kid ourselves that this is special, this is rough. And affordable housing is one of the biggest issues facing families."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Plans for Oxshott Road near Leatherhead (image MVDC)

Surrey could have had elections last year after all

9 April 2026



The Government's u-turn on reinstating elections across 30 local authorities shows just how "rash and reckless" last year's decision was to cancel polls in Surrey, opposition councillors said. In 2025, residents were told elections in Surrey should be axed because councils needed time to focus on merging into two mega authorities. Now however, the Government has written to the High Court to set out its position that 30 councils, including 21 going through their own mergers, should proceed 'in the light of recent legal advice' - a year too late for Surrey. It comes after a legal challenge was brought against the decision to delay polls by Reform UK leader Nigel Farage. It means all local elections in May 2026 will now go ahead, leaving some in Surrey wondering what has changed and whether they needed to cancel their own polls.

In a letter to the affected chief executives, Steve Reed, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, wrote: "I recognise that many of the local councils undergoing reorganisation voiced genuine concerns about the pressure they are under as we seek to deliver the most ambitious reforms of local government in a generation. I am therefore announcing today that we will provide up to £63m in additional capacity funding to the 21 local areas undergoing reorganisation across the whole programme, building on the £7.6m provided for developing proposals last year. I will shortly set out further detail about how that funding will be allocated."

Councillor Paul Follows, leader of the Liberal Democrat group at Surrey County Council, opposed the postponement in 2025 saying it robbed people of their democratic right and left in place dozens of unmandated councillors. Speaking after the Government's announcement, he said: "I am sure those areas will welcome the chance to have their democratic rights restored and to have their say on the various proposals for local government reorganisation in those areas. Surrey of course will not be one of them, due to the rash and reckless actions of Conservative-led Surrey County Council. They have jumped into the unknown, exposed most of the county to significant debt and discord in the process with barely a plan of their own - joined at the hip on this subject to a Labour government that seemingly are abandoning their own plans on a daily basis."

Epsom and Ewell Times adds: **Why the Government's U-turn does not change anything in Surrey**

Despite the Government's decision to reinstate elections in 30 other council areas, it does not alter the position in Surrey. Surrey County Council's May 2025 elections were already formally postponed as part of the Government-approved programme to abolish the existing county and district councils and replace them with two new unitary authorities. The Government has confirmed that Surrey's postponed elections are being replaced by elections to the new unitary councils instead, expected in May 2026. This means Surrey residents will not vote again for the current county council, and its existing councillors will remain in office until the new authorities take over, whereas voters in some other reorganising areas will now go to the polls as originally planned.

Surrey County Council wrote to the Government in January last year to take up the offer of delaying its own elections, arguing this would give officers time to focus on merging with its boroughs and districts. They added that spending millions on an election only to then dissolve the entire council within a year or two would be a waste of time and money. Asked what has changed since then and whether its decision in Surrey was still correct, the ministry gave a stock reply declining to answer the questions put to it. It said that, in the case of Surrey, last year's elections to the county council and six of the district councils are being replaced by elections to the two new unitary councils and that the decision relating to the postponement of 30 local council elections is separate from the decision which impacts Surrey. The ministry declined to add anything further.

Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council, said: "In Surrey we remain focussed on delivering a smooth transition for devolution and local government reorganisation and we are gearing up for local elections in May as planned. Last year, we were confirmed on the Government's accelerated programme and elections were postponed for one year so that the necessary preparatory work could take place at pace." The council also pointed out that some of the reinstated council elections this year had already been postponed once and would have given their elected officials six-year terms.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Related reports:

[Surrey County Council election delay stirring up a storm](#)

[Surrey elections: Democracy delayed, democracy denied?](#)

[Elections Delayed as Surrey Faces Uncertain Future of Local Government Shake-Up](#)

[Parliament motion to reinstate Surrey County May elections](#)

[Political furies over Surrey election postponement](#)

[Surrey County elections must go ahead clamour](#)

Government comes to Surrey's SEND rescue

9 April 2026



The Government is 'finally recognising the heavy pressure placed on local budgets to support children' after agreeing to wipe out 90 per cent of the debt councils has accrued in Special Education Need and Disabilities spending.

Surrey has 46,000 children with Additional Needs and Disabilities (AND) with 16,870 children and young people with a statutory Education Health and Care (EHC) plan. This is more than double the number in 2018 and puts it at the third highest in the country.

Councils must, by law, have to identify and support children with special educational needs but the surge in numbers has seen spending far outstrip what they receive from Government. Surrey County Council has spent millions since 2018 as part of its recovery plan for the service - which it has said is yielding results, but has pressed for changes to the wider system, additional funding and reform.

MP Greg Stafford also told the Commons that the High Needs Block deficit in Surrey was forecast to run to £165m by 2027. It leaves councils having to find huge sums every year - with historically poor support from the Government. The news that £5 billion will be spent to eliminate almost all historic debt in England, they hope, signals a major change in direction.

Helyn Clack, Surrey County Council's deputy cabinet member for children, families and lifelong learning said: "Surrey County Council welcomes the announcement on SEND deficits. It shows that central government finally recognises the heavy pressure placed on local budgets to support children with special educational needs, costs that should have been fully funded through the Government's Dedicated Schools Grant.

"We are mindful that this SEND deficit funding covers overspends we have already incurred. We now await more detail on the expected ongoing costs of the SEND system and the long-promised reforms needed to make it sustainable in the future. In the meantime, we are reviewing the details of the announcement to understand what it means for the Council."

The announcement follows Local Government Association (LGA) warnings that as many as eight in 10 English councils would be facing bankruptcy if forced pay back their SEND deficits in full.

Cllr Amanda Hopgood, chair of the Local Government Association's children, young people and families committee, said: "Councils want every child and young person to get the support they need. But under the current failing system, the rise in need has left many councils buckling under the strain.

“We were pleased that government announced it will tackle 90 per cent of councils’ historic high needs deficits, following our call to address the deficits, which removes the immediate threat of insolvency for many councils. Fully writing off historic and future high needs deficits remains critical.

“The challenges within the SEND system are not just financial. The Schools White Paper must deliver brave and bold reform where more children can get the support they need in a mainstream school, without needing a statutory plan.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

New Surrey County Council HQ, Woodhatch Place on Cockshot Hill, Reigate. Credit Surrey County Council

Related reports:

Surrey SEND place surge - is it enough?

Epsom and Ewell MP calls for SEND action

Surrey MPs slam SEND profiteers

£4.9 million not enough to solve Surrey’s SEND problems?

SENDing Pupils to Epsom’s Mainstream Schools?

.
. .
. .
. .

Mole Valley backs maximum council tax rise as deficit looms

9 April 2026



Council tax in Mole Valley is expected to rise by the highest possible amount - and still leave the district in financial deficit and relying on reserves to cover the gap. The decision was recommended at the Tuesday, February 3, meeting of the Mole Valley District Council’s executive committee ahead of its expected rubber stamping later this month, and the increase will go hand in hand with the 4.99 per cent hike imposed by Surrey County Council.

This is the final full year for many public bodies in Surrey before they are merged into two mega authorities, and Mole Valley’s budget comes amid warnings it could be among a number of councils to pass on a deficit to the newly merged East Surrey next year.

This year’s budget shortfall, projected to be about £1.5m, is to be covered by existing reserves and will allow the council to continue funding projects close to its heart including free summer activities for children, the Mole Valley Employment Hub, and a grant to Citizens Advice. The biggest loss in projected revenue is expected to come from the enforced closure of Dorking Halls during its costly multi-million pound refurbishment.

Councillor Andrew Matthews, portfolio holder for finance, said: “This budget is unlike previous years. Instead of setting a medium term plan, with local government reorganisation taking effect in April 2027, we are presenting a single year budget alongside indicative figures for the two years beyond to support planning for the new East Surrey Council. The council is forecasting that it will cost £14.3m to fund services next year with £12.8m income. The shortfall will be covered by using £1.5m of reserves.”

Part of the shortfall, he said, was due to the revenue drop off caused by the long closure of Dorking Halls while it undergoes refurbishment.

The 2.99 per cent increase in council tax will now be put before full council for formal approval and would see Mole Valley’s share for band D properties rise from about £211 to £217 a year. Mole Valley’s take is about 9 per cent of a person’s annual council tax bill, with Surrey County Council accounting for 75 per cent. The rest is distributed between Surrey Police at 14 per cent and any parish council. Currently band D homeowners in non-parished areas pay £2,395.20 - this will now go up.

Car parking within the council-owned sites will continue to be free on evenings and Sundays.

Looking forward, Cllr Andrew Matthews said: “The financial environment remains uncertain. Inflationary pressures, rising costs, and the transition to a new unitary authority means that the medium term projections for 2027 and 2028 show that the new East Surrey Council will inherit a predicted budget deficit from Mole Valley.” He said this was in part due to changes in central government funding that gave areas less able to raise money - those with fewer high council tax band homes - a larger share than those with larger tax bases. He expected other councils would be in a similar boat and could have financial implications for the new council going forward.

He told the meeting: “This is not unique. Other councils forming a new East Surrey Council are also predicting a potential budget deficit in their projections. This is a key risk for sustainability of services under the new Surrey Council.”

Cllr Paula Keay said the employment hub played a vital role in the community and was important to fund. She said: “I’m delighted that this one off revenue spend has gone through. It will ensure the long-term sustainability of such an important facility. We know there is no job centre anywhere in Mole Valley and it provides a valuable service to both employers and local people seeking work and skills.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Mole Valley District Council offices in Dorking. (Credit: Google Street View)

Council didn’t stand up Dorking Wanderers

9 April 2026



A new spectator stand that will “support the continued success” of Dorking Wanderers Football Club can stay after the club secured planning permission.

The Mole Valley club had already erected the four-row seating section in the northern corner of its Meadowbank Ground in Dorking, and it has been used since April 2025, giving spectators a better view of games. The planning application was submitted retrospectively and was granted at the February Development Management Committee meeting of Mole Valley District Council.

The tiered 100-seater stand will not increase the club’s overall capacity of 4,121, but will instead upgrade facilities for supporters who had previously been required to stand pitch-side. Objectors raised concerns about the potential for increased noise and disturbance, but planning officers said an October 2025 site visit found that existing sound-damping fencing and newly planted trees would mitigate such issues, and that the stand would not affect maximum attendances.

Mole Valley’s environmental health team said the stand would result in a negligible increase and no material change in terms of noise impacts on match days. Officers told the meeting that the new stand, which can be folded away as required, “would not increase spectator numbers, though the arrangements for spectators would differ to the current arrangement, with the three-tier seating area instead of ground-level standing.”

She added that the stand would enhance facilities at the established community ground and support the continued success of Dorking Wanderers. The application was approved without opposition after councillors were told the stand was already in place and that all objections raised had been addressed.

The approval follows a number of upgrades to the ground in recent years, including a new part-covered terrace at the western end approved in 2022, alongside LED floodlighting, additional turnstiles, TV facilities and an expanded fan zone. The western terrace was constructed after the club’s promotion to the National League in order to meet entry requirements.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Epsom and Ewell Times puts local clubs in the context of the hierarchy of English football:

Level	League	Club example
1	Premier League	Arsenal, Man City
2	EFL Championship	Norwich City, Watford
3	EFL League One	Portsmouth, Ipswich Town
4	EFL League Two	Sutton United (recently until 2024)

Level	League	Club example
5	National League	Sutton United (now)
6	National League South	Dorking Wanderers
7-8	Isthmian League etc.	Kingstonian, Leatherhead
9-10	Combined Counties	Epsom and Ewell

Photo: Meadowbank Stadium, the home ground of Dorking Wanderers Football Club, with the spire of St Martin's Church in the background (May 2021, looking south). Credit: Mertbiol. Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication.

Old trains rolled back into service

9 April 2026



Old style 1980s rolling stock that had been taken out of service to much fanfare, including a huge ticket-only retirement party, are still being used to cover shortages across South Western Railways services.

The train operator made a big song and dance about the retirement of its old iconic Class 455 trains, even charging £45 a ticket for its supposed last ever journey - with the money going to charity.

The LDRS understands old rolling stock is still being used to cover shortfall when the new trains are unable to get off the blocks, notably on the Hampton Court to Waterloo route.

In December last year some 9,000 enthusiasts tried to buy tickets for the 400 spaces on the celebrated final service from Waterloo. Demand was so high a second train was put on. The day was supposed to mark the last rides of the Class 455 as they were finally phased out and replaced with modern Class 701 Arterio - the ones with the odd half table ledges.

Thousands gathered to say their goodbyes to the 'iconic' SWR trains that have, and continue, to serve Surrey for decades. The ceremony for the 'red train' involved a nine-hour round trip from Waterloo across the SWR network.

South Western Railways celebrated with a story titled 'Train enthusiasts bid farewell to iconic red trains after almost 43 years of service' - except they are still in service. Among the passengers was social media train fan Francis Bourgeois.

South Western trains said the December 'farewell' event was to celebrate the life of the Class 455, first introduced in the 1980s ahead of their removal from timetabled services and that it was always planned to keep some of them back as a contingency.

A spokesperson for SWR said: "The Class 455 fleet of trains was withdrawn from our timetable at the end of 2025. A small number were retained for resilience purposes, to cover any eventuality that may affect the trains we use on our suburban network."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

The 17.54 from Hampton Court to London Waterloo on Thursday January 29 was the old retired train brought back into service (LDRS)

Red rag at Bull Hill as residents rage over high-rise plans

9 April 2026



Huge high rises including hundreds of homes near a small Leatherhead park will kill the town and plunge precious playspace into shadow, say campaigners fighting the plans.

Mole Valley District Council has formed a partnership with Kier Property to “transform Leatherhead” by delivering new housing and upgrading the dated 1980s Swan Centre shopping precinct.

The original plan split housing between Bull Hill open space next to the railway station and the Swan Centre. However, engineers later advised that the shopping centre could not support housing, prompting a late change that would place all 480 homes, offices and a multi-storey car park on the Bull Hill site.

Campaigners say the height of the buildings would cast much of the remaining open space and children’s playground into shade and turn a designated safe walking route for school pupils into an access road for construction workers. They say the proposals would dwarf the existing three-storey blocks near the park.

Residents say they are not opposed to housing and understand the need for town-centre development to protect the wider green belt, but argue that the scale and intensity of the proposals are too much for Leatherhead to absorb. Speaking to the Local Democracy Reporting Service, they said the project alone would increase the town’s population by almost 10 per cent and permanently alter its character.

The council argues the homes will help meet housing targets, fund the regeneration of the Swan Centre and protect valued green space outside urban areas. It also says the project would create jobs, increase footfall for shops and include a new three-screen cinema as part of a £12m refurbishment of the centre — a figure residents compare with the £14m agreed to refurbish Dorking Halls without building on open space.

Campaigners’ concerns

Steve Preston, Susan Hood and Bev Emms have led opposition to the proposals, organising resident meetings and encouraging people to submit views to the council, whether in support or against, to ensure Bull Hill is developed in the best possible way.

They say the scheme is far too intense for one of the last open spaces in the town centre and that instead of a welcoming park for people arriving by train, residents would be met by tiers of car parking, office blocks and towers up to 12 storeys high.

They said the plans would “absolutely kill Leatherhead”, adding that Bull Hill is a vital green space and that “it’s now or never”. While not opposing development in principle, they said any scheme must be right for the town. They pointed out that currently people leave the station and walk straight into a park, whereas under the proposals they would be confronted by an eight-storey car park with “Leatherhead” written on the side and a 12-storey tower in the corner. They questioned what would be more attractive — a park or a concrete car park.

Campaigners said the original proposals were for 150 homes at the Swan Centre and 300 at Bull Hill, but when the Swan Centre proved unworkable all housing was moved to the park to fund shopping centre upgrades. They argued the original Bull Hill buildings were much lower and warned that towers of up to 12 storeys would overshadow the playground and green space, leaving it in shade for much of the year.

Flooding is also a concern, with residents pointing to visible signs of sewage overflow near storm drains. Although the formal consultation deadline has passed, the council has said it will consider submissions received ahead of its final decision. Campaigners have urged residents to make their views known, whether in favour or opposed.

Car parking is another issue, with 300 spaces proposed for around 480 homes housing roughly 1,000 people. With the town’s population at around 11,000, residents fear overstretched services, gridlocked roads and irreversible change.

They said Bull Hill currently feels like an oasis and warned that if the scheme is approved Leatherhead would be changed forever, with no opportunity to reverse the decision.

Council and developer response

The council’s plan includes 81 affordable homes across two blocks and describes the application as a key milestone in its Transform Leatherhead regeneration. It also expects around £9m in developer contributions.

The Leret Partnership is a joint venture between Mole Valley District Council and Kier Property, combining public land ownership with private investment to regenerate the Swan Centre and Bull Hill. The council owns the land, while Kier Property is funding most planning and development costs and the majority of build costs. If planning permission is granted, some land will transfer to the partnership, while some will remain in council ownership. The council will also retain ownership and control of the Swan Centre.

Leigh Thomas, group managing director of Kier Property, said the project would boost the town and reverse recent

declines in shops and footfall. He said Bull Hill was Leatherhead’s most sustainable brownfield site, next to the station, buses and the High Street, and that building homes there would reduce car commuting while supporting the town centre.

He said the scheme would generate around 870 construction jobs and around 1,300 permanent jobs, alongside approximately £9m in contributions over the lifetime of the development. He added that height had been carefully tested, with taller buildings placed next to the railway and lower buildings stepping down towards existing neighbourhoods, arguing that reducing height would also reduce affordable housing, public space and funding for the Swan Centre.

Mr Thomas said early designs had been significantly reworked following community feedback, with buildings moved, heights reduced in sensitive areas and the layout changed. He said residents could continue submitting comments via the council’s planning portal.

Councillor Keira Vyvyan-Robinson, Mole Valley District Council’s cabinet member for commercial assets and property, said the partnership’s gross development value ran into hundreds of millions of pounds, far exceeding the £12m planned for the Swan Centre upgrade. She said the investment would bring long-term regeneration benefits, increased footfall, support for local businesses, new jobs and much-needed housing.

She said the £14m allocated to Dorking Halls related to essential safety and maintenance works to keep the historic venue operational and that without the investment the building would face significant risks to its future.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Related reports:

[Blockbuster cinema and 480 homes plan for Leatherhead town centre](#)

[Leatherhead to get new cinema and bowling alley?](#)

[River Mole to attract visitors to Leatherhead?](#)

[Plans for Bull Hill Leatherhead \(image Leret Group\)](#)

- .
- .
- .
- .
- .
- .

Redhill developers make a towering mistake

9 April 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)