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New hospital programme called “HS2 of hospitals”

8 March 2023



The government’s hospitals programme has been called the “HS2 of hospitals” as “quite intense” discussions continue about how to take it forward.

Epsom and St Helier had its plan for a new site agreed by the NHS in 2020, with an original date for opening set at 2025, now pushed back to 2027 “at the earliest”. A health liaison panel at **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council** heard from **James Blythe**, managing director at the trust, who said adapting the current buildings to modern healthcare standards was becoming “increasingly difficult year on year”.

The national programme was announced as delivering 40 hospitals by 2030, with Epsom and St Helier one of eight “pathfinder” hospitals due to be at the top of the list, Mr Blythe told the meeting. But he said there were “quite intense discussions” going on at government level about the programme and how to take it forward.
Mr Blythe said: “What the government, the Treasury and the Department [of Health], are working through is basically how do you go about building 40 hospitals? Clearly what don’t you do is say to 40 schemes: ‘Go and design something completely different, go out to the construction market and try and procure it.’

“This has sort of now become the HS2 of hospitals. Let’s think about how we do this as a single scheme. Let’s think about how we do this consistently, how we procure consistently, how we design consistently.”

With St Helier hospital “very evidently crumbling” and problems with buildings at the Epsom site too, the trust plans to build a new specialist emergency care hospital on the old Sutton Hospital site, next to the Royal Marsden Hospital. Mr Blythe said: “We know that if we build a modern hospital to modern standards, we can do better for our patients, including local Epsom residents.”

But he said with the move from one financial year into the next, there were questions about where future works might sit in relation to other capital projects. He added: “Clearly what the construction market can’t take is 40 new hospital schemes trying to do the same thing at the same time.”

The meeting also heard that the trust was expecting feedback on its plans “very soon”, hoping it would then be able to get on with the planning process. Mr Blythe said: “As you can imagine, planning for a hospital which is going on to the land adjacent to Royal Marsden in Belmont in a mature and developed residential area, that planning process will not be insignificant. So we know that that will take some time”

Epsom and Ewell Borough Councillor **Liz Frost** (Residents’ Association, Woodcote Ward) asked about plans for the new multi-storey car park due to be built at the Epsom site, which was granted planning permission on appeal in December. She said she received a lot of complaints about roads surrounding the hospital being clogged up as people queued for spaces.

Cllr Frost said: “I have in the past spent quite a lot of time at Epsom Hospital when car parking has been horrendous and everybody was turning up late for clinics because they couldn’t actually get in.”

Mr Blythe said work should start in the autumn to build the new car park, and that options being looked at to minimise disruption during the nine-month build included possible park and ride schemes and using town centre car parks.

Saying he would bring back a plan later in the year for how the project would be handled, Mr Blythe also said the “flip side” was parking should be “substantially better once it’s built”.

He added: “We’re hoping that by [building the new car park] we will prevent some of the build-up of traffic from backing up into the town centre, which has sadly been a feature of the hospital for the last few years.”

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Pay black hole takes £2.2M Epsom Hospital funds

8 March 2023



Epsom and St Helier Trust has set out how it is working to claw back **£2.2million in salary overpayments**. A board meeting of the trust heard that people continuing to be paid after they had left a role was one issue that had led to the outstanding money.

The Epsom and St Helier Trust board met on Friday (March 3) heard that there was “angst” against the trust when it was accused of “pushing people into hardship” when reclaiming money.

Meeting documents show that as of November 30, the trust had £2.2m of salary overpayments of which £798,000 had been invoiced for, and £382,000 was being repaid via agreed plans.

There was work being done with a payroll overpayments team and the HR department to look at £823,000 of outstanding overpayment money to make sure it could be recovered from people who were not responding or where the trust did not have a forwarding address.

Andrew Grimshaw, group chief finance officer, told the meeting that where the the trust was seeking contact or had had no contact with people who owed money was invariably people who had left and not been “terminated” on the system. He said the trust did agree an extended repayment plan with a lot of people to get overpayments back.

The “single most effective action” in stopping overpayments was terminating people on the system when they resigned from a role, he told the meeting. But he added: “A lot of the angst we see is when we are accused of pushing people into hardship.”

An active review had been carried out to find out how many people were being paid who shouldn’t be, meaning a lot of new cases had been found. The meeting chair, **Gillian Norton**, said she knew the board was “sensitive” to the issue, and in the past had given “a very clear steer” on it.

She added: “It’s public money so we have a duty to recover it but we have to do it in a way that is compassionate.”
Derek Macallan, a non-executive director on the board, he was conscious of how hard it was to employ people and how many steps there were to new starters. He asked: “At the end of employment is there a black hole people go into and keep being paid?”

The chair of the Audit Committee, **Peter Kane**, responded that there had been improvements made but there was “still some way to go. We will be keeping our eyes on it, we’e not letting go of it despite the fact that improvements have been made.”

Patient nut complaint to protect others

8 March 2023



The **Epsom and St Helier Trust board** heard the complaint of a patient allergic to nuts given nut oil. LDRS reports:

A hospital patient with a peanut allergy and an epipen was given medication for a nosebleed which contained nut oil. The patient at **St Helier hospital** was told before going home that the A&E doctor “didn’t think” the cream contained nut oil, a hospital trust board meeting heard. But on returning home and reading the leaflet, the unnamed patient learned there was in fact arachis oil, or peanut oil, in the medication. The patient had gone to the emergency department after a nosebleed, having started on a medication to help reduce blood clots. The patient had told the nursing team on arrival at the hospital and the doctor who prescribed the cream for the nosebleed about their allergy.

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On contacting the emergency department, the patient was told there was not an alternative medicine that could be prescribed.

Members of the Epsom and St Helier Trust board heard at a meeting on Friday (March 3) that the patient then contacted their GP for an alternative before making a complaint to the trust so the issue would not affect other patients.

The board meeting, held at Epsom hospital, heard from a registrar and a consultant in the emergency department what steps had since been taken to learn lessons from the incident. These included a safety alert being sent within the team and the individual doctor being spoken to, while board members also asked what more could be done at trust level to help in what was a “very, very busy” department.

Ruth Charlton, the site chief medical officer, said the emergency department was of the only in the trust to use a paper prescription method rather than electronic. She also said that because the emergency department was operating 24/7, and doing things very quickly, patients were not sent to pharmacy for medications, which would be “an extra checking mechanism in place”. She said an electronic system would flag allergens, such as cows’ milk, in a medication and then allow something else to be prescribed instead.

She added: “We need to take away this case and look at what more we could do to address the systems issues.”
The meeting also heard it was not clear what checks were made by the doctor about what was in the medication, or who the patient had spoken to when calling the hospital to ask about alternative medications.

Board chair, **Gillian Norton**, said the board was impressed with the “rigorous approach to learning” shown by the department and thanked the doctors for sharing the experience. She said: “Keep up the great work. “We are very conscious that you have done all this learning and thought about this while you have got this incredibly busy day job.”

Plodcast problem leads to PC sacking

8 March 2023

A Surrey Police officer was dismissed without notice after he made a podcast in which his wording suggested he “condoned committing criminal acts of domestic abuse”. The officer, who cannot be named due to reporting restrictions and is referred to as Officer A, uploaded an episode of his podcast in January 2022 in which he discussed a non-crime domestic incident with his ex-partner that took place on Christmas Day 2021, following an argument over child contact that day.

A Surrey Police misconduct hearing on 8 February 2023 found his behaviour was a breach of discreditable conduct and dismissed him without notice. During the podcast uploaded to Spotify on 10 January 2022, but since deleted, Officer A discussed the Christmas Day 2021 incident, and “made a number of inappropriate comments referring to his ex-partner”, according to the hearing outcome.

The report into the hearing said: “During the podcast he also used discussion and wording which suggested that he condones committing criminal acts of domestic abuse.” Surrey Police said the officer accepted the allegations made against him, but that he had experienced a “difficult break-up with his former partner”. He said this as well as “frustrations regarding his access to their child” were the context in which he recorded the podcast.

Surrey Police said: “The panel accepted the officer’s explanation that by the words he used he was not condoning domestic abuse but the impact on the public view may well be different given the ongoing national concern regarding violence against women and girls and the level of mistrust some have with the police in such matters.”

The officer, who cannot legally be named because of restrictions put in place at the hearing, identified himself as a police officer in the podcast on April 23, 2020 and as a Surrey officer in the introduction of a previous podcast.
The panel found him to have breached the professional standard of duties and responsibilities (being diligent in the exercise of their duties and responsibilities) in this regard.

A member of the public alerted Surrey Police to “inappropriate content on social media” on April 23, 2020, which was dealt with by the officer’s senior management team and the content was removed.

Surrey Police add: “The officer is not being named to protect the welfare of his former partner and child, who played no part in the officer’s alleged misconduct. This will ensure the correct balance is maintained between the open process as envisaged by the Regulations and Home Office Guidance and the welfare of either the officer or others”.

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Surrey’s longest sitting MP to stand-down

8 March 2023



Sir Paul Beresford will not stand again as an MP in Surrey, citing “midnight sittings” in Parliament and “a diary built around the whims of the whips’ office” as reasons for retiring. The Conservative Mole Valley MP, who has been in Parliament since 1992, told constituents in an email he would not stand again in the newly-formed parliamentary constituency of Dorking and Horley.

The next general election is due to take place by January 2025 and changes to constituency boundaries will come in before then, meaning the current Mole Valley constituency will no longer exist.

Sir Paul, 76, who is also a practising dentist, has been the area’s MP since 1997. The Mole Valley parliamentary constituency will be split up under current plans, with just over 60 per cent of it forming most of the new “‘Dorking and Horley” seat.

His 25,453 vote majority in 2015, and similar in 2017, was reduced to 12,041 in the 2019 general election, with the Lib Dem candidate, and Mole Valley Councillor, Paul Kennedy in second place each time.

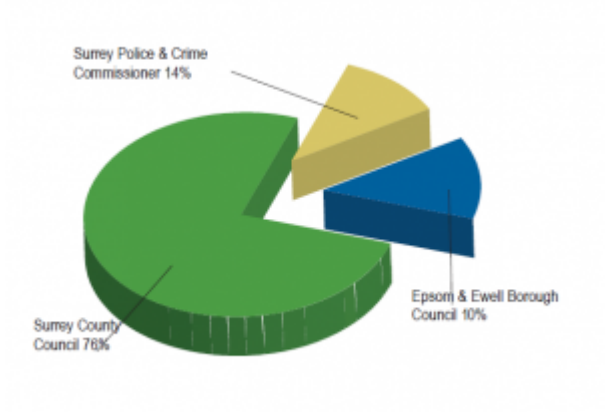
In an email to constituents, Sir Paul said: “I cannot express how grateful I am to the voters in Mole Valley who have consistently supported me for so long and trusted me to be their representative in the House of Commons – it has been a great honour. ” He said he had given “serious thought” to standing in the next election and that the decision to step back had “not been easy”.

Sir Paul added: “I am very much of the view that anyone elected as an MP owes it to their constituents to throw themselves entirely into the role – and when you find yourself beginning to wonder what life without midnight sittings of the House and a diary built around the whims of the whips’ office might look like – it is probably time to step back.”

[E&ET adds: Sir Paul represented Croydon Central 1992-1997]

2023/2024: average of £50 more to pay Surrey County Council

8 March 2023



Surrey residents will pay nearly £50 a year more to the county council for its share of council tax from April.
The 2.99 per cent increase was confirmed at a full meeting of the authority on Tuesday (February 7) though opposition parties did not vote for the budget.

The raise, which is less than the 4.99 per cent councils can increase bills by without a referendum, is made up of 0.99 per cent on the core bill, and two per cent which will go towards adult social care. It will mean the average band D property will pay 94p per week, or £48.69 per year, more from April.

Surrey’s district and borough councils are still to confirm their increases.

The council’s Conservative leader, **Tim Oliver (**Weybridge) told the meeting the rise came in the context of the cost of living crisis, inflation and interest rates all impacting the council as well as Surrey residents. He added: “Everything we do has simply become more expensive to deliver. That can be seen in our budget papers, showing increased spending in almost every area.” Cllr Oliver said it was a “challenge” each year to deliver a balanced budget which nonetheless “prioritised those most in need of help and support but equally recognising that residents don’t always see or access many of our services“.

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He said a “caring and democratic society” expected that people who needed to could turn to their local council for support, and pointed to nearly half of the council’s budget going on adult social care “looking after people with disabilities or extra needs as they get older”. The rise, he said, was less than inflation and less than in many other parts of the country.

But opposition group leaders on the council pointed to problems with the council’s home to school transport arrangements, families going to tribunals for SEND support and cuts to budgets.

Cllr **Will Forster** (Lib Dem, Woking South) highlighted £30m of cuts to adults and children’s social care, where “efficiencies” had been found in the budget. He said: “This budget has the wrong priorities. Rather than protecting services that vulnerable people rely on, they are targeted for cuts.”

The Lib Dem group also called on the council to spend some of its £150m of reserves, or savings, on highway repairs, saying residents wouldn’t understand why the council was “squirrelling” away money it could spend on improving the roads.

Residents’ group leader, Cllr **Nick Darby** (Dittons and Weston Green Residents, The Dittons), said £11m spent on an IT project that was still not operational, anger from residents over a proposed Guildford road closure and the “shambles” of school transport issues were signs of poor communication and consultation at the council. He said there was a need to “acknowledge problems, recognise them and then deal with them” adding that “not everything” in the budget was wrong.

Cllr Darby told the meeting: “On the one hand, we can and do provide figures which balance. It’s more difficult to fulfil our duty to residents by spending their money well, putting them first, especially the vulnerable.” He also repeated his call for a rethink of council tax bands, which would need to be done at central government level.

See below for a full breakdown of how much council tax money will be going to Surrey County Council from April:

Band A – £1,116.72 per year
Band B – £1,302.84 per year
Band C – £1,488.96 per year
Band D – £1,675.08 per year
Band E – £2,047.32 per year
Band F – £2,419.56 per year
Band G – £2,791.80 per year
Band H – £3,350.16 per year

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Surrey County Council sets 23/24 budget

8 March 2023



A councillor who visited rural India paused his tour to take photos of the roads because they were “in better condition than Surrey’s”. The Labour group leader on Surrey County Council said he visited the state of Karnataka last month and on a visit to a village school, stopped to take a photo of the road.

Councillor **Robert Evans** (Labour, Stanwell and Stanwell Moor) told a meeting of the council on Tuesday (February 7) that his host had asked him what was wrong with the roads there. He told the meeting he had replied: “Nothing, to the contrary. I just wanted photographic evidence that the road surfaces here in rural India are better than in many parts of Surrey.”

Cllr Evans also said his Stanwell residents asked him why roads in what he called the “forgotten part of Surrey” were worse than in other parts of the county. He told the meeting: “I actually tell them they’re not, they are pretty bad everywhere.”

In the meeting, councillors voted through the authority’s budget for 2023/24, though without the support of the opposition. The county council’s share of council tax will increase by 2.99 per cent from April, which means an increase of 94p per week, or £48.69 per year on the average band D property.

This is less than the 4.99 per cent which the government says councils can increase council tax by without a referendum, though Slough, Thurrock and Croydon councils were this week given permission to raise council tax by 10 and 15 per cent

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to help pay off huge borrowing costs.

The district and borough councils in Surrey, as well as the Police and Crime Commissioner, will also add their shares to the bills that will be paid by residents. Surrey's £1.1billion budget, which includes spending of more than £400m on adult social care and £249m on children, families and lifelong learning was described as a "good and fair" budget by the council's leader.

Cllr **Oliver** (Conservative, Weybridge) pointed to the council's "ambitious" capital programme which included highways maintenance as well as low emission buses, flood alleviation measures, independent living facilities for the elderly and more accommodation in the county for looked after children.

A cabinet meeting last week heard that more government funding was needed in Surrey for repairs on the county's 3,000 miles of roads. The Liberal Democrat group leader called on the council to spend money the council had in reserves rather than "cutting spending on roads and services for vulnerable people". Cllr **Will Forster** (Woking South) said Surrey's roads were "completely falling apart". He pointed to a highways budget that he claimed would be less than £30m by 2024/25, compared to nearly £70m in the 2023/24 budget. He said: "That is not acceptable. Our residents would find that appalling."

But another councillor said it would be "bonkers" to spend the council's savings on road repairs or other projects.
Cllr **Edward Hawkins** (Conservative, Heatherside and Parkside) said he supported the budget and looking to the situation in the Ukraine, Turkey and Syria, that it was important not to spend money that had been put aside.
He told the meeting: "It's bonkers to spend the money that you put aside for a rainy day, when we really don't know what's coming around the corner."

The meeting opened with a minute's silence for the dog walker who was killed in Caterham in January, the Epsom College head and her family who were found dead on Sunday (February 5) as well as those affected by earthquakes in Turkey and Syria.

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Don't blame us for potholes say Surrey's highway authority.

Surrey County Council proposes 2023/24 budget

Going potty about pot-holes?

Don't blame us for potholes say Surrey's highway authority.

8 March 2023



The state of Surrey's roads is "no fault of the county council" its cabinet has heard, as councillors vowed to put more pressure on central government for highways funding. In what the council's leader called "pothole season", the problems facing the repair of the county's roads were set out at a meeting of the authority's cabinet on Tuesday (January 31).

Approving the budget for the next year, ahead of full council voting on it, cabinet agreed a 2.99 per cent increase to the authority's council tax share, or 94p per week for residents. This will be alongside any increases to come from Surrey's 11 districts and boroughs and a proposed £15 increase per year for the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Cabinet members agreed a final budget for the council in 2023/24 of £1.1billion, an increase of £61.4m from 2022/23. The council tax increase will be made up of a 0.99 per cent increase in the core council tax and a 2 per cent increase in portion that is spend on adult social care.

In terms of the budget for roads in Surrey in 2023/24, the meeting heard that the budget was being set in the context of "hyper-inflation", seeing an increase in the cost of bitumen of nearly 30 per cent over the past year.
Councillor **John O'Reilly** (Conservative, Hersham), chairman of the communities, environment and highways select committee, pointed to three central government cabinet ministers being Conservative MPs, including the chancellor Jeremy Hunt, the MP for South West Surrey.

He said he hoped a central government review into highways funding was carried out earlier than next year, adding: "The state of our roads, through no fault of this council, do require not just pothole filling but resurfacing." Cllr O'Reilly told the meeting: "I'm sure we'll put as much of our influence as we possibly can on central government to address these issues of funding for highways, particularly potholes."

Speaking before the meeting, Cllr **Tim Oliver** (Conservative, Weybridge), the council's leader, said despite seeing more traffic than other areas, the county council got the same level of funding from central government. He said the potholes

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were a national problem, made worse at this time of year by the freezing weather in what he called “pothole season”. But he added that additional investment from the council had paid off and led to fewer potholes, with 32,000 being filled last year compared to 75,000 the year before.

He told the LDRS: “We need the government to give us some one-off money for potholes.”

Council will meet to approve the budget in full on Tuesday (February 7).

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Going potty about pot-holes?

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No Crawleys for Surrey’s Downton Abbeys

8 March 2023



A lack of “Downton Abbey” type families to occupy abandoned mansions led to 112 homes at Headley Court (near Epsom) get the green light last night. The Mole Valley green belt site has previously been used by the Ministry of Defence, Help for Heroes and as a covid testing centre. It could now be turned into 12 two-bed homes within the converted mansion, with further 97 two-bed homes and three one-bed residents on the grounds.

Image: Headley Court mansion: Graham Harrison MoD

They were approved by a vote of 12 in favour and zero against. with three abstentions, by Mole Valley’s Development Management Committee on Wednesday, February 1. Attached to the approval was a list of conditions, including that homes should only go to people aged over 60 and assessed as requiring a care package, to make a publicly accessible restaurant and library available on site, as well as to agree to a travel plan.
The travel plan would include an on-call bus service and car club.

The green belt site does not require special circumstances as it is considered to be previously developed land, the committee heard. There is currently an ongoing appeal of a previously rejected planning application on the site, due to be heard in May, and a decision on whether to pursue that matter will be taken in due course by developers Audley Group.

Questions raised during the meeting surrounded public access, environmental protection matters and parking, with Councillor Tim Hall, who abstained in the vote, saying the plans were “not quite there” particularly as the current bus to the site only ran once every two hours.

The meeting began with chair Cllr David Preedy announcing an interest in the matter and leaving the chamber. As a ward member, a letter was read on his behalf where he highlighted issues of parking while deputy Rosemary Hobbs oversaw the discussion.

The site was formerly part of a larger parcel of land that had used by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) from the 1950s to 2018 and since subdivided and sold to different owners. The mansion house has been vacant since the departure of the MoD with the Jubilee Complex gardens used by the NHS and Surrey County Council during the pandemic.

Cllr Helyn Clack said: “We’ve been through a lot of papers for Headley Court and a lot of changes.
“It’s a very historic site not just in its past but the very recent past. Its held very dearly in the heart of residents across the whole of mv and wider still because of the work that it did for Help for Heroes, the Afghanistan war and also what it has done more recently supporting the NHS throughout the pandemic. Across the whole of Mole Valley there are lots, particularly in rural areas, of large country houses originally built in the late 19th century or 18th century, and then become completely unable to be used for their original purpose. You see them everywhere.

“We’ve had them here to discuss being converted into something where they can maintain their facial value but also be of use to the community going forward. We certainly wouldn’t want to see Headley Court left unoccupied or abandoned and people who want to go visit it are going to be able to do so in this plan. The fact that hundreds, maybe thousands of people will visit this site when it’s finished – it will be a memorial site, not just to the veterans who were mended here but also to the pandemic.”

She added that she was banking on the new residents demanding and setting up their own residents association
Cllr Clack said: “We don’t still have the sort of Downton Abbey type families anymore who can run these huge estates. It’s a shame the MOD pulled out, it was a wonderfully loved site.”

She had trust in the planning regulations to deliver on what they were asking for and to not let that not fall by the wayside

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because it's 'too difficult to do'.

A further item on the agenda, to grant listed building consent to develop the site, was approved unanimously.

A sign of no signs to come on ULEZ?

8 March 2023



Surrey councillors say they could stop TfL (Transport for London) putting signs on the county's roads ahead of the planned ULEZ (Ultra Low Emissions Zone) expansion. **Surrey County Council**'s leader said the authority would "stand its corner" on the expansion "blindly going ahead" as he called for more conversation between the London Mayor's office and the authority.

The ULEZ sees drivers of certain cars charged £12.50 per day to enter it, and is currently in place in central London where Transport for London (TfL) claims there has been a reduction in nitrogen dioxide pollution by nearly half.
The zone is set to cover all of greater London from August, meaning it will border Surrey in council areas such as Elmbridge, **Epsom and Ewell**, and Spelthorne.

But Councillor **Matt Furniss** (Conservative, Shalford), the county council's cabinet member for transport, infrastructure and growth, told a cabinet meeting on Tuesday (January 31) that TfL would need a legal agreement with the council to put anything on the county's roads.

Cllr Furniss said he had written to the Mayor of London and TfL, setting out the council's "absolute disappointment" that the plan would go ahead without "meaningful conversation" on how Surrey residents would be affected. He said he had told officers to stop any discussions on the location of signs on the county's roads until "a grown up conversation has happened between the two authorities on mitigating the disruption and the financial cost to Surrey residents."

The council's leader, Cllr **Tim Oliver** (Conservative, Weybridge), said "any conversation would be a good start" claiming there had been "no dialogue at all". He told the meeting: "We do have the legal opportunity to prevent the Mayor of London putting signage on our highways and we will forcefully make that point to them. We will stand our corner on this."

Surrey's councils were given the chance to respond to a consultation on the ULEZ expansion in 2022, with Elmbridge, Tandridge and Spelthorne, among others, submitting responses. They called variously for a delay to the expansion, an expansion of the scrappage scheme offered to London residents to include Surrey car owners and the expansion of the zone 6 Oyster card zone.

Cllr Furniss said the county council had put forward ten points to TfL that should be considered if the scheme were to go ahead. These included exemptions for taxis and key workers, corridors to NHS facilities near the border and extensions to public transport into Surrey, among others.

The expansion is due to come into place from August 29 this year.

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Gladiator light-man on demand bus

8 March 2023

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It’s not every day you meet an Emmy award winner on a bus in rural Surrey. And it’s not every day the said Emmy award winner would be driving that bus either. But that’s what passengers in the north of Mole Valley may find if they book one of the on-demand, electric buses that have been running in the area since last year.

Tim Hall worked in TV for 40 years, including on the iconic **Gladiators** early in his career, and told the LDRS he took home Emmys for his work as a lighting director on Olympic ceremonies in Russia and Rio. Having done his last job in early 2022, he found himself in retirement, at the end of his working life and thinking: “Is this it?” He came out of retirement to drive the buses, which launched in June last year.

The LDRS* took a trip on the bus, where passengers, both regular and new, praised the service for being reliable and good value, and for the care and attention shown by the drivers as well.

*(Epsom and Ewell Times news partner the BBC Local Democracy Reporting Service)

As well as more than £600,000 of central government funding for better rural transport links in Surrey, the county council has put in more than £200,000 to the Mole Valley service, and hopes to expand the scheme further. Tim admitted there is often a lot of chat to be had on the buses. “You can start a conversation off and before you know it you have been excluded from it,” he said.

The buses can be booked on an app, via a website or on the phone, and have no fixed route. Would-be passengers can check the availability at the time they want to travel, and can book in advance or on the day, a minimum of half an hour ahead. The service is also part of the capped bus fares scheme, meaning that until the end of March all journeys will cost £2, though those over five miles would normally cost £3.

Mother and daughter Beryl and Alison Wood had booked the bus from Cobham Sainsbury’s, one of the extra places passengers can travel to outside of the designated area, back to Beryl’s Bookham home with their shopping. It was Beryl’s first time using the service, which she described as “wonderful” but Alison said she uses the bus a few times a month, whether for visiting her mum or for other reasons.

Alison said the drivers always made sure passengers got on and off safely, including helping with their shopping, which was particularly important for elderly people or those who are less mobile. She added: “You feel like you’re being taken care of. [The drivers make] sure that you’re out of the bus safely.”

Other out-of-area stops that passengers can travel to include Effingham Junction station and the Dorking stations, as well as Cobham’s Waitrose and Epsom hospital. Tim said the bus was very important to the people who use it, especially for those with reduced mobility as well as those using wheelchairs or other aids to get around. He added: “[Walking] more than 100 yards is too much for them. This is great. We pull up right outside their front door.”

[Ed: Do you think Epsom and Ewell needs these on-demand bus services? Let us know at admin@epsomandewelltimes.com.]

Surrey doctors to go on strike?

8 March 2023



Royal Surrey hospital trust bosses are beginning to plan for three days of junior doctor strikes which could have a “significant impact” on services. A national ballot is currently taking place of members of the BMA Junior Doctors union, which closes on February 20.

If members vote for action, it could mean a possible 72-hour strike taking place in March, a board meeting heard on Thursday (January 26). As yet the trust, which runs Guildford’s Royal Surrey County Hospital as well as the Haslemere hospital, has not been directly impacted by its staff striking, though ambulance strikes in December saw the hospital put measures in place.

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Meeting documents said the junior doctors' strike was more likely than others to meet the 50 per cent threshold needed for members to strike because a national ballot was being held. According to the BMA website, junior doctors have seen their pay cut by more than 25% to their salaries since 2008/09.

Bill Jewsbury, the trust's medical director, said the three-day strike, which he thought "probably would" go ahead, would have a "significant impact" on various parts of running the trust. The meeting heard that other, more senior doctors, would need to "step down" into the roles, along with non-union members.

Dr Jewsbury added: "That then has an impact beyond that 72 hours because we then have to rest those people.
"What you're looking at is a much longer period of disruption than just your three days' of strike."

According to the documents, a review carried out of the day of ambulance workers' striking in December had identified one incident that was being investigated of the strike having an impact on patient care. The meeting also heard that the possible junior doctors' strike would impact on its target to clear the backlog of people waiting more than 78 weeks, a year and a half, for treatment by the end of March, in line with national guidance.

Getting rid of all the people on the waiting list was described in documents as "the biggest operational challenge affecting the trust", with a peak of 207 patients in the category at the beginning of October, falling to 161 at the end of November and to 155 in the first week in December.

Matt Jarratt, chief operating officer, told the meeting: "That is going to be a major challenge was going forward."

'It felt like mum was a prisoner' in Surrey Hospital

8 March 2023



A woman said she felt like her mum was "a prisoner" when she couldn't take her home from a Surrey hospital.
The daughter, who we are choosing not to name, said it felt like the family was caught in a "never-concluding circle" when trying to communicate between NHS trusts to get her mum discharged.

Her mum was in hospital for five months, having been admitted to Guildford's Royal Surrey County Hospital with pain following breast cancer, but the family living in West Sussex meant a lot of communication about release was across different NHS trusts.

By Colin Smith, CC BY-SA 2.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=9266476

She told a meeting of the Royal Surrey trust board on Thursday (January 26) that conversations about getting her mum discharged were "awkward" and "difficult" as she tried to negotiate her mum's release from hospital and whether or not she needed a care plan in place.

Board members apologised for the patient and her daughter's experience, which included time at Haslemere Hospital, and said the trust would address issues such as communication between themselves and neighbouring trusts. Alexandra Ankrah, NExT director at the trust, sympathised with the woman's experience, saying she had been through similar with her own mother, though not at Royal Surrey.

Addressing concerns that her mother had felt like a "bed-blocker", where people who are medically well enough to leave hospital cannot be discharged because there may not be the appropriate social care measures in place at home, she and others in the meeting agreed they did not like the term. Ms Ankrah said: "No one should ever be made to feel that they don't have a right to our care and services."

The daughter, who chose not to make a complaint against the trust, said: "I felt like my mum was a prisoner."
The meeting heard that many patients were in similar situations regarding communication across county borders, and a meeting would be organised using the patient story as a basis to make changes.

The chief executive, Louise Stead, said it came up "every single week" with people caught in "an impossible little maze". The trust's medical director, Bill Jewsbury, said getting people home when they were well enough was "really important" because most people wanted to be at home and improved once there. He added: "If we are really honest with ourselves, we are incredibly risk averse around discharge planning."

Dr Jewsbury said the story was "a classic example" of saying somebody needed a care package in place before they could be discharged but said it would be "quite a powerful driver" for the family to be able to take their relatives home. He said the trust should ask itself: "Have we had that conversation with yourselves as the broader family? [Have we] phrased and pitched it in such a way as: 'There are going to be some risks involved in perhaps getting your mother home. 'It isn't without risk but we can get your mother home.'"

He said it would be "worth trying" and that the hospital could do more to work with families as well as outside groups

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such as charities and churches in supporting patients.

The hospital's own virtual wards, where patients can continue to be treated at home and which started late last year, were also raised as one way of helping to tackle the issue.

The daughter told the meeting: "If somebody had presented me with a disclaimer for signing mum out of the hospital, I would have done that."

The Surrey levels mean no level funding?

8 March 2023



The allocation of levelling up funding from central government was announced last week, with more than 100 projects given a share of £2.1billion. But no funding was given to Surrey's councils, with one of the county's proposed projects being improvements to Caterham town centre and flooding measures.

Three bids were put in across the county in total, with the other two being for better cycling and walking routes to the east of Woking and a new health centre in Sheerwater. Overall, government figures show £672m was allocated to develop better transport links, £821m for community regeneration and £594m to restore local heritage sites across the country.

More than £200m was given to councils in south east England, including £45m to Kent County Council for more border control points and traffic improvement measures at Dover and £20m each for improvements to Folkestone and Sheerness town centres.

Over the border in Hampshire, Rushmoor Borough Council was also awarded £20m for a state-of-the-art leisure centre, library and cultural space in Farnborough to help tackle high levels of obesity, inactivity, and poor mental health in the area. But Surrey's councils were not awarded any cash, with only three bids being put in between the county council and the 11 district and borough councils.

We break these down in detail below, including the cash that was asked for, and those councils which did not bid for funding.

Unsuccessful bids:
Surrey County Council's £12m bid to improve walking, cycling and bus routes to the east of Woking would have created better connections to the town centre, and were part of wider plans to improve sustainable travel options in the county. The scheme would have seen improved footpaths, cycle paths and tracks, more secure bike parking and e-bike charging stations and proposals to fund a trial e-cargo bike hire scheme for businesses and residents. Bus improvements would have included better accessibility, real-time information and bus stops with living roofs.

A county council spokesperson said: "Whilst our bids in the latest round were not successful, we will continue to work closely with government to identify and access funding for the vital work we are doing to ensure no one in Surrey is left behind."

Woking Borough Council also put in a bid for £3.8m for a 'health and community campus' in Sheerwater.
A £492m project is already underway to regenerate the area, which the council said is the second most deprived area in the county. The campus would have given residents access to maternity clinics, chiropody, disability support, GP services, dentistry, parenting support and nursery care.

The council said it should have a "significant and positive impact on some of the borough's most vulnerable and harder to reach residents". In response to the bid being unsuccessful, Cllr Will Forster (Liberal Democrat, Hoe Valley), the council's deputy leader, said given the area being the second most deprived in Surrey, the council felt they had "a strong case". He said the council was "disappointed" to have missed out on the latest round of Levelling Up funding. Cllr Forster added: "The next phase of the Sheerwater Regeneration Project has already commenced and we remain committed to working with partners to develop the new health and community campus and delivering the much needed facilities."

Tandridge District Council's application for £8.7m would have meant money being put towards regenerating Caterham, including new flood measures to help with the regular flooding there. The East Surrey MP, Claire Coutinho, thanked the district council for its work in putting together the bid, and said she was "disappointed" the money was not awarded. She added: "I will work with Tandridge District Council and central government to explore all future funding opportunities, to make sure that East Surrey gets the funding it needs to improve our towns and villages."

The leader of the council, Councillor Catherine Sayer (Independents and OLRG Alliance, Oxted North & Tandridge), said: "We are extremely disappointed our bid for funding was unsuccessful. We planned to use this funding to regenerate Caterham, boost the local economy, attract more people to work, visit and live in the area and introduce much needed flood alleviation measures. This would build on the work we've already done to improve Caterham Valley town centre." She said a lot of time and hard work had been put into the bid, and said the council would look for feedback on the

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application and appeal the decision if possible. Cllr Sayer added: “We will also consider another bid when government confirms details of the third round of funding.”

Councils which did not apply for the funding:

The other district and borough councils did not apply for levelling up funding, though some have bid for and received central government funding in the form of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. These included a £1m award to Elmbridge Borough Council to be used for the Walton Playhouse and in playgrounds, and the same amount to Runnymede Borough Council which it will use for transforming Chertsey high street and grants for new businesses.

The full list of councils which did not make a bid for Levelling up funding were:

Reigate & Banstead Borough Council
Spelthorne Borough Council
Mole Valley District Council
Elmbridge Borough Council
Runnymede Borough Council
Surrey Heath Borough Council
Epsom & Ewell Borough Council
Guildford Borough Council
Waverley Borough Council

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Surrey County Council on the level.

Lessons for Epsom in Mole Valley’s “shouty” Local Plan struggle?

8 March 2023



Mole Valley councillors have been warned developers could have “a field day” if government inspectors reject plans to release green belt sites from the authority’s plan for homes.

[Ed: Epsom and Ewell Times is following this story as there maybe some parallels for the progress of our Local Plan expected to be published shortly for Council consideration. (For “release” read “remove”).]

At a specially-called meeting of the district council on Monday (January 16), members unanimously voted to write to the government inspector looking at the local plan to get an opinion on the proposals. The updates to the local plan, which outlines the authority’s plan for new homes in the district up to 2037, are being proposed because of changes to planning at central government level.

The changes include a consultation running until March on updating the National Planning Policy Framework.
Changes at central government level could mean lower housing targets for councils as they look at their local plans, meaning councils may not need to release green belt sites for homes. But the move would also mean a loss in the number of affordable homes built across the district, with officers saying around 625 affordable homes could be lost over the duration of the plan.

A warning was also issued in the meeting of what might happen if the inspector said no to the proposed changes to the plan, which went through an examination in public from January to October last year. Cllr David Hawksworth (Independent, Ashtead Common) said in principle he welcomed the “brave move” but raised concerns on what might happen if the inspector did not accept any changes as a “major modification” and the plan needed to be started again. He said: “[There could be] a long period in which there would be a field day for developers that would be coming in and trying to get some of the green belt sites because they’d be operating under our existing local plan.”

The green belt sites which could be released from the plan, and therefore protected from future development unless there are very special circumstances, including land behind the Six Bells pub in Newdigate, Sondes Place Farm in Dorking and the former sewage works in Brockham. But the sites at Tanners Meadow in Bookham and Headley Court would remain part of the local plan because they already have planning permission granted on all or part of them.

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The prospect of reopening the entire local plan again was rejected by the cabinet member for planning, Cllr Margaret Cooksey (Lib Dem, Dorking South), who described it as a “dangerous proposition”. She rejected a call from one Conservative councillor to resign from her post, towards the end of a meeting that was heavy with party politics but nonetheless in which there was agreement on the final outcome.

Councillors also raised concerns about their own areas and the impact developments could have in different parts of Mole Valley. Charlwood Councillor Lisa Scott (Green) claimed a lot of people had already moved away from the area because of changes that were coming in the local plan, with villages such as Hookwood destined to see four green belt sites developed under the current draft plan.

Conservative Councillor Joanna Slater (Leatherhead South) said taking the green belt sites out of the local plan would mean half of all development would take place in the town, compared to 30 per cent under the plan currently under consideration. She added that the impact would be “huge” and affect school places, traffic and healthcare. She added: “You might as well rename the local plan ‘building tower blocks in Leatherhead and other projects’.

Despite a meeting in which the chair said he would have to adjourn if members did not stop “all this shouting out”, writing to the inspector was unanimously voted through by members, who will now await her reply.

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Crucial month for local Local Plans?

8 March 2023



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council‘s Licensing, Policy and Planning Committee meets Friday 19th January but the **Local Plan** does not feature on its agenda. Local **Liberal Democrats** are asking for the Local Plan timetable to be delayed following central Government indications of a relaxation of new build housing targets.

Liberal Democrat councillors are asking Epsom & Ewell Borough Council to delay the publication of the “regulation 18” part of its Local Plan from the current date of early February, so as to incorporate potential changes to the housing targets set by national government. It is expected that **Michael Gove**, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, will make changes to how local councils need to interpret housing targets, and the treatment of Green Belt land, and the implications of those changes are currently unclear. It is hoped to hear more from central government in the next few weeks.

“The original timetable for the draft Local Plan to go out to public consultation from early in February could well stand if there’s an announcement quickly” says Cllr **Julie Morris**, [LibDem College Ward] member of the borough council’s Licensing & Planning Policy Committee.

Liberal Democrats have previously been critical of Epsom & Ewell council’s slow progress towards the production of a Local Plan. They now say that circumstances in which the Conservative Government, primed by a statement from PM **Rishi Sunak,** could change the rules around housing targets and Green Belt development could warrant a short delay so as to make the draft Local Plan more robust.

“We have often been critical of the delays in bringing this draft Local Plan forward for consultation but going ‘live’ in early February could rule out being able to swiftly incorporate government changes to housing targets or implement new guidance on Green Belt development. We hope a delay won’t be necessary but pausing for a few weeks could potentially save months and months of extra work in 2023 and a much longer delay in achieving the objective, which is to have local policies in place to guide development and protect our borough “ says Cllr Morris.

A special meeting of Epsom and Ewell’s Licensing, Policy and Planning Committee will be held on 30th January. The agenda has not yet been published. One authoritative inside source has told the **Epsom and Ewell Times** that the Local

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Plan will proceed along the existing timetable and be published in February.

Our partner at the BBC reports below on the latest position from neighbouring Mole Valley.

Changes to **Mole Valley**'s plan for development in the district could lead to the loss of hundreds of affordable homes. The district council has paused its local plan, which sets out where 6,000 homes will be built up to 2037, while the government consults on possible changes to planning policy.

A specially-called meeting of **Mole Valley District Council** on Monday (January 16) will discuss asking the government inspector overseeing the plan about the removal of green belt sites included in the plan. The sites include land behind the Six Bells pub in Newdigate, Tapwood Workshops in Buckland, land at Chalkpit Lane in Bookham, Sondes Place Farm, Dorking and the former sewage works in Brockham and sites in Hookwood and Capel among others.

The removal of the green belt sites, if it goes ahead, would be as a result of a lower housing targets from central government, meaning the district council could aim to build fewer homes over the period of the local plan. But this also means a reduction in the number of affordable homes that would be built, with the council's policy at 40 per cent of new developments being affordable homes. Documents for the meeting said officers estimated the changes would mean the non-delivery of approximately 625 new affordable homes.

They went on to say the affordable housing policy itself would not be affected. Council documents show that one of the priority outcomes for the local plan is to: "Encourage the creation of affordable housing to meet local needs and explore innovative methods of delivery."

Surrey Community Action works with local communities to increase the amount of affordable housing in rural villages and small towns in the county. In Mole Valley the organisation has supported **The Poland Trust** on the development of 12 affordable homes to rent at social rent levels and five affordable self-build homes for people living in Brockham and Betchworth.

A Surrey Community Action spokesperson said: "Affordable housing continues to be a critical issue in Surrey. In rural areas of Surrey, the shortage of housing is particularly acute and this has been exacerbated by the increase in the number of people seeking properties with more outdoor space following the pandemic, causing house prices and rents to reach their highest levels of unaffordability for people on average salaries."

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Epsom race days confirmed next week

8 March 2023



The full list of 2023 Epsom race days could be confirmed next week, with the Derby planned for the weekend of June 3. The **Epsom Downs Racecourse** needs confirmation for some of the races in this year's programme from the **Epsom and Walton Downs Conservators**.

A meeting of the conservators, made up of councillors and representatives of the **Jockey Club**, which runs the racecourse, will discuss the proposed dates on Monday (January 16). Any race meets on a Sunday or taking place in the evening need the approval of the conservators, affecting five dates in the calendar.

It will be the first Epsom Derby to be held since the death of **Queen Elizabeth II** in September. The late Queen was a regular the Derby, and when she missed the 2022 Derby it was only the fifth time she had since her coronation, with two of those times due to coronavirus restrictions.

The meeting will also decide whether or not barbecues will be allowed on the Downs during the race days, as happened for the first time in 2022. In 2020 and 2021 the event was held behind closed doors, and in 2022 it was held with a

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capacity crowd for the first time since 2019, with people in the grandstand and watching from the Downs too.

As well as Derby Day on Saturday June 3, the list of races also includes Ladies' Day on Friday June 2 and other dates between April and October.

The full list of dates is below:

Tuesday 25 April
Friday 2 June (Ladies' Day)
Saturday 3 June (Derby Day)
Wednesday 5 July (Evening)
Thursday 13 July (Evening)
Thursday 20 July (Evening)
Thursday 3 August (Evening)
Friday 18 August
Monday 28 August (Bank Holiday)
Thursday 14 September
Sunday 1 October

The evening dates listed above and the race on Sunday October 1 are those which need approval from the meeting.

Barbecues on the Downs were approved by the Conservators in March 2020, but not introduced until 2022 because of the coronavirus pandemic. The Conservators will decide if they can go ahead again for Ladies' Day, The Derby and the August Bank Holiday race meetings.

An officers' report into the barbecues said a "global debate" was ongoing over their impact on air pollution, with sustainably produced charcoal possibly having a carbon neutral impact on the environment. The report said: "The Jockey Club may want to consider this research in its code of conduct for use of the barbecue area and encourage visitors to purchase sustainably produced charcoal from coppiced English woodlands or made from other sustainable materials such as coconut shells, seed/crop husks or bamboo."

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