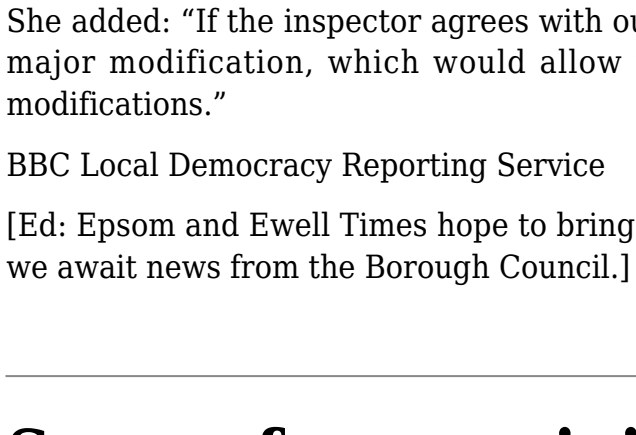
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How Green is My Mole Valley?

6 January 2023



All green belt sites could be removed from Mole Valley's plan for homes following proposed changes to planning at central government level. A specially-called meeting of the district council will be held this month to discuss asking the government inspector looking at the authority's local plan her opinion on removing the sites.

The council's local plan, which sets out where and when 6,000 homes will be built in the district up to 2037, was put on hold in December when **Michael Gove** announced changes to housing targets at central government level.
A consultation is now running on plans to update the National Planning Policy Framework, closing on March 2.
The council's leader Councillor **Stephen Cooksey** (Lib Dem, Dorking South) said along with four other members of the council's cabinet, he had called for an extraordinary meeting of the council on January 16.

The council will be asked to consider seeking the inspector's view on removing all green belt sites from the draft local plan. While many of the new homes were planned for towns like Dorking and Leatherhead, green belt sites had been released to ensure the authority could reach its housing targets set by central government.
Residents and councillors had raised concerns about developments in rural areas as well, and the impacts they could have on communities, roads and infrastructure.

The council's cabinet member for planning, Cllr **Margaret Cooksey** (Lib Dem, Dorking South) said changes to planning policy removed the "central direction" of housing numbers and the need to develop the green belt in order to meet them. She added: "If the inspector agrees with our proposed process, as we hope she will, this can be achieved by introducing a major modification, which would allow the plan to proceed to the next stage of consultation on all the proposed modifications."

BBC Local Democracy Reporting Service

[Ed: Epsom and Ewell Times hope to bring you an update on the position with Epsom and Ewell's Local Plan next week as we await news from the Borough Council.]

Surrey farmer piping-mad with Esso

6 January 2023



The destruction of farmland and countryside caused by a Heathrow Airport fuel pipeline would 'make HS2 look like a picnic in the park', an angry farmer has claimed. Farmer **Colin Rayner** has vented his frustration after fuel company Esso "wrecked" his farmland. Contractors came to Mr Rayner's farm, in Laleham, Surrey, in October to dig up and replace part of the existing 90km fuel pipeline.

The pipeline, which has been in place since 1972, stretches from Southampton to Heathrow Airport but because inspection and maintenance are increasing, Esso decided to replace it. However, this major work requires contractors to go to several landlords and farmers' land. Esso reportedly must agree to several conditions to avoid damage to their land, the countryside, and to wildlife, and to restore the land once finished.

Mr Rayner accused Esso of "empty promises" after "wrecking" and leaving "horrendous damage" at his farm when their contractors turned up in October. Speaking to the Local Democracy Reporting Service, Mr Rayner said: "It's all rather upsetting. They just wrecked our farm and they come along and make lots of promises. We had a meeting with them [Esso], and they made lots of promises, and nothing ever happened since and the damage they are doing to the countryside would make HS2 look like a picnic in the park."

Mr Rayner also claimed other farmers have experienced the same and when he raised his issues to Esso, he was reportedly met with silence. He added: "As farmers, we tried to accommodate Esso and Heathrow Airport but what is the

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point of us working with them if they just come a long and make lots of empty promises and then just damage and wreck the countryside." Some of the damage Mr Rayner outlined was Esso blocking his drainage system with water from the "mud bath" the contractors caused. Security is also something Mr Rayner is concerned about, saying not enough has been done to deter trespasser or flytipping.

Project executive of the Southampton to London pipeline project **Tim Sunderland** said: "The project is replacing an existing aviation fuel pipeline that has been in place since 1972. It currently carries the equivalent of 100 road tankers of fuel every day. Without the replacement pipeline, the fuel would need to be transported by truck on local roads. Periods of extreme wet weather experienced at the end of 2022 have made construction challenging.

"We have met with the tenant and their land agent and acknowledge that our contractor could have done a better job in this area. We regret the concern this has caused. Following our meeting we have implemented the agreed actions as recorded by the tenant's agent. We will be reinstating the land on a like-for-like basis, in compliance with the legal agreement we have with the landowner."

Heathrow Airport declined to comment.

[Ed. adds – there is also an aviation fuel pipeline that branches off from Walton on Thames to Gatwick that runs through Epsom.]

All change in Surrey's County Town?

6 January 2023



Guildford town centre is going through some huge changes, with developments taking place on the sites of some former big names and plans to open up the riverside. The LDRS* has broken down the areas which will see new homes built, and how the town centre will be changing over the coming years.

Guildford's town centre masterplan sets out the future vision for the town, including developing the town's underused sites around North Street and hundreds of new homes. New homes in the town have been put forward as the more sustainable option, with shops, facilities and public transport all within walking distance and a need in the area for lower-priced homes. But the amount of affordable housing has been an issue on some developments, with developers citing rising construction costs and lengthy planning processes meaning schemes are no longer able to offer high numbers of affordable homes, if any.

We round up some of the biggest developments below and how they will change the face of Surrey's county town.

Debenhams

A planning application for nearly 200 homes on the former Debenhams site was narrowly approved by councillors on November 22. The development will see the old store knocked down and two new buildings replacing it alongside shops, a riverside walkway and possibly a boutique cinema. Councillors approved the controversial plans by six votes to five, debating the limited amount of affordable housing and the flood risk, with the Environment agency ultimately satisfied with measures put in place to reduce the risk of flooding. This site will be a key part of the town centre redevelopment and opening up the riverside for the public.

Train station

In February 2018, planning permission was granted on appeal for developer Solum's £150million regeneration of the land around Guildford Station. The borough council had refused the application because of concerns about the development's impact on the Grade II* listed St Nicolas Church, among other things. The Station Quarter when complete will include a new station building, more than 400 homes, as well as shops and office space. The developer's website highlights £25million of station improvements including a multi-storey car park and new plaza with shops and cafes.

Old Orleans restaurant

The former restaurant next door to the Odeon cinema is currently empty and the council, as the owner of the site, has no current plans to lease it out. Councillor Tim Anderson (Residents for Guildford and Villages, Clandon and Horsley), the authority's lead councillor for assets and property, said it would not be cost-effective to lease it in the short-term while there were plans to develop the building. He added: "The full plan for the Bedford Wharf area, including this site, forms part of the emerging town centre masterplan, Shaping Guildford's Future. Proposals are that the land will support a wide mix of uses. It will support the town centre with new homes, jobs, community and service spaces."

North Street

The area around North Street has been called the "poor relation" to the town's picturesque high street – just don't call them cobbles. The redevelopment of land around the bus station, including the refurbishment of the bus station itself,

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could bring nearly 500 new homes and part-pedestrianise North Street. Plans originally put forward in December 2020 included 700 homes, this has steadily been reduced after public consultations, as has the height of the buildings in the scheme. The tallest building has been reduced from 14 to 13 storeys and the second tallest from 10 to nine storeys. A video on the developer's website shows public squares, restaurants, and new shops and cafes as part of the plans, which should be considered by the council's planning committee in January 2023.

Wisley airfield

While it's not within Guildford town centre, the proposed new town which may be built on the former Wisley Airfield could still have an impact. Campaigners have raised concerns about how local village roads will cope with traffic from the residents of the proposed 1,700 homes. The new town would be around a 20 minute drive down the A3 from Guildford, and a similar distance from Woking. The site is also just over a mile from the A3's junction 10 with the M25, where junction upgrade works have started.

It may be just another reason to look again at Guildford MP **Angela Richardson'**s calls for the A3 to tunnel under Guildford to help with traffic and pollution, as she called for in Parliament in December.

An outline application for the plans will come to the council's planning committee in 2023.

North street "fly through" video by developers: https://www.northstreetregeneration.co.uk/virtual-flythrough.html
Solum webpage on station development: https://www.solum.co.uk/development/guildford/

*Epsom and Ewell Times BBC partner – Local Democracy Reporting Service.

Related reports:

Tunnel vision for Surrey's A3?

Housing plan flying in the face of opposition

Local poverty moves 12 year old to give up pocket money

6 January 2023



Merland Rise church caretaker told LDRS* reporter: "Last week a young girl, about 12 years old, came and knocked the door. She'd gone to Asda with her pocket money and spent it on food for the food bank. I was nearly in tears."

Decision makers need to listen to the "lived experience" of people using food banks to tackle the root causes of poverty, according to one organiser. **Tadworth's Merland Rise church** is home to a weekly food bank, as well as being one of Surrey County Council's warm hubs, where people can go if they are struggling to heat their own homes.



Image: Staff, volunteers and councillors at Merland Rise church, which holds a weekly food bank and warm hub. Emily Coady-Stemp

While uptake on the warm bank had been slow, the modern church was still a hive of activity when the LDRS* visited in late November to talk to some of those involved. The food bank has seen a rise in its users, and has moved downstairs to a bigger room in the church, while organisers are sure that as people use the church for other activities, the news will start to spread about the warm hub.

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The building, where warm hub visitors can get a tea or coffee and a hot meal, is large and modern, and used for many community activities. Its administrator **Christina Lane** said she probably takes the building for granted given she goes to church there every week. She recognised that many people were struggling at the moment, and didn't want anyone to feel embarrassed about coming down. "There's no shame, we just have to club together," she said.

Jen Barnard is strategy lead at **Good Company**, which was established this year and is an umbrella organisation working with several food banks, the **Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network** and the **Epsom Pantry** among others.
She said there had been a rise in numbers of people using the food bank, compared to pre-pandemic levels, and that 10,000 food parcels have been given out this year across the five food banks in Banstead, Leatherhead, Tadworth, Epsom and Ewell.

Offering advice to those who visit on all aspects of their life, Ms Barnard said people may be referred on for mental health support, help with applying for disability benefits or advice on reducing energy consumption.
A key part of the work, she believes, is in listening to users and looking at what changes might help them.
"It seems like a small thing," she said, "but listening to people and understanding that everyone is an individual, everyone is unique. And a willingness [is needed] to try to think in new ways, and trying to really hear what people are saying and respond to it."

She said the organisation's aim was to work towards a poverty-free future, but in the meantime to support those who needed it. "Very much a part of our strategy is participation and trying to bring together people with lived experience with decision makers, trying to say: 'We can make changes locally that are going to improve people's lives,'" she added.

Andrea Lewis is the Merland Rise church caretaker, who helps run the building including the many events that go on there, from the food bank to birthday parties, exercise classes and more. Speaking before December's cold snap hit Surrey, she said the warm hub hadn't really "kicked off" but she thought the word would spread as more people visited the church, including for a Surrey County Council bingo event taking place that afternoon.

Word spreading throughout the community also means people are being brought together at a time when many are struggling. Surrey County Councillor **Rebecca Paul** (Conservative, Tadworth, Walton & Kingswood) and Reigate and Banstead Borough Councillor **Rod Ashford** (Lower Kingswood, Tadworth and Walton) both recognise that people get a lot out of volunteering for projects such as the food clubs that run in the borough.

The borough council scheme offers people discounted food for an annual subscription of £1 and £2 payment to attend each week, giving people more ownership of the situation. Cllr Paul said: "In an ideal world we would hope that we wouldn't have to do this.It does strengthen communities, it's building the social fabric that these things are going on."

The warm hub is open on Tuesdays from 10am-6pm, though it won't be open on December 27.

*Epsom and Ewell Times BBC partner – Local Democracy Reporting Service.

Cover image – for illustration only.

School transport failings lead to foodbanks...

6 January 2023



Families were pushed to using food banks and suffered an impact on their mental health when Surrey County Council-funded school transport was not provided for their children.
Surrey County Council carried out a review into the school transport "failure" after nearly 150 families, many with children with additional needs, were left without a way to get their children to school at the start of term.
Alongside the authority's internal review, Family Voice Surrey carried out its own, including a survey which heard from 290 families about the impacts of children not being provided with transport to and from school.
The survey showed that 71 per cent of those who responded had experienced challenges with home to school transport during the autumn term and that 19 per cent of children and young people were unable to attend school or college on the first day.
Leanne Henderson, the organisation's participation manager, said they heard from "desperate" families every year about issues with school transport, often right at the end of August, when transport had not been confirmed for the start of the school term.
She also raised concerns about the communication that came from the authority, with many families waiting a long time for contact from the council.
The approach of the council had been "very inconsistent" she told a meeting of the authority's children, families, lifelong learning and culture select committee on Thursday (December 15).
Ms Henderson said: "We had some families that told us they had to use food banks because they were so financially disadvantaged due to not being able to transport their child to school, and that was really quite worrying."
She also told the meeting that the organisation was "shocked" that 86 per cent of respondents said the situation had adverse effects on their mental health and well being, and increased anxiety.

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More than a third of respondents reported financial issues.
She said: “They were the two elements that really hit home and made us wonder: ‘Why has this happened? What is going on?’”
The meeting heard that at least six factors had led to a backlog of cases at the start of the school year, including an increase in applications, a policy change earlier in the year and a lack of resources.
Ms Henderson said she could see council staff were “totally overwhelmed”, saying she could see from both sides in talking to the families affected and those working at the council.
She said: “I could see the team and I really felt for them.
“They were doing the absolute best that they could do under really difficult circumstances.”
The council’s report listed 50 recommendations to ensure the issues would not be repeated next year, and there were recommendations in the Family Voice Surrey report.
Councillor Clare Curran (Conservative, Bookham and Fetcham West), the authority’s cabinet member for education and learning said she had also been “swamped” by emails on the matter.
She said the review that had been carried out was a “substantial piece of work” and not a “five-minute fix”.
The council spends more than £50m a year on helping children and families get to school, which Cllr Curran told the meeting is a fifth of the entire net budget for children and families.
Cllr Curran added: “I don’t underestimate the task at hand, I don’t underestimate the work that needs to be done.
“But I’m confident that we are going to get it done and next September families, children and young people won’t suffer the failure that there was in September this year.”
ENDS

Tunnel vision for Surrey’s A3?

6 January 2023



Guildford’s MP says it is time to tunnel the A3 under Guildford to help with traffic. **Angela Richardson** said “short-term sticking plasters” were not enough to help with the pollution outside the town, claiming the road is the most polluted in the strategic road network.

Speaking at Prime Minister’s Questions on Wednesday (December 14) the Conservative MP said it was time to “think big”, following the green light being given to the Solent free port this month. The development could lead to more traffic on the A3, with Ms Richardson highlighting the point where it narrows through Guildford as very polluted. She said “short-term sticking plasters” like nine-metre high air pollution barriers would further entrench divisions in Guildford and were not acceptable to her or to her constituents.

The MP said: “It is time to think big, it’s time to think long term. It’s time to tunnel the A3 under Guildford.”
In response, the **Prime Minister** thanked the MP for her question, recognising it was an issue she had “long-championed”. He said **National Highways** were “developing a range of solutions” for the A3 through Guildford and that the Department for Transport would consider the case.

Guildford councillors have been considering a congestion charge as one way to reduce traffic and pollution in the town, which is due to see major redevelopment in the coming years.

It has been met with concerns it could impact on businesses in the town and “discriminate” against those who can’t afford to upgrade their cars.

Related report:

County Town to charge congestion?

Image- south entrance A3 tunnel at Hindhead. Martinvl cc

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Gove gives pause for thought on Local Plans?

6 January 2023



A **Surrey council** has paused its plan for 6,000 homes after central government changes which could mean lower housing targets. Mole Valley District Council has paused its local plan saying it would be “unwise” to carry on with the process in the face of potential changes at a national level.

The authority released some green belt sites in the district for new homes, in a plan that was examined by government inspectors between January and October.

Image: Councillors-and-residents-concerned-about-Mole-Valley-Local-Plan. Emily Coady-Stemp

A local plan sets out a council’s policies and sites for homes and infrastructure, with Mole Valley’s setting out plans until 2037. Changes from central government are expected to be announced before Christmas, with Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities and Surrey Heath **Michael Gove** outlining in a letter earlier this month (December 5) that more control should be given to councils and local communities.

Councillor **Margaret Cooksey**, cabinet member for planning on the district council, said the council would pause its local plan process until it had a better understanding of what government was saying. Cllr Cooksey (Lib Dem, Dorking South) said in a statement the decision had not been taken lightly and given the progress made during an “exhaustive” examination of the plan, that pausing the plan is not what the council wanted to do. She added: “However, it would be unwise to carry on when we are not sure what the wider national planning policy situation is so we have committed to wait until such time that the Inspector can advise us on what should be done next. We had been due to consult with stakeholders on the modifications proposed by us and the Inspector in January. We remain hopeful that clarity will be provided and we will take the best course of action for our residents.”

Mole Valley’s only Green councillor, **Lisa Scott** (Charlwood) said she wanted clarification on what “pause” actually meant, calling for the plan to be “fully reviewed” when national policy had been revised. She said: “We wholeheartedly welcome the change in housing numbers required by government, which was leading to huge green areas being sacrificed to questionable house building targets and are very pleased to see that the local plan has been paused.” But she raised concerns about areas of green belt still being included in the submitted plan, claiming some had been been “significantly expanded” from the public consultation stage, so residents could not have their comments considered by the council.

She said possible changes also meant more brown field sites could be included and the types of homes could be reassessed, with terraces and town houses being more efficient to heat and cool than detached homes.

A letter from Michael Gove sent on December 5 said the changes would mean communities would “have a much more powerful incentive to get involved in drawing up local plans”. While he said planning would always start with a number of homes required in an area, though it should be and “advisory starting point” and not a mandatory figure. He added: “It will be up to local authorities, working with their communities, to determine how many homes can actually be built, taking into account what should be protected in each area – be that our precious green belt or national parks, the character or an area, or heritage assets.”

The majority of homes in the local plan as it stands would be built in Leatherhead and Dorking but there was also concern about communities in rural areas being “ruined” in areas such as Hookwood where more than 550 homes were planned over four sites.

At the February meeting of the council where members voted to submit the plan, the administration promoted its maintaining of 99.3 per cent of the district’s green belt in the local plan.

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1000 Surrey children wait for special needs plans

6 January 2023



A senior Surrey councillor admits it is “not good enough” that nearly 1,000 children with special educational needs in Surrey are waiting for an education plan. Nearly a third of those have been waiting more than the statutory 20-week limit for a Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), with a shortage in educational psychologists among the reasons the council put forward for the backlog.

Surrey County Council’s cabinet member for education and learning said nationally for 60 per cent of children being assessed for an EHCP it was being done within the 20-week period. **Clare Curran** (Conservative, Bookham and Fetcham West) added: “Clearly it is not only a situation that prevails here in Surrey. Notwithstanding the national situation, I admit that it’s not good enough and not one that we would expect or want for our young people.”

An EHCP is put together by a council for children to outline what help they may need at school to support them with their special education needs and disabilities. There are 988 active EHCP requests at the council, of which 284 were known to be over the 20-week period, according to meeting documents.

Cllr Curran explained to a meeting of Surrey’s council on Tuesday (December 13) that a shortage of educational psychologists meant a mandatory part of the EHCPs could not be completed, which was contributing to delays. She said recruiting and training up caseworkers had been a focus, and the workforce was now around 80 per cent staffed across the county.

Her answers came in response to a question put forward by **Lance Spencer** (Liberal Democrat, Goldsworth East and Horsell Village) who said families were being “left behind” by the council and asked what was being done to reduce the “excessive delays”. Cllr Curran said that the council’s ambition was to achieve “better timeliness” by the end of the year in completing EHCP plans. She added: “I know the situation is not good. I know we are not achieving the level of service that we would want to for our children and young people. We are doing our very best to address that and make sure that things improve.”

In a written response, the council denied that parents threatening legal action sped up the time scales for getting an EHCP in place. Cllr Spencer’s written question read: “It would appear that where the parents threaten legal action that the EHCP timescales are reduced” and asked for the number of parents who had written threatening legal proceedings.

A written response said data was not collected at the council in that way, adding: “This process is not influenced by the threat of legal proceedings.”

The meeting heard that the issues impacting the outstanding EHCPs were also a factor in nearly a fifth of annual reviews not being carried out within six months of their due date.

A question put forward by **Catherine Baart** (Green, Earlswood and Reigate South) asked for an update on annual EHCP reviews at the authority. The response in meeting documents showed that at the start of term, 59 per cent of plans had an up-to-date annual review in place or were due within the next month, being 6,445 of the 10,963 plans in place. There were also 4,517 plans that were overdue a review, of which 1,849 were more than six months overdue.

Documents said the availability of staff over the summer had played a part in fewer annual reviews being completed on time, and that an improvement should be seen by the end of the autumn term. Cllr Curran said she did not know if there was a target within the department for completing reviews on time, but that the service was prioritising reviews for children who were vulnerable, including those looked after by the county council or on child protection plans.

Councillors also raised the issue of home to school transport in Surrey, described as “the biggest concern of many of our residents” by the Green Party Group leader on the council.

The council’s leader, Cllr **Tim Oliver** (Conservative, Weybridge) apologised in October for a backlog in sorting school transport for some of the county’s most vulnerable children, when more than 150 families were left in limbo at the start of term.

Jonathan Essex (Redhill East) called on the council to look in its review at the views put forward Family Voice Surrey which had spoken to 290 families as part of its own review.

Cllr **Nick Darby** (Dittons and Weston Green Residents, The Dittons) told the meeting the internal review listed more than 50 recommendations for the council, which he described as “a terrible indictment of the situation”. He said the school transport was “best described as a shambles” and questioned the creation of a new board to oversee progress being made up of officers and cabinet members, many of them previously involved in the process.

On Thursday (December 15) a meeting of the council’s children, families, lifelong learning and culture select committee will consider the council’s review of what happened at the start of the school year.

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Alcohol reading on duty very non-PC

6 January 2023

A former Surrey Police Constable has been barred from the profession after turning up to work still smelling of alcohol from the night before. The force's chief constable found that the former officer had committed gross misconduct and would have been dismissed from the force, had he still been serving.

An accelerated hearing held on November 7 found that former Police Constable Jurgen Lovbakke, who was based in Guildford, turned up for duty smelling of alcohol, which he had drunk the night before.

An outcome notice from Surrey Police said the breath readings were over the "prescribed limit of fitness for duty of 13mg of alcohol per 100ml of breath". The force's Chief Constable Gavin Stephens found that the PC Lovbakke's actions amounted to gross misconduct. It was also found he had breached the standards of professional behaviour in relation to fitness for duty and discreditable conduct.

A Surrey Police statement said: "Had the officer still been serving, they would have been dismissed without notice and so they were placed on the College of Policing Barred list to prevent future employment in law enforcement or similar."

Low turnouts see political changes in Surrey

6 January 2023



The Liberal Democrats have taken two seats off the Conservatives in Surrey County Council by-elections. Winning by just 15 votes, a vote in the Sunbury Common and Ashford Common division took place on Wednesday November 30), with the Liberal Democrats beating four other candidates to be elected.

Harry Boparai got 735 votes, with the Conservative candidate Naz Islam in second place with 720 votes. The by-election was held following the death of Councillor Alison Todd, which was announced in September. With a turnout of 17.5 per cent, the votes for each party broke down as below:

Harry Boparai, Liberal Democrats 735 (elected)
Naz Islam, Conservative 720
Khalid Mustafa, Labour Party 383
Rory O'Brien, Reform UK 144
Helen Couchman Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition 63

Councillor Todd's death following a terminal lung cancer diagnosis in 2021 was announced in September. Colleagues on the council described the county and former Spelthorne borough councillor as a "strong and determined" councillor who wanted to use her own experiences to "make the world a better place".

In May 2021, Cllr Todd was elected for the Conservatives with 1,509 with the second place Liberal Democrat getting 610 votes.

The result represents a 17 per cent swing to the Lib Dems, with no Green or Independent candidates standing, as there was in the 2021 election.

The Liberal Democrats took another Conservative council seat in Surrey after a by-election on Waverley Borough Council.

Dave Busby won the Chiddingfold and Dunsfold by-election on Thursday (December 1) with 652 votes, with the second place candidate getting 297 votes.

The Conservative candidate for Chiddingfold and Dunsfold, Ian Mitchell, was suspended on Monday (November 28) and stood as an independent, though ballot papers had already been issued listing him as a Conservative. A spokesperson for

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the South West Surrey Conservatives said an investigation was pending regarding a social post “that could be considered to be an inappropriate use of social media”.

The association said in a statement: “Given this, we have suspended Mr Mitchell from the Conservative Association pending an investigation into his conduct that may potentially lead to disciplinary proceedings being taken.”

No Green candidate stood in the Waverley by-election, and the result represents a 43 per cent swing to the Lib Dems since the 2019 election.

The borough council’s Lib Dem leader Cllr Paul Follows (Godalming Central and Ockford) said: “I am ecstatic by the result, further strengthening the progressive coalition at Waverley Borough Council that I have the honour of leading with the addition of a fantastic, local, and hard-working new councillor.
“This is also a huge win and swing in a part of our borough in which the Conservatives have long just assumed the vote was theirs.”

The election took place following the death of Cllr John Gray, who died in September, having been a councillor since 2015.

The full results were as follows:

Dave Busby, Liberal Democrat: 652 (66.6 per cent) Elected
Ian Mitchell, Independent: 297 (30.3 per cent)
Rebecca Aitken, Labour 30 (3.1 per cent)

There are now 16 Liberal Democrat councillors on the county council, of a total of 81 seats.

Surrey schools energy hikes

6 January 2023



Surrey schools are being advised to plan for increases in gas prices of more than 129 per cent.
Along with this, council finance teams are telling schools to plan for a 73 per cent increase in electricity prices, according to a cabinet member on Surrey County Council.
Councillor Claire Curran (Conservative, Bookham and Fetcham West), the county council’s cabinet member for education and learning, described the rises as “very significant increases”.
At a meeting of the authority’s cabinet on Tuesday (November 29), Cllr Curran said the school finance team had been working with schools on budget planning and sharing recommendations.
She said utilities generally accounted for around two per cent of a school’s budget, while the largest part of their budget goes on staffing costs, adding: “Even though there’s enormous pressure, it is for a relatively small amount of their budget.”
Many schools are on annual fixed contracts, meaning they were likely protected from the immediate pressure of increasing prices, which Cllr Curran called “a comfort for some”.
She told the meeting: “I don’t think anybody or any organisation is immune from the pressures of gas and electricity costs.”
She said the council was “comfortable” that schools were “not in immediate danger of runaway electricity or energy prices”.
Cllr Curran also highlighted the pressures faced by the county’s smaller schools, which had fewer pupils and were seeing falling birth rates in their areas.
She said schools in rural areas in particular, mostly concentrated in the south of Surrey, were under “very significant pressure” because of the way school funding is allocated on a per pupil basis.
There are 29 schools across the county with fewer than 90 pupils and 73 schools with less than one form of entry.
Cllr Curran said: “That just goes to show that when schools are funded on a per pupil basis we can understand why they’re under pressure.”
The Department for Education is increasing schools funding nationally by £1.5billion in 2023/24 with minimum (average) per pupil funding levels being increased from £4,265 per primary pupil to £4,405 and from £5,525 per secondary pupil to £5,715.
ENDS

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Twisting out a little more for Xmas?

6 January 2023



Surrey children on free school meals will receive food vouchers over Christmas in what one councillor described as “an absolute lifeline” for some families.

The scheme, which will give families a £30 voucher per child, was confirmed by the council’s cabinet member for education and learning on Tuesday (November 29).

Councillor Clare Curran (Conservative, Bookham and Fetcham West) said the vouchers would be issued to children who were eligible for free school meals to be used over the holiday, and that the “wheels were already in motion” on the scheme.

She said: “I know they are an absolute lifeline for very many families.”

The vouchers can be spent in certain supermarkets, and with some conditions in place on what they can be spent on – covering food and other essential items only.

England footballer Marcus Rashford piled pressure on the government during the coronavirus pandemic, forcing a u-turn on the policy not to provide help for struggling families during the school holiday.

The authority’s cabinet meeting also heard about measures being taken to help residents with the cost of living crisis, including a directory sent out to residents to signpost support organisations and funding available.

Meeting documents said: “Whilst the majority of Surrey residents are not in crisis situations at the moment, many are beginning to make cutbacks.

“It is also important to note that there are some residents in crisis already before the full effects of inflation and the winter months are felt.”

Council statistics showed that more than 500 new clients had registered with Surrey Citizens Advice between April and June with more than 1,600 issues being raised particularly around benefits, debt, housing and foodbanks.

Particular groups in the county accounted for the increased demand, with 66 per cent of claimants identifying as having a disability or long-term health condition, and two-thirds of clients identifying as female.

Figures also showed a 300 per cent increase in demand at some foodbanks across Surrey.

Council leader Tim Oliver (Conservative, Weybridge) said the authority would continue to lobby government over energy prices and support for households after April, when the energy price guarantee ends.

Cllr Oliver said: “I hope that residents see what this council is doing, and see that we are genuinely trying to do whatever we can, in whatever way we can, to help support them through what I know will be a difficult period for many people.”

ENDS

Great expectations on Surrey’s tax?

6 January 2023



Surrey County Council’s leader says he has “no expectation at all” that council tax will be put up by the full amount allowed despite a £14.4million budget gap at the council.

Upper tier authorities, such as the county council, can increase council tax by up to five per cent without a referendum, since Jeremy Hunt’s autumn statement on November 17.

Presenting a draft budget for 2023/24 to his cabinet on Tuesday (November 29) Councillor Tim Oliver (Conservative, Weybridge) outlined that the council was required to produce a balanced budget each year, and that he was “confident” the gap could be closed before it came back to cabinet early next year.

The budget will then need to be signed off by full council in February, while all 11 districts and borough councils across the county will also confirm how much they expect to raise their part of council tax by as they approve their budgets.

The county council’s budget currently assumes a 1.99 per cent increase of the county council’s part of the council tax, less than the five per cent it could be increased by, made up of a three per cent raise plus a two per cent precept for adult social care.

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Cllr Oliver said: “I have no expectation at all that we will need to increase by 5 per cent.”
He also said the budget would be dependent on the settlement payment given to councils by central government, due to be confirmed on December 21.
Speaking before the meeting he said that around 80 per cent of the council’s revenue funding came from council tax, and that the authority was not “blessed with considerable sums of money from government”.
As such Cllr Oliver did not think the draft budget would be “significantly impacted” by the settlement announced by central government, but did say the council may need to use one per cent of the possible raise for adult social care, which could take the total increase to 2.99 per cent.
Of a total budget of around £1billion, Cllr Oliver said in the meeting he was “confident” the council would have found a way to close the budget gap of £14.4m and said the authority was in a much better position than in 2018.
He said after two years of the coronavirus pandemic, a cost of living crisis and rising inflation the council was not in the “easiest of times” but had a strong financial base to work from.
He added; “It is fair to say that we haven’t had the most consistent of approaches from central government over the last few months, so we are hoping that in that context, things will settle down.”
The council’s cabinet member for finance and resources, David Lewis (Conservative, Cobham), also highlighted a forecasted full year deficit of £24.5m from figures released from the halfway mark in September.
The overspend is made up of a £32.5m forecast overspend, offset by £8m of savings identified at the council.
Cllr Lewis told the meeting two areas of largest impact were around children’s services, including a £15m overspend on home to school transport, and in adult social care.
The meeting agenda said: “The current level of projected overspend remains significant.
“It is imperative that this reduces before we reach the end of the year, otherwise there would be a material negative impact on the level of the council’s reserves at a time when the level of external financial risk is extremely high.”

Image: Tim Oliver – credit Surrey Live

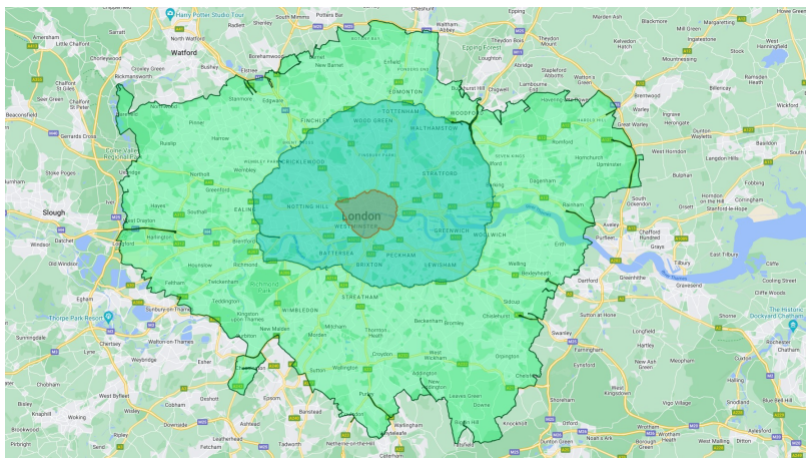
Will Epsom think on the same lines?

6 January 2023



Trams into Surrey have been raised as one “very possible solution” to improving public transport with the expansion of the capital’s **Ultra Low Emission Zone** (ULEZ). The zone’s expansion was confirmed on Friday (November 25), and Elmbridge councillors had discussed the matter with a Transport for London (TfL) representative the previous evening at an overview and scrutiny meeting.

Councillors raised issues around public transport in the borough, saying it was not as good as that in greater London, and asking what could be done to improve it so people were less reliant on their cars. The ULEZ will be expanded from August 2023 to cover the area currently in the Low Emission Zone boundary. It will mean the zone, where drivers in non-compliant cars pay £12.50 per day if they enter it, will come up to the border with Surrey.



Speaking before the decision had been announced, Elmbridge Councillor **Graham Woolgar** (The Walton Society, Walton Central) said the question of better public transport in Elmbridge was “one of money”. He said it was unlikely the county council would find more money to improve buses in Elmbridge, and TfL would not help either because the area is outside London.

He asked **Iain Killingbeck**, community partnerships lead – west, for TfL: “There wouldn’t be any prospect of public transport being improved, would you agree with that?” Mr Killingbeck said he did not accept that, though TfL’s responsibility was for transport in the capital. He said getting people out of their cars, especially on shorter journeys, and promoting walking and cycling was what TfL encouraged. He added: “That’s what we do at TfL, that’s what we’re all about. So we can help to collaborate, partner and work with you, but we don’t have the responsibility for the county or for this area.”

According to the Mayor’s office, the existing ULEZ has reduced roadside pollution levels by 44 per cent in central London

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and 20 per cent in inner London.

Speaking after the meeting, the county council's leader, **Cllr Tim Oliver** (Conservative, Weybridge) pointed to the authority's £50million investment in electric buses and the same amount in hydrogen buses in the county. There is also an on-demand electric bus service operating in some parts of Surrey including Tandridge and Mole Valley, and due to be rolled out to other areas.

Cllr Oliver told the LDRS: "We will invest whatever we possibly can. I'm a big believer that we are never going to get people out of their cars if there isn't a good alternative public transport system." He said the county council had "put the message across" to the London Mayor about the impact the expansion would have on Surrey residents, including in areas such as East Molesey where drivers will be charged if they cross Hampton Court Bridge towards Bushy Park.

The county council, as well as borough and district councils, responded to a consultation that ran over the summer on the plans, highlighting issues such as scrappage schemes, health appointments and requesting to delay the expansion. Cllr Oliver said: "We've done everything we possibly can to say: 'You can't do this, it's not fair on our residents.'"

In Thursday's Elmbridge meeting, Long Ditton Councillor **Jez Langham** (Liberal Democrat) explained his ward bordered London and agreed public transport needed to be better for residents. He pointed to the success of **trams** in cities such as Sheffield and Manchester, as well as in Wimbledon, though he mentioned the Croydon tram crash of 2016 in which seven people died. Cllr Langham said: "Nonetheless it is a successful line, and given the lack of tubes around, it would seem to be a very possible solution."

Mr Killingbeck said trams were "relatively affordable" but that there wouldn't be the option of getting a tram line in place before the August 2023 expansion. He added: "I accept, we need to strengthen public transport."

Cllr Oliver said trams could work in more urban areas of Surrey such as Guildford or Woking, but believed the on-demand buses were better for many of the more rural parts of the county. He added: "[Trams would be] a major infrastructural investment and if the government were to put some funding behind that, then I'm quite sure we would look at it."

The Mayor of London, **Sadiq Khan**, said: "Expanding the ULEZ London-wide has not been an easy decision. The easy thing for me would have been to kick the can down the road. But in the end, public health comes before political expediency. We have too often seen measures delayed around the world to tackle air pollution and the climate crisis because it's viewed as being too hard or politically inconvenient. But there's no time to waste when people's lives are on the line and we are facing a climate crisis."

Defence of Surrey M25 policing

6 January 2023



M25 protesters acting as "dead weights" means they take longer to be arrested, according to **Surrey's Police and Crime Commissioner**. **Just Stop Oil** activists brought parts of the M25 to a standstill this month as part of their ongoing campaign calling on the government to take more action on the use of fossil fuels.

Surrey's Police and Crime Commissioner, elected to hold the county's police force to account, said she had attended the protests on a day when five were arrested. She added she is "enormously proud" of Surrey Police's response. Responding to a question from Tandridge District Councillor **Mick Gillman** at a meeting of the police and crime panel on Monday (November 21), **Lisa Townsend** said she disagreed with the view that Surrey Police were not doing enough.

The meeting, at which councillors from each of the county's authorities can put questions to the PCC, heard she had also received "an awful lot" of criticism from people about police not negotiating with protesters, and not listening to their demands. She said: "It doesn't matter what reason somebody is breaking the law for. If they're breaking the law, the police will get involved regardless of what their greater or not aims. I am enormously proud of the action that Surrey Police took over these protests and I will continue to praise them for it."

Cllr Gillman's (OLRG Alliance, Burstow, Horne & Outwood) question said he had found it impossible to explain to residents when asked why more action was not being taken by Surrey Police with the protesters. He said: "Residents expect the police to apply the law without fear or favour and there is strong feeling that lack of decisive action by police when the protests started have only encouraged more protests as those involved feel they can get away with this. Can I have an assurance that you will be using all your influence with the police to insist they now apply a zero-tolerance approach to any protesters who block or disrupt the highway?"

He followed up in the meeting that one resident had said to him it should just take minutes to arrest someone, and not "hours of them sitting in the road" as had happened on previous demonstrations by the group. Mrs Townsend said: "The idea that police haven't acted swiftly I'm afraid is just rubbish and I absolutely won't accept that criticism at all."

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On a day when protesters were climbing the gantries above the M25, Mrs Townsend said she had seen four of the arrests that took place, and that once the arrest was made, the police then had to ensure it was “absolutely safe” before they went up to get protesters down. She added: “It’s not simply a case of saying ‘you’re arrested’ then they come down quietly. In two of the cases I saw, the protesters followed a well known tactic of playing dead, basically becoming a dead weight and insisting that officers go and physically remove them. That can’t happen in two minutes, although the arrest has been made. The person then needs to be lawfully and carefully removed so that everybody’s safety is protected, not least the Surrey Police officers who are up there.”

Cllr Dalton leads street night light fight

6 January 2023



Epsom and Ewell’s Councillor Hannah Dalton (Residents’ Association, Stoneleigh) said she lived in a zone five area, but when she got the last train home, she would still get the torch out on her phone in order to get home safely once off the main streets. Surrey’s Police and Crime Commissioner has hit back at a claim she “doesn’t understand what she’s talking about” as she says the decision to turn street lights on at night is the county council’s responsibility.

Lisa Townsend said street lighting has been “one of her great frustrations” with “mixed messages” at council level, as another councillor shared her experience of walking home with her phone’s torch on to get back safely.

In a heated meeting of Surrey County Council’s police and crime panel, in which councillors and non-elected members ask questions of the PCC, Runnymede Councillor **John Furey** (Conservative, Addlestone South) said residents could make a request to get lights switched back on in certain areas.

Street lights on some of Surrey’s residential roads started to be turned off at night in 2017, usually between the hours of 1am and 5am, to save money.

Epsom and Ewell’s Councillor Hannah Dalton (Residents’ Association, Stoneleigh) said she lived in a zone five area, but when she got the last train home, she would still get the torch out on her phone in order to get home safely once off the main streets.

In response the elected Conservative PCC said: “You and I have both, I suspect, walked home from train stations using the light on our phone, clutching our keys, speaking to somebody on the phone hoping that if anything happens, there will at least be a record but conscious that by the fact that we’re on our phone means we’re not paying the proper attention to our surroundings. Any woman I know has been there.”

She said she got “very annoyed” when told by officers that the reason that lights hadn’t been turned on was because police hadn’t asked for them to be. Mrs Townsend added: “That’s not the reason. It’s entirely in the county council’s gift as to whether they turn them back on or not. I’m frustrated by the mixed messaging that my office gets I’m frustrated by the different answers that I get when I ask about it.”

Calling on councillors to lobby the county council that where residents didn’t feel safe and wanted street lights switched back on, they should be, she added it was not for the police to be making the case for residents.

Mrs Townsend added: “Something should not have to happen to us, or to any other woman or man, in order for a case to be made to put the lights on. If you don’t feel safe, and it’s what the community wants, the lights should be switched on. I couldn’t be clearer in that.”

Cllr Furey had previously interrupted Mrs Townsend, saying: “This is quite out of order. The PCC doesn’t understand what she’s talking about.” He said the police would be asked for their opinion if there was a request for residents to switch lights back on, but that the request went through the county council and that if there was a case, the lights would be switched back on.

Mrs Townsend, saying she had been “rudely interrupted” by Cllr Furey, said she understood the process but was concerned about the “extra bureaucracy” and said she didn’t want to see any more delays to requests. She added: “My point is police shouldn’t have to become involved in it. If a woman doesn’t feel safe and she wants to have the lights turned on, that should be a matter for the county council. It should not be a matter for policing because the police cannot interfere on whether somebody feels safe or doesn’t.”

Surrey County Councillor **Keith Whitham** (Conservative, Worplesdon) said it was “not a black and white situation”. He said in his area he had seen successful examples of lights being switched back on where Surrey Police had supported residents in their appeals to the council. Mole Valley Councillor **Paul Kennedy** (Lib Dem, Fetcham West) said the blanket approach “simply doesn’t work” and that people had “to work really hard to try and get the lights back on.” He said he would be taking it up with the county council, but also recognised that many people in his rural area valued and wanted to

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protect their dark skies.

On the wider issues of the safety of women and girls, the meeting heard the responses to a survey carried out in April and May 2021 which showed that 45.6 per cent of the 5,427 participants felt unsafe in their neighbourhoods at night, and 55.7 per cent felt unsafe in the nearest town centre at night. A report into the findings said: “One of the main themes when respondents were asked to explain why they sometimes feel unsafe, was lighting, or lack of it in local areas. A lot of these comments mentioned the lack of street lighting in their local area, and how this made it feel unsafe when out and about after dark.”

Mrs Townsend pointed to the almost £1million received from Government to help tackle violence against women and girls in the county, including training for teachers in schools. She said: “We’re not going to police our way out of this problem. We do need to take a whole society approach.”

Neighbouring crematorium plan goes up in smoke.

6 January 2023



Reigate and Banstead borough council has shelved its plans for the area’s first crematorium despite having spent £350,000 on the project so far. The facility could have brought in more than £1.5million for the authority, but was rejected by councillors at a planning meeting in September 2021, despite the officer recommendation to approve it.

A decision then had to be taken whether to submit another application, proceed with a third party partner or appeal the decision, though it was then discovered the council could not appeal its own planning decision.
Reigate and Banstead Borough Council’s commercial ventures executive sub-committee considered a report into “project baseball” on Thursday (November 17) which detailed the closure.

The project, first brought to committee in December 2019, would have provided the borough’s first crematorium, and has been funded by the council through its reserves, or savings. Plans were refused at planning stage because of its location in the greenbelt, with more than 500 public objections to the application.

Council documents show the aim of the project was to provide a much needed and greatly improved level of service to the residents, while also bringing in income for the authority. More than 80 per cent of of dead people were cremated in the UK as at 2021, and facilities in neighbouring boroughs were found to be operating beyond their capacity.

Documents said: “[They] were not considered to serve customers, and particularly local people, well at a difficult time of life, either in terms of service, cost, environment and location/accessibility.” They went on to say the crematorium would aim to deliver “a higher quality facility and service” than the nearest competitors, closer to residents and those near the borough, and also bringing money in for the council.

Operating at full capacity, it was estimated the crematorium could have brought in more than £1.5m per year.

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