

A sign of no signs to come on ULEZ?

2 February 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

2 February 2023



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?

2 February 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.

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

2 February 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.

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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 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?

2 February 2023



The allocation of levelling up funding from central government was announced last week, with more than 100 projects given a share of £2.1 billion. 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 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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Lessons for Epsom in Mole Valley's "shouty" Local Plan struggle?

2 February 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, Ashted 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.

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?

2 February 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 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

2 February 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 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."

How Green is My Mole Valley?

2 February 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

2 February 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 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?

2 February 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, 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.

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Local poverty moves 12 year old to give up pocket money

2 February 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.

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.

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