

Will Council strikes spread to Epsom and Ewell?

19 October 2022



Reigate and Banstead Borough Council staff are using food banks and claiming Universal Credit, according to union officials, as workers go out on strike. Council employees have been offered a 1.3 per cent pay rise, labelled “insulting” by the Unison union. The strike will take place over Tuesday and Wednesday (18 and 19 October) with organisers calling for a greater increase in the face of rising inflation and the cost of living crisis.

Reigate and Banstead council staff on strike. Image credit: Darren Pepe/Surrey Live

Maggie Judd, principal local land charges officer at the council, is the union’s branch manager and said it’s the first industrial action in her 20 years at the authority. She said the council should be using some of its reserves to help staff with a better pay offer and the number of staff out on strike today showed the “strength of feeling” on the issue.

Claiming some staff were having to use food banks and topping up their wages with Universal Credit, she said: “It’s just so upsetting in this day and age, in full time employment, having to use food banks. People are having to make difficult choices.”

Unison said planning officers, parking attendants, administrators, refuse workers, cleaners, and security officers were on strike, and staff on the lower pay grades at the council would receive an additional £200. Unison south east regional organiser **Jenny Mason** said: “This pay offer is nowhere near enough. Staff feel insulted. Many employees are using food banks and their wages have to be topped up with benefits. They’ve been forced to stretch their pay to make ends meet even at the best of times.”

She called on the council to make a better offer, and on the government to provide money to protect local services, saying residents would also suffer because staff would “vote with their feet and join other local councils offering better pay”.

A council spokesperson said around seven per cent of its workforce, 40 employees, were believed to be on strike, and all services continued to operate. They said the 2022/23 pay rise was in addition to cumulative increases in the previous five years from 2017/18 to 2020/21 totalling 10.13 per cent, and additional one-off payments, such as £250 paid to all staff during the covid pandemic in August 2020 and £200 paid in April during National Insurance increases and rising living costs.

Council leader Councillor **Mark Brunt** (Conservative, Hooley, Merstham and Netherne) said the council had been making plans to minimise disruption to services since strike plans were announced. He said: “I am pleased to report that services, including our bin collections, are running as normal. We are disappointed that Unison has chosen to take this course of action. We are grateful to our dedicated staff for their ongoing hard work in challenging circumstances, and at the same time very conscious of the increased cost of living that they and their families are experiencing. However, the reality is that the council only has a finite budget from which we can offer a pay award. This is a national cost of living crisis, and increased costs and inflation are impacting the council’s budgets as well as those of households.”

Emily Coady-Stemp LDRS

Epsom and Ewell Times adds:

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council does not have a formal recognition agreement with a trade union due to the small number of union members in relation to the whole organisation. UNISON has a seat on the staff consultative group (made up of locally elected staff representatives) which is the recognised body for consultation purposes for the Council. As there is no formal recognition agreement with any union there is no formally recognised “facility time” [paid time to undertake union duties] within the Council. EEBC website statement on transparency.

A pay award for 2022/2023 of a 3% increase for staff was approved by the Council on 15th February 2022.

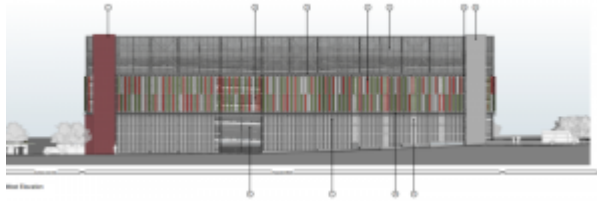
Reigate and Banstead Borough Council has 8 union representatives on its payroll and therefore do have “facility” time provided.

It seems unlikely that Epsom and Ewell Borough Council will be affected by strike action despite current inflation outstripping the pay award.

Epsom Hospital’s multi storey carpark wrong on

many levels?

19 October 2022



A council decision to refuse a new multi-storey car park at Epsom hospital is being appealed. **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council** refused an application for 600 parking spaces and changes to the Dorking Road access because of its impact on the area. An appeal by the **Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust** will be heard at the authority's town hall from November 2, and government inspectors will make a decision on the application.

Plans for the five storey car park, along with changes to surface parking and access to the site, received 125 objections and one letter in support before being refused by the borough council in May 2021.

Image: Stripe Consulting: West elevation multi-storey car park.

The multi-storey would have 527 parking spaces, with a further 104 spaces outside. Planning documents said that currently cars were backed up out of the existing car park, blocking the ambulance route in and out of the hospital but that the plans should help with this congestion. The hospital trust appealed the decision, which was made by councillors because the proposed development would adversely impact the area and affect the adjacent **Woodcote Conservation Area**.

Objections to the plans called for the car park to have some underground levels, which one nearby resident said would "minimise the horrific visual impact on the area". A resident of Dorking Road, **Mr S Curd**, called the plans "totally out of proportion for a residential area". He added: "We are so dismayed by the proposition that the house owners along our stretch of road were willing to sell our houses to the Trust so they can build a single storey car park that would actually add more spaces than this five storey monstrosity without desecrating the entire area."

The appeal will take place on November 2 from 10am.

Epsom Councillor challenges County "community" funding

19 October 2022



Questions have been raised about a community cash project and whether it is reaching those in Surrey who are most in need. **Surrey County Council** plans to allocate £100million over five years, with residents and community groups pitching for money for their areas. At its last cabinet meeting on September 22, £586,000 was allocated from the council's Your Fund Surrey community fund for the rebuilding of **Ripley Village Hall** and £982,000 was given to the **Old Woking and District Community Centre**.

Image: More than £500K was awarded for a community shop and cafe in Normandy from Your Fund Surrey. Credit Surrey County Council.

But a motion put forward at the authority's full council meeting on Tuesday (October 11) called for the fund to be paused in next year's budget, in a financial climate that is "very different" from when it was established. **Epsom** Councillor **Jan Mason** (Residents Association, West Ewell) said in her area she had two of the county's most deprived estates, and among the lowest car ownership, meaning people couldn't necessarily travel to community facilities elsewhere. She claimed the money had been "wasted", saying she was sure some councillors had "lovely clubs" for people in middle-income areas.

Cllr Mason added: "You've taken the money from the people in my area that are on low income, and they are paying their rates, they're not getting out of that. But they're actually paying for things that no one asked them do they want to have?" Cllr Mason took issue with councillors being told to work with their communities on getting the funding and has spoken out before on the lengthy application process to get the money. She added: "I know what it's like, so don't say to people like me: 'What you've got to do Jan, is work with your communities.' Yes I do, and I've always done for 20 years."

Cllr **Denise Turner-Stewart** (Conservative, Staines South and Ashford West), cabinet member for communities and community safety, said the fund had so far given 14 projects £4.5million, with another seven applications worth more than £3.75m which could be decided by the end of the year. She added: "Many of the projects funded have focused on early intervention and prevention by promoting the health and well being of residents. "Funded projects have provided

residents with a safe space to exercise, socialise and learn new skills. Bringing communities together on projects has helped reduce social isolation and there are numerous examples where projects have led to new connections being build out in our communities.”

She also announced that £50,000 would be allocated to each member for their area, aiming to simplify the fund from early 2023. Cllr **George Potter** (Liberal Democrat, Guildford East) called the announcement a “rabbit pulled out of the hat” and questioned if it should come in the middle of a debate and not via a leader’s statement or at a select committee. He said he welcomed the simplification of the process, hoping it might help some of areas of high deprivation in his division, though he raised concerns about rising costs of borrowing on the fund.

Cllr **Nick Darby** (Dittons and Weston Green Residents, The Dittons), putting forward the failed motion to pause the funding, said it was a question of “affordability, pure and simple” and not a question of not wanting to support communities. He said: “We are borrowing £100m or would be if it goes all the way through, and we cannot afford at the moment to do this.”

Council leader Cllr **Tim Oliver** (Conservative, Weybridge) called the “knee-jerk” move “premature at the very least”, saying the next year’s budget would be looked at over the coming weeks and a decision could be made. He said the council would continue to be prudent in budgeting, prioritising services to the most vulnerable children and families, but that the administration would not “abandon our residents and communities”.

Cllr Oliver added: “We should be optimistic in our ability to overcome these challenges. We have a track record of facing up to issues and finding solutions.”

Warnings of County bankruptcy?

19 October 2022



Surrey County Council is calling on the government to delay **social care reforms** which it is claimed could “bankrupt” the authority. Plans for more generous means testing and an £86,000 cap on care costs are due to come in from October 2023, but councillors have raised serious concerns on the impact it could have on finances. Surrey County Council, which was last week called on to use its status as a “top Tory authority” in lobbying government for more funding ahead of winter pressures on the NHS, has voted to call for a delay to the social care changes.

A meeting of full council on Tuesday (October 11) approved a motion to ask for more time to prepare for the roll out of the plans, which could cost the council up to an additional £40million a year.



Cllr Bernie Muir - SCC

Calling adult social care “the key issue of our time” **Councillor Bernie Muir** (Conservative, Epsom West), putting forward the motion, said Surrey was an “outlier”, with nearly two thirds of residents funding their own care. Cllr Muir said many of those would qualify for funding under the new plans, therefore needing a detailed means test and said without government funding the plans “simply would not be financially viable”.

She called the numbers “staggering” and said the timescale was “not practical” because of needing to means test an additional 9,500 to 12,000 people, on top of already “extremely challenging” staffing problems. Cllr Muir said: “With the rapidly ageing population and increase in those who have complex needs, it is clear that we have to find a way to pay for social care needs and these need to change in order to help meet the challenge. Surrey County Council supports the government’s desire to tackle this long term issue. But for Surrey the current proposals would appear to be untenable.”

Seconding the motion, **Riasat Khan** (Conservative, Woking North) said it was estimated that the county council could face a funding gap of between £8-20m in 2023/24, rising to £25-40m in 2024/25. He also said somewhere between 85 to 300 extra trained social workers would be needed “within a very tight timescale”.

Cllr Khan said: “Given that we already have resourcing issues, this will be extremely challenging.” Cllr **Will Forster**

(Liberal Democrat, Woking South) said the cumulative cost to the council by 2033 could be as high as £3.2billion, which he said “terrified” him. He said: “That is unsustainable. That would bankrupt this council, resulting in us abolishing all services to keep that bill going.”

The **County Councils Network**, which represents 36 English councils, also called for delays to the reforms, which it otherwise supports. The organisation said they could lead to longer waits for care packages, and would add to “a workforce crisis” being faced by authorities at the moment, with inflation also set to add £3.7bn in additional costs to existing services by 2023.

The motion, carried by members, said the council would continue to work with central government to get money to “fully fund reforms across the decade” and push for a delayed and phased introduction of the reforms. As well as this, the council will continue to develop the new Integrated Care Systems for a more joined up approach to health and social care and continue its commitment of tackling health inequalities across the county.

“Sorry” is not such a hard word for Surrey

19 October 2022



Surrey County Council’s leader said the authority will “learn lessons” from problems which left 150 families without school transport. Issuing an apology on behalf of the council, **Councillor Tim Oliver** said the authority had to “hold its hands up” after children, many with additional needs, had to find alternative travel arrangements. The cabinet member for education and learning, **Councillor Clare Curran** (Conservative, Bookham and Fetcham West), echoed his apology to the “families who have had such anxiety and delays” since the start of term.

Image: Tim Oliver Surrey County Council leader – credit Surrey Live

In a full council meeting on Tuesday (October 11) Cllr Oliver (Conservative, Weybridge) said a change in policy, along with increased demand and driver shortages, led to a backlog in processing applications. He added: “This has been a very complex and difficult situation and we have to hold our hands up on occasions like this to say that we have let some people down. However, I know that the home to school transport team have been working day and night alongside our customer services team to help as many families as they can.”

He committed to members that the authority would learn lessons from the beginning of the school year.

At the start of term, nearly 150 families were left without school transport as the authority attempted to work through more than 500 applications.

Parents came forward to the LDRS* with stories of long journeys on public transport and children who weren’t able to stay for the whole school day because of sibling pick ups and drop offs. A council spokesperson at the time said there had been an increase in staffing as well as temporary financial allowances being given to families to make alternative arrangements.

Cllr Nick Darby (Dittons and Weston Green Residents, The Dittons) thanked local media for bringing attention to the issue and said there had been a “woeful lack of communication” with families when transport was withdrawn or delayed before the start of the school term. He added: “Lessons need to be learned, and quickly, to avoid any repetition. Sufficient resources in place well in advance, regular communication. This year [there was] none of that, the problem could have been identified months ago. Sorry may be the hardest word but here it is entirely appropriate, as you have said leader, addressed to our numerous left-behind children, their left-behind and stressed parents, our left-behind officers doing their best to sort out the problems.”

Cllr Curran said it was not the intention that a new policy, which said individual transport would only be agreed in extenuating circumstances, would push more parents through the appeals process.

Meeting documents also showed that no SEND (Special Education and Needs Disability) children had had their solo transport removed since the new policy was implemented. She said: “I repeat and reinforce the leader’s apology to those families who have had such anxiety and delays in the recent weeks related to home to school travel assistance.”

Saying the council chamber had been turned into a “political environment”, Cllr Oliver admitted that though the authority’s ambition was to ensure that no one in Surrey was left behind, “that isn’t currently the case”. He added: “But it is our ambition and it will remain our ambition to make sure that we do look after every vulnerable member of this county, whether that’s a family or a child or any resident.”

Cllr Curran confirmed a review was being carried out into what had gone wrong.

See our earlier report: Families ‘in limbo’ as SCC fails on school transport

*LDRS BBC’s Local Democracy Reporting Service with which Epsom and Ewell Times is in partnership

Re so la - “a very good place to start”?

19 October 2022



Guildford’s MP has labelled a “blanket ban” on solar farms “unwise” and says she supports a bid by the **University of Surrey** for a site outside of the town. The plans, put forward by the university for a solar farm across three fields, are described as an “essential component” of the university’s target to be net-zero by 2030.

Early plans for the site can be found in a request for an environmental impact assessment screening submitted by SSE Energy Solutions to **Guildford Borough Council**. A planning application has not yet been submitted for the approximately 21.6 hectare site, called Blackwell solar farm in documents.



Angela Richardson MP Conservative Guildford

Angela Richardson MP (Conservative) said on Twitter: “There is a planning application for a solar farm in my constituency which I support as it will help my local university meet its net zero aims by 2030. A blanket ban on solar farms would be unwise. Should be looked at on a case by case basis.”

The land is currently being used as farm land, and plans show the panels, of a maximum height of around 3 metres, could be surrounded by two-metre high fencing, with CCTV cameras on four-metre poles.

PM Liz Truss could ban solar panel installations from most farms in England, with **The Guardian** reporting on Monday (October 10) that, **Ranil Jayawardena**, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, was understood to oppose solar panels on agricultural land. It also said he had asked that the definition of “best and most versatile” land be broadened to include the current 3b grade of agricultural land.

The screening request submitted to the borough council said though there were different grades of land on the fields, the whole site would be farmed as grade 3b. Documents also showed the applicants did not think the site would be visible from nearby villages or the nearby Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, though two farmhouses nearby could have a partial view of it.

In a release about the project, being put forward with **SSE Energy Solutions**, The University of Surrey said once complete the site could generate enough energy to supply the equivalent of 4,000 UK homes each year.

Professor Bob Nichol, the university’s executive lead for climate change, said: “The University of Surrey community is dedicated to doing our bit to minimise global warming and our move to home-generated solar power is an important part of our plans. Big strides like this are essential for organisations to reduce their carbon footprints. Increasing our solar generation is just one part of Surrey’s sustainability story and our road to ‘Net Zero’.”

A university spokesperson said: “The University of Surrey is putting finishing touches to the application for the solar farm proposals we announced for consultation in May. We have not yet submitted a formal planning application, but will do soon. We welcome the support for this important green energy plan from our local MP and other local stakeholders who have engaged with us. We look forward to progressing the proposal, which is an important part of our sustainability story and our road to ‘Net Zero’.”

Claygate not to suffer children's home

19 October 2022



Plans for a children's home in a **Claygate** cul-de-sac have been refused despite support from **Surrey County Council** which needs more beds for Surrey's vulnerable children. The application for a home for up to five children had received 25 letters of objection, ahead of a meeting of **Elmbridge Borough Council's** east area planning sub-committee on Monday (October 10).

But officers also told the meeting a petition signed by 124 people had been submitted with a late objection letter. The borough council's officers had recommended approval of the application for the home in Chadworth Way, but a motion to refuse the plans, put forward by Councillor **Mike Rollings** (Liberal Democrats, Claygate) was voted through by members.

While the meeting heard that the company putting forward the application, **HFM Care**, did not have experience running children's homes, officers said this was not something that would come under a planning consideration, and nor was the impact it may have on neighbouring property prices.

Surrey County Council supported the application because it would help with its aims to house more Surrey children within the county. In July 2022 just under 40 per cent of the children looked after by the county council were in homes in Surrey, with the authority aiming to increase that number to 80 per cent.

Councillor **Gill Coates** (Thames Ditton & Weston Green Residents' Association, Hinchley Wood and Weston Green) questioned the county council's support, but said she could see where the applicant was coming from wanting to house children in the currently residential property. She said: "You'd have to have a heart of stone not to want children from troubled backgrounds to be looked after in domestic properties of this type, in this sort of location."

But with flooding risks in the area, and in the house in particular, having been raised in the meeting and the potential for disruption highlighted by an objector to the plans, Cllr Coates said she still had questions on if it was the right property. She said: "That's effectively saying, I could put a shed at the end of my garden and employ somebody with 30 years experience in childcare and say, I want to run a children's home from it. "And Surrey will say: 'Well, we need the space. So, yes.' I think it's not good enough."

The home would cater for children who had been victims of child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation. **Yasemin Dervis**, from HFM Care, said the children would mostly be from the first group and would be "quieter and more introverted". She added: "If anything it will actually be a much quieter home than most children's homes that [the objector had] been a part of. The home will operate like a normal family home, children will go to school during the week, do their homework, go to bed at a reasonable hour. During the weekends, they will go and off and see their family and do other activities."

The meeting heard the residential house was on a three-year lease to the company, and that both Surrey County Council and **Ofsted** had been supportive of the home.

The home was refused because of flooding risks and the impact of the proposed home on the neighbouring residents.

14 against 59 = 70? Dilemma for Headley

19 October 2022



Councillors have been warned to "be under no illusions" that a plan for 70 homes at Headley Court could be progressed as they rejected an application for 59 homes on the same site. A long history of applications on the green belt site is set to continue, with various parts of it currently under appeal and the district council's local plan currently under examination.

Mole Valley District Council's development management committee meeting on Wednesday (October 6) refused the application by **14 votes to zero**, with four abstentions, in line with the officers' recommendations. After outline permission was granted in December 2020 for up to 70 homes on the site, it could now see a previous application for 70 homes approved, after an appeal was lodged with government inspectors.

The site, former Ministry of Defence land, is located over the road from the NHS Seacole Centre, used as a temporary hospital during the coronavirus pandemic and as a temporary mortuary.

Developers warned during the meeting that if councillors rejected the scheme for 59 homes then the 70 home plan would go ahead if granted on appeal, despite having previously offered to take the larger plans off the table.

Tony Williamson, representing **Angle Property**, said: “Be under no illusion, if this application is refused tonight, and approval is granted by the planning inspectorate then the 70 unit scheme will be implemented and progressed. The concessions offered in this application will be lost. In that scenario, I’m sure the local residents will not be thanking this committee.”

The previous application, deferred from a November 2021 meeting had been appealed by the developer for non-determination. Subsequently, a June meeting of the development management committee concluded it would have refused the application, had it not been sent to central government for a decision.

The latest refused plans included three two-bedroom, 28 three-bedroom, 17 four-bedroom and 11 five-bedroom homes, with eight of them being affordable. Officers described the housing mix as “unacceptable” because a three-bed home sold under shared ownership “would not prove attractive due to affordability issues”. The district council’s local plan, currently undergoing inspection at government level, identifies the Headley Court site as a whole for 120 homes.

There is still an appeal on the east part of the site for 14 senior living homes in the listed building there and redevelopment of the rest of the site for 100 new-build senior living homes. Headley Parish Councillor **Jane Pickard** said the village was at risk of doubling in size, and that the new plans had seen a shift away from smaller homes. She added: “We are prepared for a major increase in the size of our community, but want it to be done in a way which enhances rather than damages the semi rural character in the green belt.”

Cllr **Tim Hall** said he knew of at least three planning applications around Headley Court and Headley road, “all of which have serious transport implications”. He said: “This needs to be linked together. Because Headley Road, as has been said previously by the residents, is not a great highway. It’s a rural Surrey lane, in the nicest possible way.”

Will “Top Tory” Surrey County lobby Coffey?

19 October 2022

A council chief has called on select committee members to use their status as a “top Tory” authority to influence health spending at government level. Calling ambulances backed up outside hospitals “dangerous” and saying “we don’t want old people on trolleys in corridors”, one of the council’s health directors said it would take everyone working together to get through the winter.

Surrey County Council’s adults and health select committee heard on Wednesday (October 6) from representatives from Surrey Heartlands Integrated Care System (ICS), South East Coast Ambulance Service (SECAmb) and Frimley Health and Care ICS.

As the health organisations set out their plans for winter pressures, and commitment to working together to cope, members heard of current issues including Frimley Park hospital beds being nearly 100 per cent full most of the time and systems issues causing delays in ambulance handover times.

Liz Bruce, joint executive director for adult social care and integrated commissioning (Surrey County Council and Surrey Heartlands ICS), said she “absolutely agreed” that ambulances backed up outside hospitals was “high risk and dangerous to everybody else in the community”. She said: “We don’t want old people on trolleys in corridors, and therefore we’re all in this together.” She highlighted the importance of the “whole system” working together, saying improvements were “everybody’s responsibility”.

The director said: “What can this committee do to help us? A Conservative council, a top Tory council, you can help us by influencing government around funding nationally for hospital discharge and social care, and how we support sick people safely to go into hospital and come out again. Because we don’t want to see elderly people go into long term care when they don’t need to.”

While the government had announced £500million for health care over the winter, she said it was not yet clear how it would be allocated or if it was “truly new money”. Saying she expected the winter to be “extremely challenging”, she added: “It’s very obvious that we’re going into significant and stark problems in our system for people in discharge. I’ve asked [my team] to build, very quickly, a business continuity plan around with winter discharge.”

The meeting heard from **South East Coast Ambulance** and **Surrey Heartlands** representatives about what was being done to improve ambulance handover times. Moving towards electronic patient records, virtual wards and daily meetings were all hoped to help with delayed handovers which were made worse by sicker patients and “systems problems”.

SECAmb’s deputy director of operations **Mark Eley** said he was having to balance offering staff overtime, particularly in the current financial situation, with the risk they might “work too hard, wear themselves out” and go off sick. He said: “Staff are becoming very weary and worn from the last two years, so I’m not pushing too hard because as I increase my overtime, I can increase my sickness if I’m not careful.”

The issues with Frimley Park hospital beds being full “almost all of the time” were also said to be caused by not being able to discharge patients who were well enough to go home.

County children home challenges

19 October 2022



The challenges facing Surrey County Council's bid for more children's homes include high property prices, competition for places and no priority for the authority for homes in the area. Officers outlined plans to nearly double the number of spaces available for Surrey children in the county at a meeting of the children, families, lifelong learning & culture select committee on Tuesday (October 4).

The meeting heard of the authority's aim to house 80 per cent of its looked after children within the county, a number that in July 2022 was just under 40 per cent. An officers' report showed that in July, 45 of the 118 children in children's homes placements were living in Surrey, but this did not include those in residential schools, parental assessment units and in "unregulated" placements.

If these groups were included, then the number was 49 of 147 children in Surrey at that time. Plans to increase the number of children staying in the county would mean increasing the number of beds available by an additional 45 just in children's homes, or 69 to include all residential provision types.

Currently there are 28 beds in nine children's homes that are run by Surrey County Council, following the closure of one in February within 24 hours of an Ofsted inspection which said residents were at risk "of significant harm".

There are also 26 beds available in six children's homes run by external providers, but not included in total figures are 12 registered beds in two specialist services solely for young people with sexually harmful behaviours.

Councillor Jonathan Essex (Green, Redhill East) asked if there was an option to bring more of the residential services in house at the council, highlighting costs in the report which showed the weekly cost of a placement in a council-run children's home ranging on average from £3,177 to £4,294. This was in comparison to an average weekly cost in July on the open market of £5,232 per week.

The meeting heard that running children's homes "wasn't easy" and that having other providers could mean more support for the authority. Meeting documents show that the council's intention would be to run the new homes in the first instance, but consideration would be given to working with "trusted and high-quality" external providers. Documents also showed that Surrey faced challenges with its location near to London, which contributed to "increased competition" for beds in children's homes and some of the highest property prices in the country outside of London.

High costs of living made it hard for new providers to set up in the county which in turn meant "upward pressure to the cost of placements in Surrey". The county council also does not have priority access to local homes in the area, and other local authorities can refer children to homes in the county in placements which may last for several years. There is also a need to increase the number of places available because of the number of children in "unlawful" placements in Surrey.

Unregulated placements are not subject to Ofsted inspections but the county council is responsible for quality assuring all unregulated provision where looked after children will be placed. As of September 12 2022, there were five Surrey children looked after by the county council and aged under 16 in "unlawful" placements, so called after a change to legislation in September 2021.

Tina Benjamin, the county council's director - corporate parenting, said: "Unregulated, unlawful placements are not something we ever want to use and we try to do everything we can to avoid them. Unfortunately the national lack of placements sometimes means that we have to." She said as well as looking for other placements for the children, the authority would work with providers to try to get their Ofsted registration.

Plans to re-purpose £18 million of capital funding to bring about the additional capacity will be brought to the council's November cabinet meeting.

Housing plan flying in the face of opposition

19 October 2022



Wisley Airfield town plan: We report on a Surrey housing application that illuminates issues all local boroughs face today [Ed.] : To paraphrase from a popular TV show: “Wrong location, wrong location, wrong location.” That’s the message from campaigners against plans for 1,700 homes on the former Wisley Airfield. They say traffic concerns, an abundance of wildlife and trying to fit an urban development in a rural area are all reasons for the plans not to go ahead.

The former airfield is located alongside the A3 and is just over a mile from junction 10 with the M25, where another set of controversial works started this month. It was allocated as a new settlement in **Guildford Borough Council’s** local plan for around 2,000 homes, shops and offices. An outline planning application was submitted to the borough council by **Taylor Wimpey** for the first 1,700 in the summer, and residents have until Monday (October 3) to comment on the plans.

There are so far 168 objections to the outline plans on the borough council’s planning portal and comments received after the deadline will ordinarily also be considered. On a walk around the current site, which was used as an airfield from 1942 until 1972 and still has a tarmac landing strip in the middle, campaigner **Chris Campbell**, from Villages against Wisley New Town, told the LDRS he did not believe a new town should be built there. “Wrong location, wrong location, wrong location,” he said. “Location is everything and as you can see, this is not the location for a town.”

Around the old runway, the site is used as farmland, with two tractors out on the fields on the day of our visit. We also see several kites in the air, and pass “Snakes Field”, so-called, the campaigners tell me, because there are grass snakes, slow worms and amphibians living there. They’ve also seen badgers and owls on and around the site, and Mr Campbell raises concerns particularly about the impact of an increase in the number of dogs walking through woodland, a special protection area, between the site and the A3.

He said the “last thing” that’s needed for the ground nesting birds on the site, including the Dartford warbler, night jar and woodlark, would be the additional 400 dogs that could come with the new homes.

A suitable alternative natural green space (**SANG**) will be allocated on the site to “avoid adverse effects on the integrity” of the special protection area according to the borough council’s local plan. Taylor Wimpey documents state that the SANG provision is a “bespoke provision agreed with **Natural England**” and that more than half of the site will be accessible open space, as well as a 20 per cent biodiversity net gain on the site.

Frances Porter, chair of Ockham and Hatchford Residents’ Association, walks across the former airfield every day with her dogs. She claimed she was told at a meeting with Taylor Wimpey representatives that traffic calming measures around the new town were designed to “frustrate” motorists out of their cars. But she doesn’t think that people living in the town will be pushed out of their cars. “People haven’t got anywhere else to go,” she said. “You’re going to need a car; you can’t get the bus.”

The borough council’s local plan identifies requirements for the site including a “significant bus network” going to Effingham Junction and/or Horsley stations, as well as Guildford and Cobham. It would also require a cycle network to key destinations including stations, Ripley and Byfleet “to a level that would be attractive and safe for the average cyclist”.



Frances Porter, Imogen Jamieson And Chris Campbell of Villages Against Wisley New Town. Credit Emily Coady-Stemp

Imogen Jamieson, vice chair of Ockham Parish Council, does not think the narrow roads surrounding the site can

support the additional traffic, and isn't convinced cycle lanes would be used anyway. She said: "You're not going to pack your three children onto the back of bikes and cycle them to Horsley to get to school in the pouring rain." The parish councillor also said she believes it's a "myth" that so many new homes are needed, though she does acknowledge that there is a need for places for people to live. She said the environmental impacts of building new homes are far greater than re-purposing and retrofitting existing buildings, which can be done in towns and urban areas.

On top of the plans for the airfield, a further 1,500 new homes are planned in a three-mile radius of the site, but Mrs Jamieson said homes would be better built in areas where there are already transport links, employment opportunities and facilities such as doctors and schools. She said: "Here you're entirely reliant on a car. It's positioned right by the strategic road network. So it's going to mean that people are constantly in their cars trying to access everything." She claimed there was an over-allocation of homes in the local plan, which came to light when the census released in June showed the figures used to draw up the plan were too high. "I'm still trying to understand the way housing is delivered in the country," she said. "I think it's a bit of a myth that we need homes in the way that we're constantly told we do."

A Taylor Wimpey spokesperson said: "The former Wisley Airfield is allocated for development in the Guildford Borough Council local plan and our proposals have been carefully considered following close engagement with key stakeholders and the local community. We understand the concerns of local residents regarding traffic and our proposals include a number of measures to encourage the use of sustainable transport options, including new bus services and cycle routes. The design and layout of the development has been considered with the surrounding area in mind and we will continue to consult with residents on this as our plans progress."

Guildford Borough Council was contacted for comment.

Local plan documents: <https://www.guildford.gov.uk/localplan/2015-2034>

Wisley Airfield development page: <https://www.wisleyairfield.com/>

Image: Wisley Airfield plans. Credit Taylor Wimpey and Vivid

Tongham Tories Tetchy Tongues Ticked Off

19 October 2022



Epsom and Ewell Times's inspiration, "**The Guildford Dragon**" was a victim of inappropriate comments from two Guildford Councillors. Report from LDRS:

Two Guildford councillors breached the authority's code of conduct in calling a journalist "pea-brained" and "grubby". A hearings sub-committee of the borough council on Tuesday (September 27) concluded that one member should apologise for the remarks and another should face formal censure.

In a series of events described by the investigating officer as "unfortunate" and "regrettable" that it could not have been resolved earlier with an apology, the meeting heard about emails and WhatsApp messages sent by Councillors **Paul Spooner and Graham Eyre**.

The councillors, both Conservative representatives for **Ash South & Tongham**, were accused of sending emails and messages about the editor of local news website the **Guildford Dragon**. Its editor, **Martin Giles**, complained to the council about their comments and the committee heard from the investigating officer that the facts in the case were "straightforward and not particularly in dispute".

Simon Gaucher, a partner at **Weightmans LLP**, had looked into the communications and interviewed those involved in the case, which centred around a story about Cllr Spooner being elected the Conservative group leader on the council in June 2021. The committee found that the councillors had breached the council's code of conduct regarding treating others with respect and in terms of councillors conducting themselves in "a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing your office or the Council into disrepute".

Cllr Spooner said in the meeting he disputed the fact he was acting in his capacity as a councillor, saying these were conversations held in a private forum, and there was a grey area in this respect. He asked the meeting: "If I go and I order a curry from the local tandoori and the proprietor greets me as: 'Hello Councillor Spooner', does that mean that I'm acting as a councillor or acting as someone collecting a curry for the family?"

In his report on the issue, Mr Gaucher said he had considered Cllr Spooner's article 10 right to freedom of expression and particularly political expression "which is afforded a high degree of protection". He added: "**Mr Giles** is a journalist writing about and commenting on political matters so must be expected to receive a certain amount of comment on his reporting by those he reports about. However, the comments made by Cllr Spooner which I have found to result in a failure to comply with the code are merely personal and abusive ("So you can get stuffed" and "pea brained editor") and cannot be categorised as political expression."

He said the same considerations applied in Cllr Eyre's case when he called Mr Giles a, "grubby little boss" in an email to one of the site's reporters, David Reading. The meeting also heard that the context for the emails and WhatsApps was Mr Giles contacting the late councillor Richard Billington, at a time when he was ill, to corroborate what he had been told by Cllr Spooner, and a typo in a message which seemed to call Cllr Spooner untruthful.

The report stated: "Cllr Spooner had indicated that one of the reasons he was so angry about Mr Giles's behaviour was because he had chosen to contact Cllr Billington despite knowing he was seriously ill. This may provide a degree of context and mitigation it does not justify Cllr Spooner's response."

Cllr Eyre, who was not present at the sub-committee, told the LDRS before the meeting: "I don't believe I was in breach of the code of conduct because I sent the email from my private email account and it contained thought to someone I had known for years." Cllr Spooner made clear in the meeting he would not apologise to Mr Giles or the Guildford Dragon, and on this basis the committee decided he should be subject to formal censure.

He will also be sent a formal letter of advisement about his conduct.

Cllr Eyre will be sent a formal letter of advisement about his conduct and asked to apologise to Mr Giles.

A borough council spokesperson said before the meeting: "Councillors are routinely reminded of their duties at committee meetings. They are reminded to disclose any interests they may have in respect of matters to be considered. We review our code of conduct at least every four years. The next review is due following the borough council elections next year. Councillors complete training that we arrange for them on a regular basis. The next training is due to take place in October 2022. We endeavour to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by our Councillors."

Speaking after the meeting, Mr Giles said the messages sent by Cllr Spooner had come about because he had been clarifying information he was given, when "journalists are often criticised for not checking or double-checking facts".