

Getting teed off by golf club's landfill designs

A Surrey golf club has been accused of being a “landfill site in disguise” after anger at the sheer volume of heavy lorries that could be needed to drop waste off at the site.

The owners of Merrist Wood Golf Club, off Holly Lane, are hoping to redesign and reconstruct the existing course including water features and the creation of a heathland and wetland habitat.

The remodelling would include making use of nearly 600k tonnes of recovered ‘inert materials’ across the 55-hectare site. ‘Inert waste’ is discarded materials that do not biodegrade or chemically react with other substances.

These plans, which are currently under consideration, could see around 141 Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) movements at the sites for up to 256 days a year across the possible two years of the renovation project. A six-hour period is proposed for these movements meaning at peak times there could be one HGV movement every 2.5 minutes.

The planning application has received 55 objections and only one letter of support. Opposing the application, locals have raised concerns the HGVs would exacerbate an already congested road and increase wear and tear. One resident said: “Everything is just a constant worry. We moved here for peace and now it feels like it has been taken away.”

Road safety issues were highlighted by some residents, suggesting footpaths will be “destroyed” and there will be “no safe place” for students and parents to cross the road for Merrist Wood College and Fairlands School. Locals expressed fears about how the HGV movement would impact on ‘school run’ times and rush hour, citing the narrow lanes as already dangerous.

Despite residents’ anxieties about the development’s impact on the road, Surrey County Council (SCC) officers have concluded that “there are no unacceptable highway and transport impacts”.

The applicant argues the many road journeys over the construction period will be less disruptive than traffic caused by piece-meal course maintenance. As the source of the inert soils is still unknown, it is likely routes from both the north and the south will be used to access the site.

Comments asked what ‘inert materials’ will consist of, with some dubious of where the matter will be sourced. Sceptical commentators have described it as a “landfill scheme in disguise” with the amount of material suggesting it is being “dumped on the site”.

Rather than ‘borrowing’ existing soil on the course, inert waste is described as the ‘best way’ to create new terrain. Planning documents state if inert waste material was not used in the project, ‘virgin’ soil would have to be used.

Constructed in 1996, the applicant argues the 18-hole golf course has ‘deteriorated’ and “suffers from a number of underlying design defects”. Taking over the course in 2020, Lavershots Oaks Ltd complained the club has a “poor reputation’ and is ‘failing’ as a sports club and as a business.

The Guildford MP Angela Richardson has written to residents affected by the Merrist Wood Golf Club planning application to alert them to the proposals and the consultation. She raised concerns about the traffic disturbance, congestion caused and whether detritus will be left on the ground.

The Wooldridge Group (formerly known as Lavershot Oaks), which specialises in civil and contract build projects, filed for administration on February 5 this year. The Wooldridge Group has been approached for comment.

Consultation on the application ends April 16.

Image: Entrance to Merrist Wood Golf Club. (Credit: Google Street View)



Low morale hits Surrey Police

Up to 20 per cent of Surrey Police officers want to leave due to low morale and poor pay, according to a new report.

Police Federation of England and Wales (PFEW) found that 84 per cent of officers had experienced stress, low mood or anxiety over the studied 12 months. Of 2,276 Surrey police officers, 460 responded to the Pay and Morale Survey from November 2023.

PFEW issued its survey to support its national campaign for fair pay for police officers and an independent pay mechanism. It found nearly 80 per cent of officers said they were unsatisfied with their pay, with 69 per cent saying their workload was 'too high'.

Tom Arthur, Branch Secretary of Surrey Police Federation, said: "This year shows yet again that officer morale stays at an all-time low, some 90% of those surveyed confirming this - with pay and feeling undervalued by the Government being the main reasons.

"One in five of my colleagues in Surrey are actively seeking alternative employment. Forces and the Government cannot keep ignoring this and making platitudes to the public about how they are serious in dealing with Law and Order."

Polling 460 officers, 20 per cent of respondents said they intend to resign from Surrey Police either 'within the next two years' or 'as soon as [they] can'. This was slightly lower than the national average (22 per cent) in the PFEW survey.

Due to the high number of staff leavers Surrey has a group monitoring resignations with leavers' questionnaires and stay interviews. A recent PEEL inspection into Surrey Police found it still "lacks understanding" why staff or recruits might leave the force.

Adrian Rutherford, Director of People Services for Surrey Police and Sussex Police said: "We have seen our largest police officer recruitment drive in a decade; welcoming hundreds of new officers into our organisation and onto the streets of our communities."

However, 12 per cent of police staff posts were vacant at the end of November 2023, according to a Surrey Police and Crime panel report. Approximately 73 per cent of respondents from Surrey Police said that they would not recommend joining the police to others.

The report found 85 per cent feel 'worse off' financially now than they were five years ago and 16 per cent 'never' or 'almost never' have enough money to cover all their essentials. Whilst police officers received a 7 per cent pay rise in 2023, they have still seen a 16 per cent real-terms pay cut since 2011.

Supporting and protecting Surrey's workforce was found to 'require improvement' in the latest PEEL report (December 2023). The force had not completed a well-being survey in three years, or the Bluelight self-assessment to understand what affects good or poor well-being.

Officers responding to the PFEW survey said they do not feel respected by the Government (95 per cent) and they do not feel valued within the service (65 per cent) and over half (54 per cent) said they were experiencing low morale.

Surrey Police said it had a wellbeing strategy "which places officer and staff wellbeing at the heart of the organisation". Indeed, the force's mental health app, Backup Buddy, won best innovation at the InsideOut Awards 2021. However, according to the survey, morale and pride in the force have dipped since then.

Adrian added: "Our police officers undertake a demanding and often dangerous role, ensuring that we keep Surrey safe and protect the most vulnerable from harm. As a force, we are doing all that we can to ensure that we're alleviating some of the pressures faced by those on the front-line.

"We will be looking closely at the findings of the survey, alongside our recent internal employee opinion survey to look at what we can do to improve matters. We wish to be an employer of choice and will continue to work with our colleagues in the Federation, as well as our own people, to ensure we're doing all that we can to demonstrate the high value we place on our officers and staff and to be the best employer that we can be."

Image Dave Connor CC 2 by deed (altered placing officers in front of Surrey Police HQ entrance)



Epsom and Ewell candidates dominate Police Commissioner election

Nominations have closed in the race to become the next Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) with four candidates across the parties lined up. Two of the four candidates are Epsom and Ewell councillors.

The Epsom and Ewell Times has invited all candidates to submit statements to our publication and we hope to publish them in the days ahead.

The PCC role oversees the work of Surrey Police and its Chief Constable and holds them and their decisions to account. They set the strategic direction and aims for the force through the Police and Crime Plan.

In the running on May 2 are Lisa Townsend (the current PCC and Conservative), Paul Kennedy (Liberal Democrat), Kate Chinn (Labour) and Alex Coley (Independent).

Salaries of the PCC are decided on a national basis and vary depending on the size of the force; the commissioner for Surrey will receive a salary of £73,000 per annum.

PCCs are also responsible for all funding relating to policing, including the police precept, and to work with the Chief Constable to set the force budget in line with priorities and deliver value for money for residents.

Providing a link between the police and Surrey residents, the PCC listens to the public's concerns and works with the Chief Constable to create improvements.

Lisa Townsend, Conservative

Looking to get a second term, one of Lisa's major flagships is campaigning to end violence against women and girls. She has been working on various community projects including Safer Streets tackling anti-social behaviour and support services for victims.

In a post on X, formerly Twitter, Lisa said her immediate priorities are maintaining and growing the police force, as well as working with the Chief Constable on 'back to basics' policing. She said this includes "ensuring Surrey Police do what only they can: investigating and solving crime, not sitting in hospitals."

Alex Coley, Independent

Previously a Digital Lead for the Met Police, Alex said he wants "more bobbies on the beat" in Surrey. Headline policies include petitioning to parliament to change the way police funding is allocated in the country; so that the government contributes more for policing in Surrey than the taxpayer

Since 2018 Alex has been an Epsom and Ewell councillor as well as chairing the Crime and Disorder panel for the borough. The only independent candidate, Alex is campaigning to "take party politics out of policing" and put "pride and professionalism back into Surrey Police".

Paul Kennedy, Liberal Democrat

Hoping to be third-time lucky is Paul- a former barrister, accountant, actuary and Mole Valley councillor. Some of his campaign policies include "bringing back community policing" and combatting offending behaviour through restorative justice, education and support for mental health and addictions.

In a press statement, Paul said: "Like many people I disagree with the idea of PCCs, but we're stuck with them for now. So, let's do the job properly." If elected, Paul said he will work with the Chief Constable to fix the issues highlighted in the December 2023 inspection report.

Kate Chinn, Labour

Councillor for Epsom and Ewell, Kate's policies include refocusing on neighbourhood-based policing and using empty shops in the town centre for a police presence. Preventative measures is another concern as Kate aims to increase support services for young people.

Kate has said that she wants to review current training to ensure police have a good understanding of domestic violence,



misogyny and sexual assault.

The deadline to register to vote is April 16, which can be done online. Elections take place on May 2, with the result announced the following day.

To vote for your preferred candidate, a valid ID must be brought to the polling station. This can include passport, driving licence, disabled or older person's Bus Pass funded by the UK Government, and a biometric immigration document. Residents without an accepted form of photo ID can apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate (VAC).

Surgery delay after hip break led to death

An elderly woman who tragically died after waiting five days for hip surgery prompted a coroner to raise concerns that a hospital is putting patients at risk of an early death.

Anne Rowland, a care home resident in Oxted, died in East Surrey Hospital after inflammation and infection of the lungs following surgery.

Ms Rowland broke her hip following a collision and fall with another care home resident who was partially sighted on February 27, 2023. She was taken to East Surrey Hospital the same day.

Coroner Anna Crawford found there was "no clinical reason" for the surgery not taking place until five days later on March 3 as the patient was "clinically fit".

She concluded that outstanding infrastructure repairs and the use of different guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) that the Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust was "placing patients at risk of early death".

NICE guidelines say that hip surgery should take place on the day of the injury or the day after. Early mobilisation is recommended for hip fracture patients to reduce the risk of complications, including pneumonia.

East Surrey Hospital uses a metric of 48 hours within which to conduct such surgery and does not use the NICE timeframe. Although the hospital has a dedicated operating theatre for trauma patients, on some occasions demand outweighs capacity.

However, the surgery did not take place because "other trauma patients were prioritised ahead of [Mrs Rowland] based upon their relative clinical need".

Operating theatre capacity at the hospital has on occasion been compromised by infrastructure failings. An entire new surgery unit is being constructed and is anticipated to be completed by 2025 at the latest. The orthopaedic theatres also need new air handling and chillers which is yet to be completed.

The coroner concluded that waiting for her operation "caused" Mrs Rowland to develop dementia and immobility. This "contributed" to her developing aspiration pneumonia following surgery. Mrs Rowland's condition deteriorated resulting in her death at East Surrey Hospital on March 31, 2023.

Ed Cetti, chief medical officer of Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust, said: "We are profoundly sorry for the delay in Mrs Rowland's hip surgery and offer our deepest sympathies to her family during this difficult time."

The Trust said that in the months since Mrs Rowland's death, it has "significantly" reduced delays in hip fracture surgery. In November 2023 59 per cent of operations occurred within 36 hours and 91 per cent within 48 hours.

Mr Cetti added: "We always strive to perform surgeries of this nature as soon as possible and monitor our performance against the 36-hour time window identified by NICE guidance. We also monitor against a 48-hour window to ensure any patients that miss the 36-hour target are not waiting longer than 48 hours.

"Recognising that not all patients are medically well enough for surgery within 36 hours, we are working on improving our performance further and reaching the 80 per cent target by the end of 2024/25."

Image: Entrance to East Surrey Hospital. Credit Get Surrey •



New SEND school blocked by Nimby?

A group of Surrey parents say they are “devastated” and fear it is back to the drawing board after plans for a ‘much needed’ special needs school will likely be quashed.

Planning permission was approved by Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) in March 2023 for a state-run Betchwood Vale school on the site of the vacant Chalcraft Nursery and garden centre. Around 82% of kids with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) have to commute out of the district to go to a specialist school. One mum said she covers 80 miles a day on the school run to access education for two of her children

But a single claimant took it to the High Court to challenge the procedure on the way the decision was made on two grounds: application of the environmental habitat regulations and traffic flow. The court has said the first point is valid and thrown out the second.

Using his delegated authority, the council’s Deputy Chief Executive decided not to defend the legal challenge, asking the court to quash the decision, given the legal costs.

Originally scheduled to open in September 2023, parents say they were thrilled to think there might ‘finally be a school locally’ to cater for their needs.

Elizabeth Marett, mum and campaigner for the school, told the Local Democracy Reporting Service that she feels education for disabled children is not being prioritised. She said: “I am disappointed, angry and upset with the local residents who have taken it upon themselves to oppose the schools because they are essentially saying the education of disabled children is unimportant.”

“There are children who need schools, and if this isn’t built, their future is very bleak. Is there any way we can convince these people that what they’re doing is really damaging for the local children of the future? These schools are hard to come by. There are so many children in the county that need to go to this school.” Other parents called it a “bitter blow” to the SEND community.

Elizabeth said some children in her son’s class “have nowhere else to go” as mainstream school is not possible for children with anxiety and complex needs.

Betchwood Vale school is likely to be for high-functioning autistic children, who do not have other learning disabilities, if it goes ahead. It would teach children between seven and 19 years old, providing places for around 60 pupil in its first year and going up to 180 children over a few years.

Currently, more than 100 autistic children who live in Mole Valley and require a specialist place go to school out of their district, meaning they spend a long time every day travelling large distances between home and school.

One mum said she covers 80 miles a day on the school run to access education for two of her children whilst another is transported 22 miles in the opposite direction.

Fighting against the application in the planning meeting (March 2023) was an unofficial group called Ladyegate Road Residents Association Ltd (LRRRA). The group, named after a private road near the site, objected to the application because of the adverse impact on traffic flow and approach to Dorking, the negative effect on biodiversity and that no alternative options have been investigated for the site.

Planning documents reveal Surrey County Council (SCC) Highways warned of “minor” impacts to traffic on the A25 junctions as a result of the proposed school. It also added conditions of improving vehicle access on nearby Punchbowl Lane.

Cllr Joanna Slater (Conservative for Leatherhead South) said: “What is also troubling is that this has happened completely behind the scenes. Councillors did not know.”

The council’s Development Management Committee (DMC) meeting on 3 April heard that the team claim they were not informed of the SEND school decision being changed or is likely to change. A spokesperson for MVDC said it is not “unusual practice” for a decision to be taken by a senior officer under delegated authority. They said all local ward members were kept updated in the proceedings.

Cllr Slater added: “At best this is a delay to the SEND school opening. At worst, it will result in the whole project failing as the budget for planning permission has been spent.”

Clare Curran, Lead Cabinet Member for Children and Families at SCC, said: “We are disappointed with Mole Valley’s decision not to defend the judicial review. The proposed Betchwood Vale Academy is critical to achieving Surrey’s ambition that autistic children are educated closer to home.”



SCC have promised to deliver 2,440 permanent additional specialist school places in Surrey between 2019 – 2026 to create capacity for 5,760 planned places by 2030/31.

SCC said it has been advised by the Department of Education of their ongoing commitment to deliver Betchwood Vale Academy in full once a positive planning application has been confirmed.

A Mole Valley spokesperson said: “We are working as quickly as possible to get a decision from the Court. Once that is made, we will reconsult on the planning application and soon after – return the application to the Development Management Committee to make the planning decision.”

It added: “This will allow us to ensure that there is no future potential for legal challenge and that once a new decision is made, if it is to again approve the application, then the delivery of the school can start swiftly.”

The Department of Education has been contacted for comment.

The Ladygate Road Residents Association is not an official body. The Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) tried to contact the group for additional comment but was unable to do so.

Related report:

Surrey to SEND £40m for special schools

Image: Betchwood Vale SEND school plan. From Design and Access statement. Credit: Jestico + Whiles Associates Ltd.

PM confident of success in Woking

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said he was “confident” that Conservatives will hold onto Woking in the upcoming local and general elections, when he was grilled about why people should vote for a party that allowed the local council to go bankrupt.

The PM was at Woking Community Hospital April 11th where he was grilled about the fate of the Conservative party by reporters.

The PM pointed to the UK economy in response to questions about why Woking residents should vote for a party that allowed the local council to go bankrupt.

Woking Council declared bankruptcy in June 2023 after it admitted a risky investment spree into hotels and skyscrapers by its former Conservative administration.

Calling Woking’s investments a “cross-party” decision, Rishi said local councils are “in control of their own finances”, and urged they run their budgets “in a sensible manner to deliver to their residents”.

Citing the national picture, Rishi said inflation has “more than halved” to 3.4% in February 2024, wages have increased ahead of inflation, taxes have been cut and free childcare has been expanded to working families.

He added: “While we have been through a tough few years as a country, that’s been difficult for families in Surrey, I do believe that the start of this year we have turned a corner and we’re now heading in the right direction.

“Our plan is working, if we stick to our plan we can give everyone in Surrey and Woking the peace of mind that there is a brighter future for them and their family.”

Woking is set to go to the polls on May 2 to vote for a third of the council (10 seats) in the local elections. Since news first emerged about the borough’s financial crisis, his party lost control of the council, and saw its share of councillors drop to four (from 17 in 2016).

MP Jonathan Lord won 48.9% of the vote in the 2019 election, with Liberal Democrat candidate Will Forster coming second at 30.8%. One poll from Electoral Calculus predicts Jonathan will win a narrow victory of just 30.8%, with Lib Dem and Labour closely at its heels with 27.6% and 23.6% respectively.

Although the Woking MP was present during the media pool, he made no further comment.

The PM argued central government has put more funding into councils, claiming local councils have on average 7.5% more funding than 2023. A further £600m has also been put into local authorities for 2024-25.

He said: “Central government is doing its bit to support [local councils] with considerably more funding.” Despite the added



funding Woking Council said it has to make £8.4m savings for year one of its five-year financial strategy. Closing most public toilets, ending grants to voluntary and community groups, reducing dial-a-ride services and losing up to 60 staff are some of the cuts the council has made to make ends meet.

Related report:

Sunak in Surrey

Virtual care to rise under ambulance plan

Over a third of South East Coast Ambulance (SECAmb) service responses will be done remotely in a new five-year strategy. (Here “remotely” means by video call or telephone rather than sending out an ambulance.)

The NHS Trust said its care model is no longer “fit for purpose” as it prepares for a 15 per cent increase in patient demand over the next five years, at a board meeting last week (April 4). Increasing demands on the service included health care becoming more complex, the ageing population and changing areas of deprivation.

By 2029, the Trust aims that over a third of all its patients will be signposted to another service- leaving 65 per cent of patients with an ambulance response. The change will affect Surrey, Thames Valley, Kent and Medway as well as Sussex Integrated Care Systems (ICS).

Simon Weldon, CEO, reassured that SECAmb would still be there to protect and look after the sick who needed an ambulance. He added: “If patients don’t need an ambulance, we can help you get you to a place which can meet your healthcare needs.”

Urgent medical needs such as cardiac arrest, a stroke, heart attack, pneumonia, childbirth and newborn care would still be attended to by ambulances, the Trust said.

Delivering this strategy, over the next three years, SECAmb expects it to meet emergency care needs within the national standards of 7 minutes for calls for immediate life-threatening and time-critical injuries and illnesses; and 18 minutes for emergency calls.

For non-emergency patients, virtual care will be provided via an assessment by a remote senior clinician. Meeting documents said this would enable patients to be “cared for directly or referred to the most appropriate care provider”.

Investing in a data and digital strategy was highlighted as a key part of the new direction. The board heard how new technology like AI would help the SECAmb make better decisions and lead virtual consultations. These could be used to respond to patient needs in a remote and professional setting rather than sending an ambulance.

Meeting documents revealed that 88 per cent of patients received an ambulance response; but an SECAmb officer said the outcomes from the cases indicated only 30.5 per cent of patients needed clinical care.

Only 12 per cent of patients are currently referred or signposted to another service rather than receiving ambulance care; but under the new strategy for 2029, this will increase to 35 per cent.

Team Member for SEAmb, Matt Dechaine, said: “Sending a fully kitted ambulance is a very expensive way for the public purse to respond to patient needs, when other services may be able to address it in a cost-effective way.”

Covering five years, the new strategy will be carried out in three phases: designing new models of care, collaborating with partners and developing a digital strategy; implementing the change and finalising and improving the operational model. Digitalisation of the service will begin in phase 2, with electronic health records deployed by March 2025.

SEAmb identified its model as “unsustainable when challenged” from an operational, workforce and financial perspective. The Trust found it would need to employ 600 more people over the next five years to respond to demand.

Not all non-emergency patient consultations will be resolved solely over the telephone. Simon told the board that the strategy aims to “align patient needs with ambulance services”.

Over 2,000 staff, 400 volunteers and 350 members of the public have been consulted on the strategy, with the Trust saying it has been “clinically led”. System partners have also been invited to 20 sessions to share their views.

The full new SECAmb strategy is set to be published in May 2024.

Call staff at South East Coast Ambulance NHS Foundation Trust. Credit SECAmb



Psychiatric bed shortages in Surrey

A man tragically took his own life in Surrey after a mental health relapse, prompting a coroner to warn of a shortage of psychiatric beds in Surrey hospitals.

Jonathan Harris, 52, who suffered from paranoid schizophrenia, died by suicide on June 27, 2022.

If an inpatient psychiatric hospital bed had been available just days earlier, Jonathan would not have died, the coroner ruled. Coroner Anna Crawford judged that action should be taken to prevent future deaths.

Bed shortages for mental health patients in Surrey, as well as nationwide, has been an ongoing issue for NHS Trusts. Many patients are forced to move up to 60 miles away from home to receive treatment because there are few beds in their area. The court heard that this is in the context of a national shortage of suitably qualified psychiatrists.

Following a lengthy psychiatric inpatient stay in Camberley in November 2021, Jonathan was under the care of Surrey Heath Community Mental Health Recovery Service, which is part of Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust.

Jonathan was prescribed anti-psychotic medication. In February and May 2022, Jonathan requested for his medication to be reduced to fortnightly and then once every three weeks.

The reduction in medication in May 2022 was judged as “premature” by the coroner. Jonathan had reportedly shown signs of appearing “suspicious” when he was seen by the Surrey Heath Mental Health Team (MHT) on May 4. However, these signs were not explored.

The mental health team were also aware Mr Harris was moving house, meaning and move to a new community mental health team, which may affect his wellbeing.

Jonathan’s mental health continued to deteriorate and on June 24 the MHT decided that he required an assessment under the Mental Health Act.

No inpatient bed was available and therefore the assessment did not take place. If Jonathan had been assessed, he would have been detained under the Mental Health Act and admitted to hospital.

The coroner said: “Mr Harris would not have taken his own life had he remained well and the relapse of his paranoid schizophrenia materially contributed to his death.

“Mr Harris would not have died had an inpatient psychiatric hospital bed been available on either 24, 25 or 26 June 2022.

“The court also heard that there is an ongoing shortage of available inpatient psychiatric beds in Surrey and that this is in the context of a national shortage of inpatient psychiatric beds. The court is concerned that both of these matters present a risk of future deaths.”

The Prevention of Future Deaths report was issued to NHS England rather than to Surrey and Borders Partnership. NHS England was invited to comment; it said it is working to the coroner’s deadline of 56 days to respond with the action it will take or proposed to take, and such information is not yet available.

Related reports:

Coroner catalogues care failures in diabetic death

Better private – public health communications could prevent deaths

Stoneleigh library flats for homeless

Two flats above a library are set to be used as temporary accommodation for homeless people, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council decided yesterday (March 26).

Demand for temporary accommodation is “acute”, according to the council. It is currently predicting an overspend of £200,000 of its £1.5m temporary accommodation budget, according to the Local Democracy Reporting Service.



Two self-contained, two bedroom maisonettes that sit above the Stoneleigh Community Library in Epsom that are accessed through the back of the building are earmarked for use.

Surrey County Council, who commercially lease the empty flats, have reportedly refurbished the maisonettes to a “high standard” and will require “minimal preparation” to be used as temporary accommodation.

Emergency and temporary accommodation is provided to housing register applicants whilst their claim is being investigated. Homeless people currently sit in Band A of the council’s housing allocations.

Around 235 homeless ‘households’ (i.e individuals or families) were accommodated by the council in 2021, with 155 in temporary accommodation and 80 in nightly-paid accommodation, costing up to £140 a night.

Meeting documents state the decision will create a real cost saving of £30,920 pa for the two maisonettes combined to the council.

A budget of £15,000 was agreed to cover the development of the site, with £5,000 covering legal and/or surveyor costs to the council and contributing to SCC for landlord approval costs. An additional £10,000 is set aside for a maisonettes preparation contingency.

Owned by a private landlord, the borough council will under lease from SCC who currently commercially lets the property. SCC and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council lease will co-expire in just under three years. The terms will then be renewed or re-negotiated.

Stoneleigh Community Library (Credit Google Maps)

Crime rising on Surrey farms

Surrey farmers have called for police to take rural crime ‘seriously’ as it pledges to crackdown on rising incidents. The National Farmers’ Union (NFU) have welcomed **Surrey Police**’s commitment to tackle rural crime, but said the farming communities need to see results.

Harriet Henrick, NFU County Adviser for Surrey, said farmers need “better protection” from police. She said: “Our members need reassurance that when crimes are reported they will be taken seriously and investigated.”

Attacks on sheep, thefts, suspected arson on barns and fly-tipping are some of the many serious incidents Surrey farmers have been victim to in recent months.

Farmers say rural crimes are taking an expensive toll, costing individual businesses thousands of pounds, causing severe animal suffering, and impacting on their ability to feed the nation.

The cost of rural crime in the South East was estimated at £9.3m in 2022, an increase by nearly a quarter from 2021, the NFU said. The South East made up around 18.7 per cent of the total cost of rural crime in the UK in 2022, at £49.5m.

Members of the union want to see clear targets, priorities and objectives in preventing rural crime- with both long-term and short-term solutions.

Superintendent **Michael Hodder** of Surrey Police admitted rural crime is an area where “even more work can be done” to support farming communities. Key initiatives for cracking down on rural crime focus on collaborating and engaging with farmers and landowners to understand the challenges they are facing and how the force can support them in policing.

Meetings between the NFU and Surrey Police have taken place with the aim of giving farmers greater protection; Surrey Police have also promised to visit every NFU member in the county as part of its efforts to tackle rural crime. Superintendent Hodder added: “We will investigate every report of rural crime, and will work closely with victims so they know what they can expect from us, what we need from them, and how we can work together to reduce rural crime across the county.

“We want everyone to feel safe in Surrey, and so my main ask would be that anyone who is the victim of rural crime reports it to us, so that we can continue to build an accurate picture of this crime across the county.”

Photo: Credit: National Farmers’ Union