



## Banstead Dog licensing scheme deemed 'foul'

28 March 2025



Professional dog walkers say they were told "if you don't like what we're doing, take your dog somewhere else" at a public meeting about a new licensing scheme being introduced for several Surrey beauty spots.

Dog walkers have claimed the land managers are using the new licensing project as a 'pay or go away scheme' which they say it is more expensive than neighbouring schemes and has been "appallingly" managed.

New rules could see professional dog walkers pay £360 to use a Surrey beauty spot, Banstead Common, from April 1. Banstead Common Conservators (BCC) said the main reason for setting up the scheme was to ensure the safety of everyone who uses the Commons and to control commercial business on the land.

"There's disdain for the profession and that's been made very clear," said Emma, a self-employed dog walker. She previously spoke to Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) of the BCC staff being "heavy handed". Now, Emma said the BCC are "bullying people into submission" with the new licensing rules.

Calling the land managers "prejudiced", the professional dog walkers said the BCC have presented "no evidence" that they are a danger to the public or conservation compared to any other person who walks over the heath.

"They are refusing to supply the legal standing for the scheme," said Emma, "I just don't know what else to do." Dog walkers have said they welcome the licensing scheme in principle but accused the BCC's proposition as 'unworkable', more expensive than others and without engagement or input from dog walkers.

Rather than just a side-hustle, professional dog-walking is a job or business that people pay their mortgage with. Jen, a dog walker for nearly 10 years said: "The chairman and another committee member were dismissive and incredibly rude when concerned dog walkers asked legitimate questions about the licensing scheme at a January meeting."

For months the professional dog walkers have complained they have been "left in the dark" and there has been "no dialogue" with the managers implementing a scheme which could significantly change their working conditions. "Their attitude has spurred so much misery and alienation," an anonymous local dog walker said.

The chairman of the BCC accused professional dog walkers of "lying" in their complaints and "being insulting" against the BCC at a public meeting earlier this year. Another member advised dog walkers if they were not willing to pay for the license they should "go back to where they came from".

A BCC spokesperson said: "All of our engagement with any user of Banstead Commons is done with respect and in accordance with our statutory duties." The BCC have said they have responded to all enquiries they have received "in a professional and timely manner" and have hosted three informal meetings about the licensing scheme with positive feedback.

The land managers have said they are using their powers under paragraph 18 of the Metropolitan Commons Banstead (Supplemental) Act 1893 act to restrict commercial activity. Despite repeated requests from LDRS and interested groups, the conservators chose not to specifically highlight which part of the act they are referring to.

The BCC said the scheme was a response to the increase in the number of dogs being walked commercially on the Commons in recent years and the pressure it puts on the land, wildlife and visitors. As land managers, the conservators said, they need to ensure businesses are insured and identifiable when they are operating on our sites.

Spanning 1,350 acres, the land - owned by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council - includes Banstead Heath, Banstead Downs, Park Downs and Burgh Heath. Although the BCC claim the £360 annual license fee offers a good deal for users at just less than £1 a day, professional dog walkers argue it is extortionate compared to other Surrey and London boroughs which are council-run.

Similar schemes are also being trialled elsewhere in Surrey. Nonsuch Park in Epsom, is running a pilot commercial dog licensing fee of £200 a year with a limit of six dogs walking at any one time. The licence will be managed by Epsom and Ewell Borough Council as well as the London Borough of Sutton Council. Charging £164.50 to use open spaces across the whole district, Tandridge District Council also runs a licensing scheme.

Although some dog walkers may call the response "overblown", the BCC said it has clear legal responsibilities to "protect the integrity of Banstead Commons and visitor safety". The group added it has also catered its response in line with a prevention of future deaths report for Natasha Johnston, a professional dog walker who tragically was mauled to death by eight dogs she was walking in Caterham in 2023.

"Unknown people shouldn't approach unknown dogs," said Jen. She said the part of the scheme she was most concerned about was BCC staff being able to walk up to her and the dogs and check collars which could put the dogs and herself at risk. "It goes completely against my GDPR policy," Jen said.

As it stands, if a dog walker's license is revoked there is no process of appeal and no refund. "They are judge, jury and executioner," Jen said. She lamented that neither Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, the landowners, nor the Department for Environmental Food and Rural Affairs want to get involved and the BCC are "unaccountable".

"What's different between dog walkers and members of the public walking dogs?" the anonymous dog walker challenged, explaining everyone uses the land and has to pick up dog poo. Speaking to the LDRS, the dog walkers said they take out local community dogs that live in the area and provide a needed service.

A BCC spokesperson said: "Banstead Commons Conservators are looking forward to working together with licensed dog walkers operating on our Commons. We have set up clear reporting procedures with licensed businesses which as well as a direct staff member to report concerns, includes hosting an annual review meeting open to all licensed businesses and an invitation for two representatives to join our Banstead Commons Consultative Group.

"Banstead Commons are wonderful open spaces enjoyed by many residents and visitors from further afield. Under our Act commercial activity is controlled in order to protect the integrity of the Commons and the welfare of its users. With the increasing volume of professional dog walkers, including displacement from other areas that have already implemented restrictions, it has become necessary to take the responsible step of licensing this activity. This scheme will help regulate the numbers of dogs being walked commercially on our sites and ensure that companies are operating safely and treating Banstead Commons, its users and wildlife with respect and consideration.

"Unless there is an incident to manage, Banstead Commons Conservators will not be interfering with licensed dog walking companies when they are operating safely and adhering to the licence scheme [...] Banstead Commons Conservators are always compliant in their operations."

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[Should Nonsuch Park go to the dogs?](#)

Image: Four dogs in Banstead wood, ahead of the licensing scheme to be introduced. (Credit: Dog walker Emma)



## Local Epsom LibDem leader leaves her Party

28 March 2025



An Epsom councillor who has been a leading Liberal Democrat in the area for over 20 years has defected to become an independent member. After several changes, including upcoming local Government reorganisation, Cllr **Julie Morris** has taken the decision to continue serving College Ward as an Independent councillor.

She has served on Epsom and Ewell Borough Council for almost 20 years, her old party described her as "experienced local champion". A spokesperson for the party said on social media: "We want to express our gratitude for the years of service Julie has given to the Epsom and Ewell Liberal Democrats."

Stepping into the well-worn shoes of the former leader, Cllr **James Lawrence** (also of the College Ward) will now take over. Only three Lib Dem councillors will now sit on the council, along with 25 Residents Association members, three Labour, two Conservative and now two Independent.

According to the Lib Dem website, Cllr Morris has led a number of environmental campaigns including: leading the charge against the Aldi food store plans for Epsom in 2015, a local campaign to stop builders developing back gardens, the campaign to preserve part of the Mill Road railway cutting as a wildlife sanctuary, as well as helping the residents of many roads in College ward deal with commuter parking problems.

"The Liberal Democrat group will continue to work closely with Julie for the residents of the college ward," the spokesperson added.

Cllr Morris declined to make a statement at this time.

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## Surrey's BIG debt question in local government reorganisation

28 March 2025



Plans for what Surrey could look like in local government reorganisation have been agreed but questions remain over looming debt. Councillors demanded to know how debt would be managed before the county is divided up.

The government outlined plans for a major reorganisation of local government in December. Two tier councils will be dissolved into unitary authorities which will carry out all local government functions like planning, bin collections as well as education and social care.

Members of the County Council have agreed on March 18 two proposals for how Surrey could be carved up in the most dramatic reorganisation of local services in 50 years. Serving 1.2m people, Surrey's current matrix - consisting of 12 borough and district councils and one county council - could be split into two or three new local authorities.

Leader of Surrey County Council, Tim Oliver, said he believes reorganisation is the "opportunity to turbo charge localism". He said: "Single councils are clearer for residents, have greater accountability, are more efficient and effective for delivery and strip out unnecessary bureaucracy and duplication."

Option 1, and the Conservative-run cabinet's preference, is to cut Surrey in half to create an east and west, or north and south. Exactly which councils will be included in the new authority are still yet to be determined, for instance whether Spelthorne borough is either on the east or west side.

Option 2, put forward by the majority of district and borough councils, consists of three new local authorities in the form of north-west, south-west and south-east Surrey. Again, full details of which councils would be included is still in the draft stages.

The two outline plans will be submitted to the central government on Friday March 21, who will ultimately have the deciding power on the new face of Surrey. Meanwhile, the local authorities will keep working to produce a final proposal by May 9.

With over £5.5bn worth of crushing debt across the county, members publicly urged the government to solve Surrey's financial issues before reorganisation. Cllr Catherine Powell said there needs to be "a clear path on the £5.5bn of debt" as it could create "significant imbalances" leading one council "more likely to fail". The Residents' Association and Independent Group Leader said she does not feel Surrey can propose new authorities without a solution.

Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, Cllr Paul Follows, said the councils' debt is "so toxic it will pollute the rest of this county". He lamented that reorganisation will not be about what is best for residents but about how money will be spent.

Speaking to the council, the leader said the government has "made it clear it does not intend to write off all of Woking's debt". Cllr Oliver said he will be having detailed conversations and Surrey will "have to come up with plan B".

Creating two councils in Surrey could save £27m after five years but three authorities could potentially make a loss of £8m, according to the county council's report. But the district and borough councils argue three unitary authorities would only save slightly less money than two and not be in a deficit.

However, Cllr Oliver said they have not taken into account the cost of reorganising services, such as adult social care, which could add substantial added costs. The leader claimed splitting into two is the best value for money for residents.

"There is no desire for Ashford to sink in with Godstone should the boundaries be cut [one] way," said Cllr Robert Evans OBE. He explained slicing Surrey into two would only reveal some towns would have little in common with villages they may have not even heard of.

Creating two unitary councils with a population of around 600,000 each, opponents slammed the proposal as bad for local democracy and eroding distinctive community identities. Members also flagged there would be significantly less councillors looking after greater areas.

But those batting for a dual council-led Surrey said few residents even identify with the council and local identity would be strengthened by working with community groups and local healthcare networks.

Questions about services like adult social care as well as children and education services were raised as major issues. Cllr Sinead Mooney said splitting the adult social care beyond two units would complicate the service and people could "fall through the gaps". Cllr Clare Curran highlighted the potential difficulties in retaining and splitting staff to more than two councils, meaning experienced teams could leave.

Cllr Fiona Davidson called for a need to assess how many children homes, specialist school places and demand for foster children to ensure Surrey is covered with



the right services. Members agreed it was not just about making services cheaper and simpler- they had to be run better than currently.

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## Who will be saddled with Spelthorne's and Woking's £3 billion debts?

28 March 2025



The Surrey Borough of Spelthorne's financial crisis is "even more critical", with millions in cuts needed to avoid catastrophic bankruptcy, says new report.

Best value inspectors were called in to review the council's finances in May 2024 in light of extremely high levels of debt and borrowing. Spelthorne's debt reached £1.096 billion in March 2023 - the second highest level of debt for a district council in England at the time.

The findings of the inspection have been published today (March 17). The report highlights that the council "is in a critical financial position, burdened by unsustainable debt levels, significant investment risks, and systemic governance weaknesses".

Between 2016 and 2018, Spelthorne Borough Council borrowed around £1 billion to invest in a commercial portfolio of Grade A office buildings and residential land in and around the borough. But slow progress on regeneration and housing projects highlights a limited understanding of regeneration delivery as well as finance and risk, the inspectors said.

Best Value Inspectors concluded: "The council's use of its resources is inadequate". In the damning report, they said Spelthorne's approach to property acquisitions "lacked due regard to long-term planning and risk management" and had an "overly-optimistic reliance on consistency" of the market that the Council first entered.

The report said: "The combination of voids, expiring leases, and falling income streams from the investment portfolio threatens the stability of its budget. Adding to the strain are the ongoing revenue costs of housing and regeneration projects, which were suspended in late 2023. Despite these mounting financial pressures, no clear path forward has been outlined to address them."

The recovery process will be overseen by government-appointed commissioners. Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, Jim McMahon, wrote to leader Cllr Joanne Sexton to say the local authority is failing in its 'best value' duty to residents, essentially meaning the authority is defecting on its ability to make decisions that are economic, efficient and effective and work towards continuous improvement.

Inspectors said the council has a "poor record" of fully and effectively implementing recommendations from external reviews. The report read: "Senior officers display an optimism bias and a lack of awareness of the true situation facing the council. We do not believe the council has the capacity and capability to make the urgent changes needed without significant external support."

Both the inspection and the recent external audit found errors in the council's financial practices including the miscalculating the minimum amount Spelthorne needs to keep paying back its debt, incorrectly classifying expenses as assets, further undermining the revenue budget.

"The outline budget report for 2025/26 to 2028/29 presented to members on December 9, 2024 shows the need to deliver £8.6 million in savings by 2028/29, equating to 64 per cent of the council's core spending power for 2024/25, or 33 per cent of the net budget, assuming contributions from commercial income. In our view, even these projections are understated. Despite this, we have seen no credible strategy in place to achieve savings of this level," said the report.

Leader of Spelthorne Borough Council, Cllr Joanne Sexton, said, "This Group Administration has faced a challenging time and has been actively pursuing the right solution to manage the historical debt that it has inherited. We have met with the Local Government Minister from central government, and we have agreed to work in partnership to take decisive action in the remaining time we have before local government reorganisation is implemented. Our pledge remains that we will always put residents at the heart of everything we do."

The council's senior management team also came in for criticism in the report. Inspectors said the team seemed "overly confident" and "appear to underestimate the scale of the financial risks". Member challenges remain "limited" according to the report, with many councillors not fully understanding the risks at hand. Inspectors highlighted there was a "wider breakdown" of relationships between senior management and the political leadership.

The findings of the inspection highlight the council is failing to meet best value standards in five critical areas:

- Use of Resources;
- Continuous Improvement;
- Governance;
- Leadership;
- Culture.

Inspectors have published thirteen recommendations for Spelthorne:

1. Commissioner-led intervention
2. Comprehensive commercial strategy
3. Review and strengthen asset management
4. Review of the Council's Minimum Revenue Provision
5. Revised Medium-Term Financial strategy
6. Debt reduction strategy
7. Transformation strategy development



8. Review and strengthen finance function
9. Improvement and recovery plan
10. Revised Corporate Plan
11. Audit Committee structure
12. Culture and relationship building
13. Housing delivery

#### **Emily Dalton**

Spelthorne Borough Council offices in Knowle Green, Staines. Credit: Emily Coady-Stemp

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#### **Chris Caulfield** compares Woking and Spelthorne:

The “critical” state of Spelthorne Borough Council’s finances means it must cut at least £8.6 million from its budget by 2028. To put that into perspective, bankrupt Woking Borough Council made £8.4 million in cuts last year in an effort to right its own mess. It managed it by cutting 20 per cent of its workforce, scrapping all grant funding to community groups, and shutting services such as public toilets.

Spelthorne Borough Council’s finances are “unsustainable”, with a £1 billion pound debt and a falling income stream. It means the authority must also cut millions in services to avoid the catastrophe of bankruptcy. The damning critique of the north Surrey council’s situation was published today, Monday, March 17, on the back of a best value review into the way the borough has been managed.

Spelthorne Borough Council, like Woking, borrowed heavily to invest in property and used the income to pay for services above and beyond what it could have otherwise afforded. And, again like Woking, it failed to put enough money aside to cover the cost of debt interest repayments.

“In essence, the council’s revenue budget is under far greater pressure than recognised by the council. Inherent risks are beginning to materialise, and could accelerate rapidly”, the Spelthorne Borough Council: Best Value Inspection report read.

It comes as the government confirmed it was proposing an intervention package, including appointing commissioners to oversee changes in how Spelthorne Borough Council is run because the borough lacks experience needed to make the cuts and had “no credible strategy in place to achieve savings of this level.”

Spelthorne has to shed £8.6 million from 2028/29 budget. Last year Woking Borough Council – the only local authority with a higher per capita debt than Spelthorne – achieved £8.4 million in savings.

This is how residents and community groups in Woking were affected. It is being used to paint a picture of what cuts at that scale look and feel like

#### **How Woking achieved its savings.**

- Centres for the community and day care facilities closed and merged
- Sports pavilions transferred to sports clubs to take over and “ensure as many of these facilities can remain open”.
- Grants to voluntary and community groups stopped
- Woking Community Transport reduced but reviewed annually as part of the council’s Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
- Grounds maintenance and street cleaning services scaled back to statutory levels.
- Independent living and family services transferred to Surrey County Council or other boroughs, which means they will continue to operate as normal with no impact to services users.
- Business liaison and support services will be scaled back
- All public toilets closed, except those located in Victoria Place and Wolsey Walk in Woking Town Centre.
- Fees and charges increased
- Loss of up to 60 council staff
- Council tax was also increased that year by 10 per cent. Since then it has risen by a further 2.99 per cent.

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## **Golf course housing tees off Green Belt preservers**

28 March 2025



Over 200 homes will be built on a golf course in an “epoch making moment” for Surrey’s green belt. Elmbridge Borough Council’s planning committee approved developer Claudel Venture Holdings Ltd’s vision for the 43 hectare site in Hersham on Wednesday, March 11.

The former 18-hole golf course off Assher Road will be transformed into a mix of 57 houses and 164 apartments with 246 parking spaces. Half of the homes will be affordable including social and affordable rent as well as shared ownership.

As well as the 221 homes, the plans feature a GP surgery, café, play areas and a natural green space in the form of a country park.

Debates around the proposal centred on whether the golf club was previously developed grey belt land or not. “It is almost an epoch-making moment,” said



Councillor John O'Reilly. "It is probably the first major application where the green belt will be so compromised."

Green belt land keeps countryside spaces free from development and stops the urban sprawl of towns merging together. Building on the green belt is only allowed when special circumstances can be demonstrated. But planning officers found the scheme would not undermine the openness of the green belt.

Michel Phillips, a professional adviser speaking against the scheme for the objectors, called it a "fallacy" the golf club is developed land as it was recognised as green belt land in a 2016 review. He told the committee: "There is no policy for Elmbridge to slice and dice the greenbelt to please development objectives."

"You have all been elected on a promise to protect the greenbelt. [The residents'] plea to you is to honour your commitment to Elmbridge citizens..

The decision was made despite over 800 objections (some from the same address) were sent against the plans, criticising the loss of countryside views for the neighbours and invasion of privacy.

Doubts were cast over whether a GP surgery would want to move into the proposed medical building. The developer acknowledged that it cannot 'force' the NHS to set up a new surgery on the site. Instead Claudel Venture Holdings said it would add another ten affordable units, in the shape of one and two-bedroom homes, and contribute £150,000 towards the NHS.

Speaking for the applicant, Mr Edwards said: "The planning inspector concluded that the need for affordable housing is acute and ever worsening and exceeds the council's assessment that 296 affordable homes need to be built annually." He told the committee that the proposed affordable homes are "important as Elmbridge is one of the most expensive boroughs in the country".

Ward councillor for Hersham Village, Cllr Wendy Gibbs said the affordable housing on the development "doesn't go far enough" to provide much-needed three-bedroom homes. She slammed the developer for not flats not being inclusive enough with lifts and areas for prams. Some councillors raised concerns whether housing associations would take up new affordable properties.

Although Cllr Judy Sarsby said she disliked the "overbearing building", she acknowledged there are 2,500 families currently on a housing waiting list and a hundred families which are homeless. Members from either side of the political spectrum, from Conservative to Liberal Democrats agreed the proposed housing development was in a useful location near the station and would provide social and economic benefits in the area.

Currently private land, only golfers and those using the public footpath to the River Mole are allowed to access the green. But the applicant has proposed a green space of 21.8 hectares as part of the development to help mitigate the new homes on the former golf course.

Residents complained the site floods every year from rain and stressed the flood waters could be redirected to the surrounding homes. To combat the flood risk, the applicant is proposing to raise the level of the land meant for residential development to deal with the water run off.

Transport improvements include new footpaths, bus stops and a signal crossing on Molesey Road is also part of the development. Around £110k is being put towards Hersham station for rail improvements. But some councillors said the money "won't touch the sides" of what is needed and that the station is from a "bygone" era.

Artist's impression of proposed Hersham golf club development. (Credit: Claudel Venture Holdings Ltd / Elmbridge Borough Council planning documents)

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## Surrey's fire ruined mansion restoration plan

28 March 2025



Plans to restore an 18th century house have been waved through. The National Trust has now revealed its designs to restore and refurbish Clandon Park House to celebrate the rich history and legacy wrapped around the building.

The Grade I listed home near Guildford was considered an architectural masterpiece when it was built 200 years ago. But Clandon Park House was tragically gutted by an accidental fire in 2015, destroying the roof and leaving most of the interior with blackened and scorched brickwork.

Illustrative designs show the trust's ambitions for Clandon Park House to become a new national treasure and a defining cultural hub, with space for workshops and social events. Guildford Borough Council unanimously approved the plans last week.

Restoring the inside of the mansion house, the scheme will refurbish and replace windows and doors, reinstating the stairs as well as providing a new accessible lift from the basement to the roof. Generous walkways will be carved out in the mansion house and the scheme promises to conserve historic collections, redisplaying them in creative ways.

Alterations to the basement will provide a cafe, toilets and other back of house bits. The project will restore the exterior of the building to appear as it did before it was engulfed by the fire, planning documents state.

Image: The Marble Hall could be used to hold events for the community. (Credit: Allies and Morrison/ National Trust)

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## Surrey schools not swamped by private VAT escapees

28 March 2025



Figures released by Surrey County Council suggest that state secondary schools admissions have not been overrun with private school pupils after VAT was added to fees by the Labour government.

While critics including Jeremy Hunt MP for Godalming and Ash had predicted up to 90,000 children could swarm the state sector if 20 per cent VAT was thrust on school fees, so far Surrey County Council said it has not impacted applications to join state secondary schools this year.

From January 2025, independent school fees have been slapped with 20 per cent VAT from the Labour government. The controversial policy, aimed at generating £1.5 billion to improve state education, drew up harsh criticisms from local residents. They accused the government of "punishing" hard-working families wanting



to invest in their children's education.

As state school admission results came out last week, it marks the first indicator whether priced-out private school children have spilled over into the state sector. But Clare Curran, county council's cabinet leader for children, families and lifelong learning, said: "Surrey has not seen a significant rise in the number of applications for a Year 7 state school place for children currently in the independent sector compared to last year."

"For September 2025, 664 on time applications were received from Surrey residents with children in the independent sector, compared to 608 for September 2024, a rise of 56."

Not a mass exodus of children to the state sector, the policy appears to have not squeezed private schools out of business just yet. Panic over secondary school place shortages has also not materialised in these new figures. Admissions data shows that for Year 7 places there is a mild buffer on the number of families getting their first preference in school places this year.

Cllr Curran said: "While the percentage of applicants offered their first preference school has decreased for September 2025 (80.6%) compared to 2024 (83.1%), the 2025 figure is not dissimilar to the 2023 figure of 81.3%."

"The percentage of applicants offered one of their six preferences for September 2025 was 95.3%, which is comparable with last year's figure of 95.9%."

However, it is still early days for the new policy and the ripple effects of the change could have wider implications. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) said there might not be an immediate effect but the long-term effects could be more significant. The IFS estimated a 3-7 per cent reduction in private school attendance which could require additional £100-£300 million in state funding to manage the overflow within the state school sector.

MPs and educators have raised the alarm that private schools serving students with special educational needs and disabilities should be left out of the VAT tax raid. Sometimes children with an EHCP cannot have their needs met in a regular state school so private school with 1-2-1 support is necessary for their education.

Surrey has around 140 private schools: including primary, secondary and special schools. Fees vary between schools, but the cost of independent education in Surrey is above the national average.

Image: Rosebery School Epsom - Google

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## Epsom and Ewell Council Approves Public Spaces Protection Order for Borough-Wide Expansion

28 March 2025



The Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Crime and Disorder Committee has voted to recommend the adoption of a borough-wide Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) following a public consultation that showed overwhelming community support.

The new PSPO, which will now be referred to Full Council for final approval, aims to tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB) by prohibiting a range of activities, including harassment, intimidation, verbal abuse, and alcohol consumption in public spaces after a warning from an authorised officer. The order also bans wearing face coverings, such as balaclavas, with the intent to commit ASB or crime, a measure police say will help deter group-related intimidation.

At the meeting, Public Protection Manager Oliver Nelson introduced the officers' report, highlighting the strong public backing for the PSPO. He noted that 92% of respondents supported extending the order for three years, and 83% backed its expansion across the entire borough. "The consultation has given us a clear steer from residents," he said. "We've slightly refined the prohibitions based on feedback, ensuring the PSPO is proportionate and enforceable."

Police representatives, including Acting Inspector Tommy Pearson and Chief Inspector Kelly Clifton-Sinclair, attended the meeting in support of the proposal.

Lib Dem Councillor **James Lawrence** (College) expressed his support, citing the consultation results as key to his decision. "Over 200 people responded to the consultation, with 92% of respondents supporting an extension to the PSPO and 83% supporting it covering the entire borough. My fellow Lib Dem councillors and I are happy to uphold public opinion on this and support the PSPO as proposed," he said.

However, some concerns were raised over the demographic spread of consultation responses. Councillor **Christine Howells** (RA Nonsuch) noted that only 2% of respondents were under the age of 24, questioning whether younger voices had been fully heard. In response, Committee Chair Councillor **Shanice Goldman** (RA Nonsuch) acknowledged the difficulty in securing wider engagement but highlighted outreach efforts to schools, faith groups, and youth charities, including Buddy Up, a mentoring programme for young people.

Councillor **Tony Froud** (RA Stoneleigh) sought clarification on the geographical scope of the PSPO, asking whether it applied to specific areas or the entire borough. Cllr Goldman confirmed that the order would be borough-wide, expanding upon previous PSPOs that only covered certain locations. "It's about making sure enforcement is not limited to certain hotspots," she explained.

The Committee also unanimously agreed to recommend a £100 fixed penalty for breaches (reduced to £80 if paid within 10 days). The PSPO will now go to Full Council for formal adoption, where it is expected to pass with broad support.

If approved, the borough-wide PSPO will be in place for three years, subject to review. Council officers have committed to a public awareness campaign, including new signage and social media outreach, to ensure residents are informed about the restrictions.

Sam Jones - Reporter

Image credits: Google and Tobias "ToMar" Maier Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0

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## Guildford Students protest against PSPOs

Surrey students have come out against a council's draft rules about public spaces, saying they could be "detrimental" to local students. Under the proposed new rules, students could be banned from being in a group of two or more people in the town centre which could "cause harassment, alarm or distress" to other people.

Guildford town centre has public space protection orders (PSPO) aimed at tackling persistent anti-social behaviour affecting others. Introduced in 2022, the rules are now up for review. Boundaries for the PSPO cover the town centre, Stoke Park and some neighbouring residential roads, the Mount (residential area and green open space), including Black Cat Alley.

But students at the University of Surrey have attacked the draft regulations as "vague" and have said that they can be "misinterpreted" in a way that can be harmful to students in Guildford.

Leading the cause, the Student Union's President Liam White said in a statement: "We are concerned by the overly conditional phrasing of 'acting in a manner that is likely to cause' and the vague nature of 'distress'. This feels like an extremely broad scope to enforce, given that members of the public may potentially be 'distressed' when encountering young adults socialising in public, even if it is not disorderly or anti-social."

Under a PSPO, individuals deemed to be breaching the order can be asked to change their behaviour by police officers, PCSOs, or GBC compliance officers. Fines and written warnings can be given for repeated breaches.



He argued the PSPO is not phrased in a way which prevents groups acting disorderly but instead relies purely on a member of the public claiming to be distressed or alarmed. Mr White claimed this is "unreasonable" to potentially penalise members of the public, including students, in the town centre.

A spokesperson for Guildford Borough Council said: "We appreciate everyone who has taken time to respond to the Town Centre Public Spaces Protection Order consultation. These were draft proposals and the purpose of the consultation was to encourage feedback."

"In response to our partners and consultees, including the Student Union, we have adapted the proposed restrictions. The revised draft restrictions will be presented to the Executive on 27 March 2025 for consideration."

Other key concerns raised included how "rowdy and inconsiderate behaviour" could be defined by someone's clothing. The draft proposals state: "Wearing a piece of clothing with the intent to obscure or hide his/her identity for the purposes of committing crime and/or anti-social behaviour".

The Student Union said this is particularly concerning for members of the community who wear clothing that covers their face or hair for religious purposes. "We question how appropriate it is to be enforcing restrictions on clothing, rather than other indicators of anti-social behaviour," members said.

Students also criticised the proposed public space rules against the "anti-social" use of bicycles, skateboards and scooters in pedestrian areas. They said some of Guildford's community is already "resistant" to the Beryl Bikes scheme and extending the PSPO will "disincentivise people from using sustainable travel".

Emily Dalton

## Surrey to get new recycling centre?

28 March 2025



Newspapers, cardboard, plastic bottles and tins of tuna could have a new home to go to in Surrey. Plans for a new recycling centre are on the cards on farmland in Chertsey as the existing infrastructure is "under strain", a new report says.

Surrey County Council is proposing to build a dry material recycling centre on Trumps Farm, just off the M3. An outline planning application has been submitted and an outline business case has been developed, with a decision hopefully being made in May 2025.

Waste like metal, cardboard and plastic would be collected at the kerbside and then separated from mixed items like paper, card, plastic, metal and glass into single material streams. These streams are then sent on to reprocessors to turn into new products.

Trump's Farm, owned by the county council, was identified as the most suitable location for a recycling facility as it is North West Surrey, closest to where the highest levels of waste are produced, according to the council report. The size of the proposed facility will provide capacity for Surrey's dry recycling now and into the future, the document said.

The county's ability to recycle and get rid of waste is under "significant strain", according to a council report. A report in 2023 highlighted a strain on the current recycling infrastructure and a lack of dry mixed recycling centres in the county.

"If we're going to build and invest in a recycling centre, we need to up our recycling rates," said the Leader of the council, Tim Oliver at a cabinet meeting on February 25. He urged members to "renew their energy" for recycling around the districts and boroughs.

The Conservative leader said recycling rates around Surrey had stagnated at around 50 per cent and perhaps residents were not sure what can and cannot be recycled. He added: "I have persuaded my wife to look at a package before she puts it in the bin because it does tell you whether it's recyclable or not."

Responsible for around 90,000 tonnes of recycling in Surrey, the council is hoping to find an operator to process all this material without changing the current district and borough collection regimes. These authorities are Epsom & Ewell, Elmbridge, Guildford, Runnymede, Spelthorne, Surrey Heath, Tandridge, Waverley and Woking.

Use of third-party sites to manage recyclable materials collected by the District and Boroughs on the county's behalf has been increasingly expensive and the service has no control over costs or the separation processes. "Surrey County Council will need greater control over its supply chain and associated infrastructure," according to a new report.

Imminent waste legislative changes could put the county council at risk of not meeting its duty as the Waste Disposal Authority. The new legal rules include: collection packaging reforms and extended producer responsibility (meaning the need to collect and recycle a broader range of materials) and a new levy on fossil fuel waste which could cost the council up to £10m a year.

The report said: "The delivery of a Surrey material recycling facility will work to mitigate these financial pressures by increasing recycling, particularly with regard to plastics and provide revenue savings which can offset these costs."

In the event that Surrey was split into a number of unitary authorities that were responsible for waste disposal, the county council said the continued use of strategic waste management facilities would be managed through agreements between local authorities.

Image: Surrey Recycling Centre. Credit Surrey County Council

## An Epsom 17th century pub to become supermarket?

28 March 2025



A 17th century pub could be transformed into a Sainsbury's Local. Plans have been submitted to refurbish the Grade II-listed drinking establishment, on Dorking Road in Epsom, to a convenience store.

If approved, a Sainsbury's convenience store would take over the ground floor of the historic building and install an ATM machine outside. Plans also include resurfacing and reducing the car park to just 13 spaces, four of which will be reserved for delivery vehicles.

The former White Horse Public House was converted into Lava Lounge, a restaurant and cocktail bar, in 2020. Lava Lounge closed in January 2024, having been on the market for at least two years according to planning documents.



Used for centuries for drinking, the former purpose of the pub is no longer viable according to Sainsbury's. "Given the wealth of drinking establishments in Epsom, not just in the town centre, it is unlikely that the loss of a facility which has already been closed for a year could be considered a detriment," the application said.

Serving a specific catchment area, the proposed Sainsbury's is said to be conveniently located for nearby residents, visitors and employees at Epsom hospital as well as passing trade. The development will also create around 20 new jobs, a mixture of full and part-time.

"Very little appears to have survived" from the 17th-18th century on the ground floor, planning documents state, perhaps only the thick walls around the chimney breasts. The timber framed structure at first floor level appears to be correctly placed for a historic building but, the report says, the timbers appear to be modern.

Sainsbury's heritage statement states the proposals would have a "neutral effect" on the special interest of a listed building. The report says the vast majority of the building's internal heritage value has been lost from modern adaptations.

Planning documents read: "The core of the building has a hipped slate roof and is of timber framed construction, some of which is evidently modern, but which may form the altered remains of the 17th or 18th century building referred to in the Listing description. The pub has a parapeted brick frontage which likely dates from the middle of the 19th century."

The scheme proposes removing the replacement of the Victorian-style sash window, as well as reconfiguring and refurbishing the insides of the former pub. Demolishing the covered yard at the back of the site, Sainsbury's plans to build an extension to form a 'back of house' for the convenience store.

Minor modifications to the historic part of the building are needed to use the original pub building for the back office part of the shop. The application clarifies the historic part of the building is not being used for a sales area.

Neighbours can comment on the application on Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's website. No decision date has been listed yet.

View outside the Lava Lounge, and former White Horse Pub, in Epsom. (Credit: Sainsbury's/ Epsom and Ewell Planning Documents)