

Epsom and Ewell Council leader message for 2026



Cllr **Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) has outlined Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s goals for 2026 in a New Year message to residents. The leader has promised a smooth transition to the new mega council, East Surrey, and services will still be there for residents.

It has been a busy year for Cllr Dalton with growing financial pressures amid housing demand for those facing homelessness, planning applications on green belt sites and, of course, local government reorganisation and heated debates around parish councils.

The leader wrote:

“2026 will mark the final full year of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) as a local authority. As the one of the longest, independently led councils in England and Wales, that is quite a legacy and landmark.

“As Chair of the Surrey Leaders Group, I have been heavily involved in local government reorganisation (LGR) process since it was announced in December last year. The focus for me in the next 12 months will be around establishing the new East Surrey Unitary Council. As part of this I will be a member of the Joint Committee for LGR in Surrey, and I want to ensure the safe and legal transition of services to the new authority. My focus will also be on EEBC continuing to deliver for our residents and our legacy.

“Elections for the East Surrey Unitary Council in May 2026 will be pivotal, and I urge all Surrey residents to vote when the time comes. It’s vital that everyone in our communities is represented, as these elections will decide the make-up of the new Unitary Council that will set the strategy for the next five years.

“EEBC is also currently carrying out its second and final consultation asking residents them whether they want to create two new community councils, Epsom Community Council and Ewell Community Council. Epsom & Ewell is unparished which means that when EEBC is dissolved, there will be no lower tier of local government, and we are asking if residents want new community councils to represent local voices, be a statutory consultee on planning matters, and more.

“Finally, next year I will look to reflect and recognise what EEBC has achieved during the 90 years since it was formed and the vast changes it has seen. It’s an honour to lead the council in its final year of Residents’ Association administration, and I’m proud to serve our community during this landmark time.”

Emily Dalton LDRS

Hannah Dalton, leader of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council. (Credit: Epsom and Ewell Borough Council)

Christmas trains and buses in Surrey



Heading out over Christmas? Here is what Surrey buses and trains are actually doing this festive season.

If you are planning to get around Surrey over Christmas and New Year – whether that is popping into town for Boxing Day sales, visiting family or braving a London trip – it is worth knowing now that services will be patchy, quieter and sometimes non-existent.

Here is the lowdown:

Christmas Eve - Wednesday, December 24

Most buses will run as normal, but:

- No night buses
- Some evening services will finish earlier than usual

A few operators (including Stagecoach and First Berkshire) will switch to a Saturday timetable, so buses may be less frequent later in the day. Essentially it will be fine to take a bus during the day, do not rely on late buses coming home from the Christmas Eve pub crawl.

Trains on Christmas Eve will also wrap up quickly:

- Trains finish early – around 10pm
- Island Line services finish even earlier

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Christmas Day - Thursday, December 25

The only services running are a handful of special routes, mainly:

- Carlone’s 442/X442
- A couple of First Berkshire and Metrobus routes

For most of Surrey, there will be no buses.

South Western Railway has also confirmed there will be no trains running.

□

Boxing Day - Friday, December 26

Still very quiet.

- Many areas will again have no bus service
- Some operators will run a Sunday-style timetable

If you do need to travel, check your route carefully as services vary wildly by operator.

South Western Railway has also confirmed there will be no trains running.

□

Saturday & Sunday, December 27-28

The good news is this is when things feel more normal again as standard weekend bus services return.

The bad news is this is when there are major train disruptions.

- No trains between London Waterloo and Clapham Junction
- Trains from Surrey will start and finish at Clapham Junction

If you're heading into central London, you'll need to:

- Change onto the Tube (District Line from Wimbledon or Richmond)
- Or use other rail operators via Reading, Portsmouth or Epsom

□

Monday 29 to Wednesday 31 December

Most buses switch to a Saturday timetable, meaning:

- Fewer buses
- Longer gaps between services

On New Year's Eve, there will again be:

- No night buses
- Early finishes on some routes

For trains

- Services via Barnes still stop at Clapham Junction
- Reduced services elsewhere
- Some central London stations closed

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New Year's Day - Thursday, January 1

Much like Boxing Day:

- Very limited services
- Mostly Sunday timetables where anything is running at all

Trains:

- Reduced services
- Many trains still start and finish at Clapham Junction

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From Friday, January 2

Services mostly return to normal, though some operators will ease back in with Saturday-style timetables.

When does it go back to normal? Monday, January 5, 2026. When most people are back at work.

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The simple advice is to check before you travel, even if you 'know' your route. If you are heading into London, Clapham Junction (rather than Waterloo) will be your point of entry. Travel early when possible - late services are the first to disappear - unless you want an expensive taxi back home.

Engineers say the disruption will lead to more reliable journeys long-term, but for now, Surrey residents should expect a festive period that's a little more stop-start than usual.

<https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/buses-and-other-transport/bus-timetable-changes/buses-at-christmas-and-New-Year>

<https://www.southwesternrailway.com/plan-my-journey/christmas-trave>

Emily Dalton LDRS

Photo: Engineering work at London Waterloo. (Credit: South Western Railway)

‘I don't believe I am a political person’: Surrey leader reflects



As Surrey heads into the new year, the mood at Woodhatch Place, the county council's head quarters, is one of reflection and quiet apprehension for the year ahead. For Tim Oliver, leader of Surrey County Council, the festive period comes at the end of what he described as a "busy" year. One that began with the announcement of the biggest shake up in local government for decades and will end with the council preparing for even more change in 2026.

"It's been quite a journey," he said, reflecting on the year since local government reorganisation was announced. "But we've ended it in a pretty good place in terms of setting ourselves up for the heavy lifting over the next 12 months."

While Christmas brings a lull in council business and many work places, Cllr Oliver joked that residents “with a bit of time on their hands” are still keen to get in touch about local issues. But there is no resentment in his voice, just a familiar sense of public service never stops.

Sat in an office of some description, a blurred bookshelf marked a hazy backdrop, the council leader seemed slightly weary but ready for a half-hour interview. Reflecting back on his time at the local authority, at the last full year in power, he said: “I just marked seven years as the leader of this council. I feel proud of what the council has done over that period in terms of financial stability, we’ve invested a lot into communities like ‘Your Fund Surrey’.”

“I don’t believe that I am a political person,” said Mr Oliver, the Conservative leader of the council, speaking to the local democracy reporting service. “Or that I run this council in an overtly political way.”

It is a claim some of his colleagues and opponents may find laughable. Particularly when the councillors might claim the council is concerned about financial resilience despite all the criticism over its SEND service, asset-based funding and ambitions to empower communities and charities with funding rather than expand the council’s services. But Mr Oliver confirmed the council should not be swayed by ideology and national movements. “There shouldn’t be party politics in local government,” he said. “We have one job here and we are elected to improve the lives of our residents.”

Yet the past year has shown how difficult that principle can be to maintain. Debates over reorganisation, he said, have exposed what he described as a rise in “tribal politics” within the council’s HQ. “One of the things that has been slightly disappointing over this last year is that there has been a bit of tribal politics around the reorganisation,” he said. Mr Oliver added: “

However, this criticism has been robustly rejected by opposition councillors. Paul Follows, leader of the Liberal Democrats, said that while the Conservative leader was “disappointed” by the tone of the debate, the response from other parties reflected what they described as the reality that only the Conservatives supported pursuing local government reorganisation in its current form.

He said Lib Dems across Surrey had supported reform only where it was rooted in “genuine localism” and underpinned a proper assessment of the county’s financial challenges. Cllr Follows said: “It is difficult to see what, if any, benefit this rushed process of local government reorganisation brings to Surrey - particularly to boroughs that are largely self-sufficient and solvent, such as Waverley, Guildford, and Reigate & Banstead.”

Cllr Oliver acknowledged that local election results often reflect national sentiment, regardless of how councils perform. “You could be the most outstanding council,” he said, “but if you’re standing through a political party, it reflects the national position.”

While he said he was proud of the council’s record on financial stability and service improvement, he admitted he did not know how voters would respond in an election likely to be shaped by national politics, council tax pressures and public frustration. “I genuinely don’t know what will happen here locally,” he said. Mr Oliver said he saw no evidence that Reform-run councils were doing anything fundamentally different from authorities already under financial pressure.

Despite his concerns, Mr Oliver said residents ultimately judge councils on outcomes rather than ideology, on results rather than rhetoric. As he prepares to take a step away from leadership, Mr Oliver said whoever takes over must remain true to acting in the best interest of residents.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Tim Oliver (credit Surrey Live) and County graphic credit SCC.

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Epsom waste site plans refused after years of noise and disruption complaints



Plans to retrospectively approve changes at a controversial waste and recycling site near Epsom have been refused, following years of complaints from residents about noise, dust and early-morning lorry movements.

Surrey County Council’s planning committee voted to reject the application for land at the Chalk Pit on College Road, where skip hire firm Skip It Epsom Ltd operates, at a meeting on December 17.

Residents speaking at the meeting and objecting to the scheme online slammed the plans. They described how the site had been “destroying their lives” and making it a misery with constant noise, intruding on their home life and impacting nearby schools. Locals complained that site has not been built according to its planning permission.

The application was not for a brand-new site, but to regularise changes that had already been made to buildings and operations at the former waste transfer station, which was granted permission in 2023 to become a materials recycling facility.

However, councillors were told the development had not been built as approved and crucially, a required drainage system was never installed.

The operator wanted permission to change several conditions attached to the original approval, including:

- Buildings being built on a different footprint and with altered materials
- A new entrance and staircase
- Moving noisy waste-sorting machinery into a different building
- Changes to HGV parking and electric vehicle charging points

Officers described most of these changes as relatively minor and, on their own, acceptable even though the site sits in the Green Belt.

So why was it rejected? The refusal came down to one major issue: drainage. Councillors heard that the surface water drainage scheme approved in 2023 had never been installed, and that new assessments now showed a much larger soakaway was needed.

But part of the required drainage system would sit outside the application site, meaning it could not legally be approved or enforced through this planning application.

As a result, officers said an essential planning condition could no longer be met or reimposed, leaving the council with no option but to recommend refusal.

Local residents spoke passionately against the application at the meeting, describing years of disruption since operations ramped up in 2020.

Bernie Muir, local councillor for Epsom, told the committee that the site had been “destroying lives for five years”. She said: “People can’t use their gardens, open windows or work from home [...] There are serious mental health impacts from the constant noise.”

More than 170 objections were submitted overall. Residents complained of:

- Banging, clanging and crashing from skips being dropped

- Heavy lorries arriving as early as 5.30am
- Dust, light pollution and breaches of operating hours
- Noise carrying across the landscape due to the bowl-shaped chalk pit

Fiona, who lives around 350 metres from the site, said she had no problems for years after moving to the area until operations changed. “On some days the noise I experience in my garden is banging, clanging and repetitive crashing,” she said.

She also raised concerns about drainage, saying the site sits near a protected groundwater zone and the chalk geology is highly porous. “This is an unfixable flaw,” said John Beckett, an Epsom and Ewell borough council member.

Residents’ groups also argued that moving noisy machinery and changing the building entrance had directed sound towards homes that were never properly assessed in earlier reports.

Speaking for the applicant, a representative said she was aware of concerns but claimed the developer had not been invited to some of the multi-agency meetings.

Cllr Tim Hall said he was “surprised” by the claim, given the number of meetings held with residents, agencies and council officers over five years.

The applicant’s agent defended the criticism by describing the chalk pit as a “very busy site” and it is difficult to keep all the workers across the procedures to keep the doors closed and noise down. She also said the early starts referred to residents were “alleged breaches on the site” and the noise could be coming from elsewhere nearby.

Some councillors acknowledged residents’ frustrations, while others pointed out the site has long been industrial. Cllr Ernest Mallett MBE said: “At the end of the day, people bought houses next to an industrial site.” But others felt the problems went beyond normal industrial impact.

The refusal does not shut the site down but it does mean the unauthorised changes cannot be approved. To move forward, the operator would need to submit a new full planning application, including a drainage solution that can be properly assessed and enforced.

Emily Dalton LDRS

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Surrey to have a Mayor?



Surrey will get a mayor despite months of uncertainty and a lack of solid confirmation from the government, the county council leader has insisted. Tim Oliver said he is “confident” a mayor of Surrey would go ahead, even though the central government has yet to formally sign off and has delayed mayoral elections in other parts of the country.

“I can assure you, it will happen,” Cllr Oliver said, speaking to the local democracy reporting service (LDRS), on December 17. Surrey was placed on the government’s first wave of local government reorganisation specifically to unlock devolution and create a mayor. The leader added that ministers were fully aware of the county’s position.

The delay, he suggested, was more about shifting national priorities and new ministers rather than any change of heart over Surrey itself. “It’s slightly frustrating,” he said. “We didn’t get a confirmation date of the mayoral election when we thought we would.”

Since reorganisation was announced last year, there has been a change of secretary of state and a rethink over how quickly devolution should roll out. Mayoral elections have already been pushed back to 2028, something Cllr Oliver believes Surrey is now being caught up in. “They haven’t said no,” he said. “But equally they didn’t say yes at the same time as the announcement, which is what we had expected.”

The county leader said he has already met with the minister responsible and is due to have another meeting in early January, saying discussions with the government were “active”. Despite the uncertainty surrounding a mayor, Cllr Oliver said Surrey’s positioning has remained strong and that the county would likely follow whatever timetable the government agrees with other mayoral areas: potentially bringing elections forward to 2027 rather than waiting until 2028.

While residents may find the process confusing, he said the end goal was clearer leadership and more powers devolved from Westminster. The LDRS reported in October there was “no promise” that Surrey could have a directly-elected mayor as part of the government’s devolution despite this being described locally by councillors as the entire main purpose of reorganisation.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has previously said that the references to Surrey getting a directly elected mayor were “not quite accurate” as the decision “has not been confirmed” and that they were only “committed to working with partners to establish a strategic authority for the area”.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Council Leader Tim Oliver speaking at full council meeting October 8. (Credit: Surrey County Council live stream)

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Surrey fast to introduce slow speed limits?



20mph speed limits could soon be introduced across three Surrey neighbourhoods, with residents now invited to give their views.

Surrey County Council is consulting on new slower-speed zones in Barnsbury and Bonsey Lane in Woking, the Goodwyns estate in Dorking, and the Parsonage Road area of Cranleigh. The aim, the council says, is to make streets safer and more pleasant for people travelling on foot, bike and especially children heading to and from school.

Speed surveys carried out by the council show drivers in all three areas are already mostly respecting limits, meaning the new rules could be brought in without speed bumps or chicanes. In Woking, some “light-touch” measures such as vehicle-activated signs or painted roundels could be added on Bonsey Lane as an extra reminder to keep speeds down.

If approved, the schemes would each cost around £20,000 from a budget specifically set aside for 20mph zones. Details on the council’s website highlight that money cannot be spent on potholes or other road maintenance, which is funded separately.

Residents may spot a few extra road signs, though council officers say they will only install what’s needed and will make use of existing posts wherever possible to avoid cluttering pavements.

Currently, there are no plans for police to step up enforcement. Instead Surrey said the new limits must “self-enforce” and remain credible to drivers. Information online stressed that action should not wait for someone to be hurt: slower traffic means fewer crashes, and those that do happen are much less severe.

The consultation website read: “Research suggests 20 mph schemes do not increase air pollution. Slower vehicle speeds support a shift to more walking, scooting and cycling and then fewer polluting vehicles on the roads. 20 mph schemes can also encourage a smoother driving style with less acceleration and deceleration between junctions and pedestrian crossings.

“The amount of fuel a vehicle uses is mainly influenced by the way we drive – driving at a consistent speed is better than stopping and starting. Accelerating up to 30 mph can take twice as much energy as speeding up to 20 mph.

“Some people are concerned that 20 mph may lead to increased journey times. However, most of the delays that occur for motor vehicles in built up areas are at junctions, rather than the roads between junctions.”

Plans and maps for each scheme are now available online, and residents living in or near the affected roads are being encouraged to take part in the consultation and share their feedback.

Emily Dalton LDRS

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Image: 20mph sign. Picture taken by LDR. Permission for use by all partners.

Toyota prevention of future death report



A senior coroner has warned that more drivers could die because a Toyota braking system failed to stop a woman’s car before a deadly M25 crash. Lisa Bowen, 48, died instantly when her Toyota Corolla hit the back of a stationary lorry on the hard shoulder at almost 38mph in January 2022 despite her pressing the brake pedal repeatedly. Senior Surrey coroner Richard Travers said the car’s anti-lock braking system (ABS) “operated to reduce the braking effect almost entirely” and was “working in accordance with its design”, but the design did not account for what happened when her tyre deflated and detached at speed. He said the outcome was “an unintended effect of the system’s design which arose because the specific scenario [...] had not been taken into account in the design process.” Mr Travers warned this creates “a continuing risk that future deaths could occur unless action is taken”.

The senior coroner said he was noting that a large number of Toyota Corollas on UK roads have the same anti-locking braking system as Ms Bowen’s car, and other brands may well be affected too. He also criticised the “catastrophic failure” of the lorry’s under-run protection bar saying its strength was “grossly insufficient” under current laws. The coroner said he was concerned that the risk of future death will arise without more stringent requirements for how much force such bars must withstand.

He has issued a statutory Prevention of Future Deaths report to Toyota, the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency and the Department for Transport (DfT), saying: “Action should be taken to prevent future deaths by addressing the concerns set out above.” They must reply by 16 January 2026. A DfT spokesperson said: “Every death on our roads is a tragedy, and our thoughts are with Lisa’s family and loved ones. We will carefully review the coroner’s findings from this tragic case to determine the appropriateness of further amendments to these requirements.”

A Toyota spokesperson [Toyota’s HQ is in Burgh Heath, Epsom] said the company was “deeply saddened by this tragic accident” and “acknowledges the findings of the coroner”, adding it would “carefully review the Senior Coroner’s conclusions.”

Emily Dalton LDRS

[Toyota HQ Epsom Google](#)

Surrey Police Commissioner responds to morale report



Surrey’s Police and Crime Commissioner has defended a reported drop in police officer morale, pointing to public and media criticism of the force. Only 57 per cent of officers believe they are making a difference, according to a new report, but **PCC Lisa Townsend** said the decline reflects wider tensions between the force and the field. Speaking at a Surrey Police and Crime Panel meeting on November 27, she said: “It doesn’t matter what this job you’re in, if the profession that you do is being attacked by the public, is being attacked in the news, attacked by colleagues or other people – there is an inevitable correlation in terms of morale.” She added that Surrey’s proximity to the Met Police, “that features in the news on a regular basis”, may also be influencing Surrey officers’ perceptions. “Our officers feel that. They see police officers being attacked and it’s not surprising they are not completely immune to feeling that themselves,” she said.

However, Ms Townsend warned against assuming pressure is spread evenly across the force: “We’ve got to be careful about treating it as a single... as a uniform [experience] across all police officers or police staff.” Backlogs in the justice process, not feeling adequately equipped and workload were also cited as frustrations potentially chipping away at morale. Nearly 66 per cent of officers said they were unable to finish tasks on time, according to council documents. Despite the uncertainty of local government reorganisation and the government’s plan to scrap the PCC role in 2028, Ms Townsend stressed that officer numbers remain strong. “We would never have enough police officers to deal with everything every member of the public will want to deal with. It is always going to be an issue. Police officers are always going to be under a certain amount of pressure, as everyone in the public sector.”

The Commissioner said work to improve retention and reduce stress is making progress but a tough reality remains: demand continues to feel high and work-life balance remains “the most common reason for leaving the force”.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Image: Lisa Townsend, Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner. (Credit: Surrey PCC office)

Surrey to sell off property in Epsom and elsewhere to fill budget gaps



Surrey County Council is looking to bank a major cash boost by selling off a string of properties sitting idle across the county. The money is earmarked to help plug budget pressures and support future investment in council services.

Cabinet members gave officers the green light to pursue the sale of six unused council sites at a meeting on November 25. Cabinet papers show the deals are expected to generate significant capital receipts, while saving taxpayers thousands more in ongoing security and maintenance costs. The detailed sale values were kept behind closed doors in restricted documents due to commercial sensitivity.

The properties, spread across Staines, Ewell, Tongham, Wallington, and Mickleham, include former social care and nursery buildings, vacant houses, and small plots of land. The sales follow open marketing campaigns and recommended offers from prospective buyers.

Properties up for sale include:

- 33 Rookery Road, Staines: Former supported living houses, now demolished, being marketed for residential redevelopment.
- Former Fairways Day Centre, Staines: A large, partially vacant building in a flood zone that the council said would be costly to maintain.
- **Beechcroft Nursery, Ewell:** An empty house and three acres of scrubland, with 11 bids received from developers.
- Land west of Oxenden Court, Tongham: Small 0.03-hectare plot with access and contamination issues.
- 42 Little Woodcote Estate, Wallington: 3-bed house previously leased to Halsey Garton Residential Ltd, now vacant. Sale includes surrender of the lease.
- 2 Pressforward Cottages, Mickleham: Terraced 3-bed house with a leasehold to be surrendered before sale.

Together the properties have been vacant and unused for months, in some cases years, leaving the council to pick up costs for business rates, insurance and preventing vandalism. By selling them, the authority says it will cut those losses and funnel the money into frontline priorities: ensuring the stable provision of services for Surrey county council and the future unitary authorities.

Officials stress that legal checks, including anti-money-laundering safeguards, will be completed before any contracts are signed. Cabinet is also being asked to give senior directors delegated authority to finalise the deals swiftly, avoiding developer drop-out and market risk.

Decisions on the disposals will be made at upcoming Cabinet meetings, with the detailed sale values kept behind closed doors for now due to commercial sensitivity.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Image: Beechcroft Nursery Reigate Road Ewell Epsom – Google maps

Epsom and Ewell’s first neighbourhood plan



A leafy Surrey suburb is about to make its mark for the local community. Stoneleigh and Auriol are poised to be able to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to planning developments that do not match their design plan for the neighbourhood with legal backing.

Members of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council’s (EEBC) licensing and planning policy committee gave the new local scheme the go ahead to move to the next stage on November 25. The Stoneleigh and Auriol Neighbourhood Plan (SANP) is the first of its kind in Surrey’s smallest borough.

“This plans’ compilation has taken an immense amount of effort by all those involved and it’s been an enormous undertaking,” said Cllr **Tony Froud** (RA Stoneleigh), part of the SANP working group. “The remarkable thing about this is they [the residents group] have done it all on their own with just a keen interest in preserving the character of the neighbourhood. It’s an immense body of work by residents, lay people and non-professionals. Due to the costs involved, no outside help could be sought or brought in.”

The SANP, along with some tweaks, is set to go to a public referendum in February 2026. If residents vote ‘yes’, this plan will become law for the area. This will shape what can be built, how it looks and protect things like shops, green spaces, housing character, and more.

If adopted, future planning applications in Stoneleigh and Auriol will be judged against the neighbourhood plan’s policies as well as broader strategic policies.

For locals, that could mean tighter control over what gets built. This aims to preserve the area’s distinctive character, leafy streets and sense of community, while still allowing carefully managed change. The SANP must strike a balance between protecting what residents love and accommodating new housing and development where appropriate.

The journey has not been quick. The neighbourhood forum behind the plan took on the task over five years ago in gathering evidence, consulting residents, drafting policies, and refining proposals.

Cllr **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) said: “This has been a great example of what residents can do when they want to put together really clear guidance around planning.” He told the committee that not every group of residents can put in the amount of work, time and effort into making a neighbourhood plan rather than campaigning and protesting about developments and planning decisions.

After the Plan was submitted to EEBC in May 2025, a six-week public consultation took place between June 20 and August 1. Eight organisations and individuals, including expert bodies, submitted comments. An independent examiner was then appointed and delivered their report on 23 October 23, recommending the plan proceed to referendum subject to a number of changes.

Council planners and the neighbourhood forum have now accepted all the examiner’s recommendations. The revised plan contains 11 clear policies, setting out rules for building, design, green spaces, flood risk, transport and more.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Image: View from Newbury Gardens down to Stoneleigh Park Road. (Credit: Epsom and Ewell Borough Council documents)