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Guildford clean air zone rejected

30 June 2026



A clean air zone will not be coming to Guildford after councillors accepted a report saying the costs would outweigh the benefits of such a scheme.

Guildford Borough Council's cabinet was presented with a report into measures to stem the level of harmful air pollution in the town.

The possibility of a clean air zone for Guildford was raised in a draft air quality action plan, although it sparked concerns over its potential economic impact on the town.

Councillor Merel Rehorst-Smith said: "A clean air zone scored highly as a measure capable of delivering air quality improvements within a relatively short timeframe.

"However, it was recognised that introducing a clean air zone would have significant implications for residents, businesses, and visitors, and therefore a detailed economic feasibility assessment was commissioned before any decision could be made."

Clean air zones have become increasingly common in cities and towns across Britain over the past few years, many of which see high-polluting vehicles charged a small fee for entering the area.

However, some schemes opt for traffic control measures instead of charges on motorists.

The London Ultra Low Emission Zone is one of the best known examples, which sees vehicles that do not meet emission standards billed £12.50 to drive within its borders.

A feasibility study into a possible Guildford clean air zone found that such a measure could bring significant costs, and instead recommended targeted interventions in pollution hotspots and incentives for active travel.

It was considered by the council's overview and scrutiny committee earlier this month, where report lead Dr Margarethe Theseira told councillors: "The reason a clean air zone or low emission zone is not proportionate to local need is that the air quality is very much concentrated on one site, at Park Street.

"And so it made a broader scheme disproportionate in scale and cost. There are alternative measures you can do to improve air quality at Park Street."

The research found that Park Street saw especially high levels of pollution as vehicles are forced to drive uphill before being held at traffic lights.

Better traffic management and engineering solutions were floated as options to alleviate nitrogen dioxide spikes in the area rather than a blanket clean air zone for the entire town.

Councillor Rehorst-Smith said: "The study concludes that a clean air zone would not be a proportionate or economically justified intervention for addressing the air quality issues identified.

"Instead, the study implements a package of targeted measures focused on promoting active and sustainable travel, improving traffic management, and delivering local mitigation measures."

Guildford Borough Council's cabinet resolved to note the conclusions and recommendations of the feasibility report.

Councillors also agreed to report its findings to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and report back on a revised draft Air Quality Action Plan within six months.

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

Park Street Guildford (Credit: Google Maps)

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Mayoralty is not for Surrey Leader

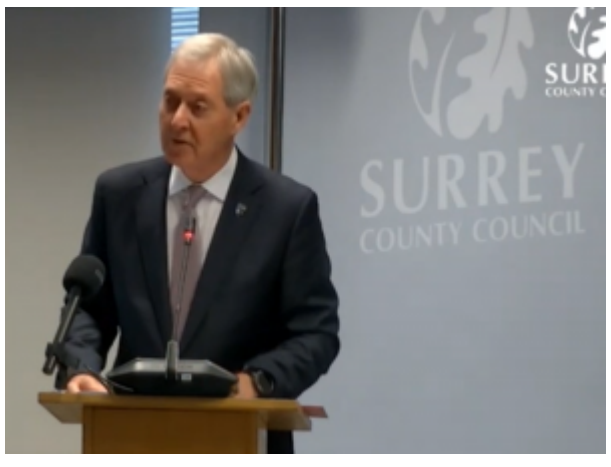
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Surrey County Council's outgoing leader says he will not seek to become the county's mayor if and when the role is created.

Councillor Tim Oliver, who has led the county council since 2018, is serving a final stint in office ahead of the area's move to two new unitary councils in East and West Surrey – which will take full effect next April.

It comes as part of a wider restructuring of local government, in which many areas with separate county and district councils are seeing them merged into single, unitary authorities.

While this transition is going ahead in Surrey, central government has not yet signed off on a subsequent phase that would see the county get a directly elected mayor.

However, Councillor Oliver has told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) he will not stand for the mayoralty when the office is formally established.

He said: "We're entering a different world, and at some point perhaps I would have gone for the mayoralty, but I decided a couple of years ago that I would sort of see through this restructuring, and then dip out."

"One of the things I'm hoping that will happen is these two new unitaries will create their own new culture," he added.

West and East Surrey's first elections were held last month, which saw the Liberal Democrats gain majorities in both "shadow authorities".

These authorities will now be tasked with getting the new councils up and running in time for April 2027, when they will formally take the reins from Surrey County Council and the various district councils.

Unitary authorities exist to manage all local government functions in their area, while the previous model of county and district councils saw these responsibilities split between the two.

District councils would manage services such as council tax and bin collections, while the county council oversaw social care, education and highways.

Councillor Oliver said the new unitary system had the potential to be "a much simpler, more streamlined, more resident-focused system".

Reflecting on his time as leader, Councillor Oliver said getting the county council onto a "strong financial footing" was among his proudest achievements, saying: "I think we can hold our head up high, certainly compared with many other councils."

Moving the county council back into the county was also high on his list of top accomplishments over the past eight years.

"That meant that we then got on and got ourselves properly set up for agile working just before Covid hit – and had we not done that, there would have been real difficulties."

He added: "I think ultimately I would like to think we have changed the culture from a kind of 'the answer's no, now what's the question' to a 'can-do' authority."

Councillor Oliver said his "expectation" is that Surrey could be ready for the 2028 wave of mayoral elections – alongside new authorities Greater Essex, Norfolk & Suffolk, Hampshire & the Solent, and Sussex & Brighton – if the green light is received from central government.

"We've got a conversation with the other Surrey leaders about going forward with a foundation strategic authority, which is the next stepping stone before you can get the mayoral strategic authority," he said.

"And the government is saying push on with the creation of a foundation strategic authority by the first of April 2027 and if we do that it's not an expensive next step."

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government was contacted for comment.

The department previously told Surrey Live that a decision on whether Surrey will get a mayor "has not been confirmed" and that they are simply "committed to working with partners to establish a strategic authority for the area".

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

Cllr Tim Oliver, Surrey County Council leader, making his final address to full council as the outgoing leader. (Credit: Surrey County Council livestream)

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