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Epsom and Ewell Parish councils decision looms amid questions over cost, timing and scrutiny

16 February 2026



Full Council set to decide weeks after consultation closes.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is preparing to decide whether to create new Community or Parish Councils for Epsom and Ewell, with a final decision expected at Full Council on 12 March.

The move follows the closure on 1st February of the statutory Community Governance Review consultation. The Council has confirmed that councillors will consider the consultation outcome and decide whether to make a Reorganisation Order formally establishing the new councils. The agenda and supporting analysis are expected to be published only in the week before the meeting, leaving limited time for councillors and residents to review the findings before a potentially irreversible decision.

Cllr **John Beckett** (RA Auriol – Chair of the Standards and Constitution Committee) said “I thank everyone who responded to the consultation for taking the time to have your say.”

Conservatives warn residents face “another tax” for limited services

Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative, Horton Ward) has warned that residents could face significant additional costs without any certainty that parish councils will deliver meaningful services.

He said the proposal risks introducing “another layer of local government and another tax” without a clear or guaranteed transfer of responsibilities.

At present, allotments are the only service clearly identified for transfer. Epsom and Ewell has 11 allotment sites which together cost around £20,000 per year to operate.

However, the administrative cost of running the proposed parish councils has been estimated at around £1.5 million per year.

Crucially, any expansion of parish council responsibilities beyond allotments would require the agreement of the new East Surrey Unitary Authority after the borough council is abolished in April 2027. There is no guarantee that such agreement would be given.

This raises the prospect that residents could face substantial additional council tax through a parish precept to fund administrative structures whose only assured function would be managing allotments costing a small fraction of the projected overhead.

Cllr Persand said residents were being asked to support a costly and permanent new tier of government without clarity on what it would actually do.

Move comes as borough council prepares for abolition

The parish council proposal comes against the backdrop of Local Government Reorganisation, which will see Epsom and Ewell Borough Council abolished and replaced by the new East Surrey Unitary Authority in April 2027.

Parish councils can preserve a layer of local representation after district councils cease to exist, but they also introduce an additional tier of governance funded through their own council tax precept.

Once established, parish councils are permanent public authorities and cannot easily be dissolved.

Questions over scrutiny and decision-making process

The timing and handling of the decision has also prompted procedural questions.

The Council’s Strategy and Resources Committee normally considers major financial and governance matters before final decisions are taken by Full Council.

Will the parish council proposal be referred to Strategy and Resources Committee or to the Standards and Constitution Committee for detailed examination on 12th March — as the Bucha (Ukraine) town-twinning motion was on 10th February — or will Full Council proceed directly to a final decision without prior committee scrutiny?

That earlier twinning proposal involved only a symbolic endorsement and no financial commitment, yet it was referred to

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committee without debate, delaying any decision.

The parish council proposal, by contrast, would create entirely new public bodies with tax-raising powers and long-term financial implications for every household in the borough.

Decision will shape Epsom and Ewell's future governance

Supporters argue Community / Parish Councils will preserve local voice and identity. Critics warn they risk creating costly administrative structures without guaranteed powers or meaningful responsibilities.

With the consultation now closed and a decision imminent, councillors face a choice that could reshape local government in Epsom and Ewell for decades to come.

The Epsom and Ewell Times is keeping open its own Reader Survey for two more weeks. A survey that provides residents an opportunity to express their views on a wider set of options than the Council consultation provided.

Click HERE to access the Epsom and Ewell Times LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION SURVEY

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Stoneleigh & Auriol Voters Back Neighbourhood Plan – But What Will It Change?

16 February 2026



Residents of Stoneleigh and Auriol have decisively backed their Neighbourhood Plan in a local referendum, giving it formal authority to influence planning decisions in the area until 2039.

At the poll held on 12 February 2026, 1,296 voters supported the plan, with 92 voting against. Turnout was 20.7% of the 6,724 electorate, with just one ballot paper rejected.

Voters were asked whether Epsom & Ewell Borough Council should use the Neighbourhood Plan to help decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area.

The Council has confirmed that the next step is for the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee formally to "make" (adopt) the plan, after which its policies will be used in determining planning applications in Stoneleigh and Auriol.

What the Plan Covers

The Stoneleigh and Auriol Neighbourhood Plan (SANP) covers around 180 hectares broadly aligned with the two wards and runs to 2039.

Prepared by the Stoneleigh and Auriol Neighbourhood Forum, the plan's stated vision is to retain the area's "unique

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character and strong sense of community" while allowing it to grow to meet future needs.

Once made, it becomes part of the statutory development plan and must be used in deciding planning applications, alongside the Borough Local Plan and national planning policy.

Core Principles in the Plan

The plan does not allocate major development sites. Instead, it focuses on design control, protection of character, safeguarding retail and community facilities, environmental sustainability and parking standards.

Housing and design: New development must maintain consistent building lines and complement existing form, massing and roofscapes, reflecting the area's largely 1930s suburban layout. Development should generally respect the prevailing two to three storey character, using materials sympathetic to the area. Backland development may be permitted only where access, amenity space and privacy standards are satisfied. The Forum supports higher-density development where it is demonstrably sympathetic and does not harm local character.

Retail and community facilities: Proposals that enhance local retail facilities will be supported, while changes of use that threaten the predominance of commercial uses in retail centres will be resisted.

Green spaces and environment: The plan designates and protects local green spaces, seeks to minimise flood risk and supports renewable energy and energy efficiency measures where compatible with local character.

Transport and parking: Development must assess transport impact and provide adequate residential parking and cycle storage.

What Is Its Legal Weight?

Neighbourhood Plans derive their authority from national planning legislation. Once formally "made", they form part of the statutory development plan.

Planning applications must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In practical terms, SANP policies will therefore carry weight in planning decisions and appeals.

However, they must be in general conformity with strategic policies in the Borough's Local Plan and with national planning policy. They cannot override housing targets or contradict higher-level planning frameworks.

Does It Add Anything New?

The referendum result gives the plan a strong democratic mandate. Yet a legitimate question arises: does the Neighbourhood Plan introduce new planning principles, or does it largely restate existing ones?

Many of its core themes — protecting local character, limiting excessive height, maintaining building lines, safeguarding retail centres, supporting sustainable drainage and requiring parking provision — are already embedded in the National Planning Policy Framework, existing Borough Core Strategy and Development Management Policies, and established appeal decisions emphasising design quality and character.

The plan does not set housing numbers, allocate strategic sites or alter Borough-wide growth targets.

Its practical effect may therefore be less about introducing new rules and more about giving locally specific design guidance additional statutory status, strengthening the weight attached to character arguments at appeal, and sending a clear political signal about community expectations.

Whether that materially alters planning outcomes will be tested in future applications and appeals.

What Happens After April 2027?

The abolition of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council in April 2027 and its confirmed replacement by the East Surrey Unitary Authority will not invalidate the Neighbourhood Plan.

Neighbourhood Plans form part of the statutory development plan for the land area, not merely for the council that adopted them. The East Surrey Unitary Authority will inherit responsibility for applying the SANP in determining planning applications within Stoneleigh and Auriol.

However, the new authority will prepare its own strategic development plan covering a much wider geography. Over time, neighbourhood plan policies can be superseded or carry reduced weight if inconsistent with new strategic frameworks. The Neighbourhood Forum will also require renewed designation if the plan is to be formally reviewed or updated.

In short, the SANP is likely to survive reorganisation — but its long-term influence will depend on how it aligns with the policies of the incoming East Surrey authority.

A Strong 'Yes' — and a Test Ahead

With more than 93% of votes cast in favour, residents have clearly expressed a wish to shape development in their area.

The real question now is whether the Neighbourhood Plan will meaningfully change planning outcomes — or whether it primarily codifies principles already embedded in existing local and national policy.

That answer will emerge not at the ballot box, but in the planning committee room — and, potentially, on appeal.

Sam Jones – Reporter

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Image: Typical Stoneleigh residential road. Google Street View

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Cllr prays for Priest Hill not to be developed in Ewell

16 February 2026



A controversial proposal to build hundreds of homes on Green Belt land at Priest Hill in Ewell has re-emerged, with developers now progressing a revised scheme for up to 300 homes. The land, adjacent to Ewell East Station, had previously been identified in the draft Local Plan as a major housing allocation but was later removed from the Regulation 19 version due to concerns over deliverability.

From 350 Homes to 300

Under the earlier Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan, the site — known as NON013 — was allocated for at least 350 net zero carbon dwellings, with buildings up to six storeys, ground-floor retail space and the re-provision of playing pitches at Hook Road Arena. However, concerns were raised during consultation. Sutton & Epsom Rugby Football Club (RFC), which leases part of the site until 2079, objected strongly, citing the importance of its pitches to its 2,000 members and warning of potential harm to its long-term viability. Sport England also raised concerns, noting that any loss of playing field land would have to meet strict national policy tests, including equivalent replacement in quality, quantity, location and accessibility. Following these issues, and in the absence of evidence that long leases could be surrendered, the Council removed the site from the Regulation 19 Proposed Submission Local Plan in November 2024.

What Has Changed?

According to the Council’s latest position statement dated 22 January 2026, the landowner’s agents are now seeking pre-application advice for a revised scheme. The updated proposal would redevelop approximately 4.9 hectares currently under the leasehold control of Old Suttonians for up to 300 homes, while retaining the 3.7 hectares leased to Sutton & Epsom RFC as sports pitches. Old Suttonians confirmed to the Council in December 2025 that their use of the land for sports ceased in 1999, the clubhouse and changing rooms were demolished in 2015, and they have signed an option agreement to return their land to the freeholder for redevelopment. They do not sub-lease or share the land with other parties. In contrast, Sutton & Epsom RFC confirmed in January 2026 that it fully utilises its leased land for three senior pitches and one mini pitch and has no intention of ending its lease early, with 53 years remaining.

Green Belt Concerns

Nonsuch Ward Conservative councillor **Shanice Goldman** has called for urgent clarity over the revived proposals. The site lies within the Green Belt and while the revised scheme indicates that rugby pitches would remain, residential development would still take place on designated Green Belt land. Cllr Goldman said: “The protection of Green Belt and transparency in process are not optional extras. They are fundamental.” She added: “This is still Green Belt land. And once Green Belt is gone, it does not come back.” Residents, she said, had been left with the impression that large-scale development at Priest Hill was no longer proceeding and were now asking what has changed.

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Housing Need Versus Open Land

The landowner's agents have previously argued that the site is well served by public transport and should be reconsidered given the borough's unmet housing need. The current proposal is at pre-application stage, meaning no formal planning application has yet been submitted. However, the renewed activity is likely to reignite debate over housing numbers, Green Belt protection and the future of community sports provision in Ewell. Interested parties include Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, the freeholder Coldunell Limited, Old Suttonians and Sutton & Epsom Rugby Football Club. Further details are expected once a formal planning application is lodged.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Councillors belted-up on Green Belt?

Land adjoining Ewell East Station

Image: Development area approximately overlaid on Google Map aerial view of Priest Hill.

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See-saw debate on whether Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's budget is balanced

16 February 2026



Inside the Claims and Counter-Claims at EEBC's 2026/27 Budget Meeting

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) declared Tuesday (10th February) that it has delivered a "balanced budget without the use of reserves" for 2026/27.

The ruling Residents' Association (RA) described it as the culmination of decades of prudent financial management. Opposition councillors from Labour, Liberal Democrat and Independent benches described something rather different: a one-year balancing act achieved by withdrawing revenue support for maintenance and capital projects, while pushing structural deficits into the future and increasing council tax to the legal maximum.

"Balanced Without the Use of Reserves" — What Does That Mean?

The morning after the meeting, EEBC issued a press release stating that the final budget had been "balanced without the use of reserves" following "£700,000-worth of savings" and a more favourable government funding settlement, particularly relating to temporary accommodation costs.

In the chamber, Cllr **Neil Dallen** (RA Town), Chair of Strategy & Resources, framed the result as both fiscally responsible and stable: "We have produced a balanced budget without using reserves… while ensuring the borough's finances are stable."

Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) went further, calling EEBC: "an island of financial calm and stability" and describing the budget as "balanced… with no cuts… the continuation and culmination of decades of sound RA-led financial management."

On the face of it, the claim is correct — in Year 1. The budget report states that, following savings and funding uplifts, the

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council has set a balanced budget for 2026/27.

However, the same report pack makes clear that this balance applies to the first year only. The medium-term financial strategy still shows a projected gap of approximately £0.206m in Year 2 and £0.373m in Year 3 — around £0.579m in total across the later years of the plan. The Section 151 Officer's robustness statement acknowledges that the estimated gap by 2028/29 remains in the region of £0.56m–£0.57m.

So the question is not whether Year 1 balances — it does — but whether the structural challenge has been solved or merely deferred.

From £5 Million Gap to £579,000 — How Was It Done?

Back in July 2025, the projected three-year funding gap stood at £5.063 million. By February 2026, that gap had reduced to £0.579 million.

The improvement is attributed to three principal factors:

1. A favourable uplift in Revenue Support Grant (around £1.4 million) under revised funding formulae.*
2. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) funding that exceeded expectations — around £1.08 million received versus £0.337 million forecast. [Click here for an Epsom and Ewell Times guide to EPR.]
3. Approximately £700,000 of savings achieved largely by removing planned revenue contributions toward capital projects and maintenance budgets.

The opposition did not dispute the arithmetic. They disputed the sustainability.

Liberal Democrat Warning: "We Are No Longer Maintaining Our Assets"

Cllr **James Lawrence** (Lib Dem College) delivered the most detailed financial critique of the evening. Referring directly to the budget papers, he acknowledged that the headline gap had fallen dramatically — but argued the method used to close it was deeply concerning.

He told Council: "We have 930k of savings being put forth for this year, 700,000 of that is because we're no longer putting any revenue contributions towards our capital projects, and we're not putting any towards our maintenance projects… That is 700,000 this year and all future years that we are not putting towards repairing and maintaining our buildings and capital assets."

In other words, the largest element of recurring savings is the removal of revenue support for asset upkeep.

Lawrence also criticised what he described as unrealistic budgeting assumptions on temporary accommodation numbers the previous year, stating that predictions had been far below actual demand. He argued that the in-year deficit had only been reduced from around £900,000 to £500,000 because: "we took 400,000 out of the Rainbow Leisure Centre contingency."

That reference would become a flashpoint later in the debate.

Temporary Accommodation: Windfall or Long-Overdue Reimbursement?

Homelessness spending sits at the heart of this budget story. The report pack acknowledges that 2025/26 is forecast to end with a deficit of around £520,000, largely due to housing and homelessness pressures, with a £750,000 increase built into 2026/27 for nightly paid accommodation.

The RA's defence is that central government has finally begun to recognise real costs through revised funding formulae. Cllr Dallen told Council: "For years, they haven't [paid], and we have been subsidizing that service by millions of pounds… The one and a half million they've given us still doesn't cover the cost… So it's not a windfall. It is actually starting to pay what they should be paying for homelessness."

Opposition councillors saw it differently.

Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) argued that the scale of temporary accommodation expenditure reflected years of policy failure: "The council is spending huge amounts… on managing a homelessness problem, largely of its own making… People should be housed in permanent homes, not expensive temporary accommodation."

Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) added that prevention should sit "at the heart of our budget as a serious financial and moral commitment."

The debate therefore split along a clear line: RA framing increased grant as overdue reimbursement; Labour framing homelessness spending as structural failure.

Council Tax: "Expected by Government" or "Squeezing Residents"?

The budget applies a 2.98% council tax increase — effectively the maximum allowed without triggering a referendum.

Cllr Dallen told Council that government "expects us to raise council tax by this amount," warning that failure to do so could have grant consequences.

The report pack itself notes that the funding settlement assumes councils apply maximum Band D increases and deliver taxbase growth.

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But Cllr Chinn challenged the choice: “The RA are again proposing residents pay the maximum increase allowed… this council should be reducing the pressure… not adding further costs.”

The political divide here is clear: RA sees the increase as prudent and necessary; opposition sees it as avoidable and poorly timed during cost-of-living pressures.

The Strategic Priorities Reserve — A Missed Opportunity?

One of the most substantive amendments came from Cllr Lawrence, seconded by Ruxley Independent Cllr **Alex Coley**, proposing that the Strategic Priorities Reserve — originally funded with approximately £2.3 million and still containing around £1.6 million unallocated — be dissolved and transferred to general reserves.

Lawrence argued that, with local government reorganisation and a shadow authority imminent, earmarking funds for long-term “wish list” projects no longer made sense.

Coley supported him: “I just don’t see the reason for keeping this money out of our general reserves any longer.”

Cllr Dallen rejected the amendment, invoking process: “We have a financial strategy advisory group… to suddenly have a knee jerk reaction at a council meeting where officers are not allowed to speak… I think is crazy… We have proper processes.”

The amendment failed. The reserve remains intact.

The deeper issue: what constitutes prudence at the end of a council’s life — ring-fenced ambition, or flexible liquidity?

Rainbow Leisure Centre — The Unresolved Liability

During debate, Cllr Ames alleged that the transfer of Rainbow Leisure Centre to a new operator could leave the council facing: “a bill of around half a million pounds plus legal costs.”

Lawrence’s separate reference to drawing £400,000 from the Rainbow contingency fund amplified the concern.

The budget papers do not explicitly quantify any final Rainbow liability within the headline figures, and no detailed rebuttal was provided during the meeting.

For residents, the question is simple: if liabilities exist, where do they sit within the risk assessment of the medium-term plan?

Reserves: Not Used — But Still Doing the Heavy Lifting

The claim that the 2026/27 budget is balanced without reserves is technically correct. However, the report pack confirms that 2025/26 is forecast to close with a deficit to be managed through earmarked reserves, while the General Fund reserve stands at £1.555m — only £55,000 above the council’s stated minimum threshold of £1.5m.

The distinction is important. “No reserves used in 2026/27” does not mean reserves are irrelevant to the council’s overall financial stability.

The Vote — And What It Revealed

The budget passed on a recorded division: 19 in favour, 10 against, one abstention.

Cllr **Julian Freeman** (LibDem College) criticised what he described as bloc voting by the RA: “Residents councillors just voting along with their group.”

The RA closed ranks. Opposition parties voted against.

So — Balanced, or Balanced for Now?

The 2026/27 budget does balance in accounting terms.

But it does so through a combination of:
• Exceptional government funding uplifts.
• Removal of recurring revenue support for capital and maintenance.
• Maximum council tax increase.
• Deferral of structural gaps into later years.

The ruling group describes this as prudent stewardship at the end of an administration.

Opposition councillors describe it as a one-year fix achieved by stopping maintenance contributions and raising tax while underlying pressures remain.

With local government reorganisation approaching and a shadow authority soon to assume control, the final judgement may not be made by this council at all — but by its successor.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Image: Any resemblance to any particular councillor is random and their position on the see-saw is not indicative of whether they supported the budget or not.

*A general grant paid by central government to local authorities to help fund their day-to-day services, with no requirement that it be spent on any specific activity

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Epsom reserves vs investment

January crime and safety round-up

16 February 2026



Epsom and Ewell Times does not normally report individual crime incidents. However, as a trial, we are publishing a monthly round-up of crime and community safety matters with a local connection, drawing on information released by Surrey Police and partner agencies.

Safer Epsom & Ewell partnership – early impact

Surrey Police and Epsom & Ewell Borough Council have continued to roll out the **Safer Epsom & Ewell** partnership during January, aimed at tackling persistent offending, organised crime, antisocial behaviour and theft across the borough.

According to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, the initiative has already resulted in more than **150 arrests**, targeting prolific offenders, shoplifting, drug supply and county-lines activity. Police report the disruption of multiple county-lines gangs, seizures of Class A drugs and cash, and the removal of knives from circulation.

The partnership builds on high-visibility policing activity over the Christmas and New Year period and is intended to provide a sustained, joined-up approach to community safety involving the police, the borough council, housing providers and other local partners.

(Source: Surrey Police / Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner)

Witness appeal after approach in Court Recreation Ground, Epsom

Surrey Police have issued an appeal for information following an incident reported on **Monday 26 January** in **Court Recreation Ground, Epsom**.

Police say a **13-year-old girl walking to school** was approached by two men, one of whom reached out towards her. The girl was able to run away and was not injured.

One suspect is described as a **tall white man of slim build with dark hair**, wearing a **dark jumper**. Police have asked anyone who was in the area at the time, or who saw anything suspicious, to contact them.

Robbery in Ash Court, Epsom – police seek witnesses

Earlier in the month, Surrey Police appealed for witnesses following a **robbery in Ash Court, Epsom**, reported late on **Friday 9 January**.

The incident is believed to have taken place between **approximately 11.50pm and 11.56pm**. Officers have asked residents and motorists in the area at the time to check **CCTV, doorbell or dash-cam footage** and contact police if they have information that may assist enquiries.

Police have not released further public details about the victim or property taken.

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Missing child appeal cancelled after positive outcome

Surrey Police also confirmed this month that a **13-year-old girl reported missing from Epsom** was later **found safe and well**, and that an earlier public appeal was stood down.

Community engagement – 'Meet the Beat' sessions

Throughout January, Surrey Police neighbourhood teams held a series of **"Meet the Beat"** drop-in sessions across Epsom and Ewell.

The sessions allowed residents to speak directly with local officers about issues such as antisocial behaviour, shoplifting, speeding and general community safety concerns. Locations included areas such as Epsom town centre, Waterloo Road, Long Grove and local shopping parades.

Further sessions are scheduled into February.

Local policing priorities

Surrey Police have continued to highlight neighbourhood priorities for Epsom and Ewell, including action against **antisocial use of motorbikes and e-bikes**, and a **zero-tolerance approach to retail crime** in the town centre.

Police say this includes targeted patrols, enforcement activity and work with local businesses and CCTV operators.

How to contact Surrey Police

- **In an emergency (immediate danger or a crime in progress):** call **999**
- **Non-emergency matters:** call **101**
- **Online reporting and advice:** use the Surrey Police website reporting tools
- **Crimestoppers (anonymous information): 0800 555 111**

Residents are encouraged to report concerns, suspicious behaviour or relevant information promptly to assist local policing and community safety.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Epsom & Ewell's Council responds to Local Plan concerns

16 February 2026



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has responded to questions raised about the handling of its Local Plan examination, following criticism from a local resident that key issues were not discussed at the January meeting of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee (LPPC).

The concerns, raised by Alex Duval and subsequently put to the council by Epsom & Ewell Times, centred on the absence of any Local Plan item on the LPPC agenda, whether revised evidence requested by the Planning Inspector had been submitted on time, and how the plan is being managed during the transition to a new unitary authority.

No committee decision required, says council

Responding to the first point, a council spokesperson said that although the Planning Inspector had requested additional work on two areas of the Local Plan evidence base following the public hearings in autumn 2025, no LPPC agenda item was required on 22 January because no formal decision was needed.

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"The Local Plan Inspector requested that the planning authority undertake two pieces of work, as set out in her post-hearing letter dated 22 October 2025," the spokesperson said.

"There was no item on the agenda for the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee on 22 January 2026 as there was no decision to be made in relation to the submission of this evidence base."

Critics had argued that, given the significance of the work and the proximity to the council's own stated submission deadline, the committee should at least have been asked to note or review the position.

Evidence submitted by deadline

On the question of whether revised Green Belt and Land Availability Assessment material had been submitted by the deadline of 22 January 2026, the council confirmed that it had.

"Yes, the work was submitted by the agreed deadline," the spokesperson said.

"The Planning Inspector will review the information in due course and advise how the examination will proceed."

At the time the concern was raised, the updated material was not visible on the examination website, prompting uncertainty among observers about whether the deadline had been met.

Examination remains Inspector-led

Addressing wider concerns about how the Local Plan will be managed as Epsom and Ewell moves towards abolition under local government reorganisation, the council said the examination process remains unaffected.

"Following the submission of the Local Plan in March 2025, approved by Full Council on 10 December 2024, the Local Plan entered its Examination stage, which is led by the appointed Planning Inspector," the spokesperson said.

"This will continue to be the case until the Examination stage concludes."

The council's response does not address whether any further member oversight or discussion of the Local Plan will take place before the examination ends, but confirms that responsibility for the process now rests with the Inspector rather than the council's policy committees.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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The Local Plan plot thickens after revised NPPF

Council minority vote Local Plan to next stage with Green Belt in

…and many more – search "local plan" in our search box.

Epsom & Ewell MP presses government on firearm licensing safeguards

16 February 2026



Epsom & Ewell's MP **Helen Maguire** led a Westminster Hall debate on 28 January calling for tighter safeguards in the firearms licensing system, with a particular focus on making *medical markers* on GP records mandatory for gun licence

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holders.

Opening the debate, Ms Maguire set out the case for reform by referencing a series of fatal incidents where legally held firearms were used, including cases with direct relevance to Epsom & Ewell. She told MPs that the issue was not about restricting lawful gun ownership, but about closing gaps in safeguarding where warning signs were missed.

“This is a missed opportunity to save lives,” she said. “A missed opportunity to safeguard vulnerable adults with access to firearms and protect public safety.”

Local tragedy cited in Parliament

In a powerful and emotional passage, Ms Maguire referred to the double murder and suicide connected to **Epsom College**, a case that attracted national attention in 2023. She told the House:

“Gemma and her daughter Letty Patterson, who lived in my constituency, were shot and killed by Gemma’s husband almost three years ago, before he turned the gun on himself… If they had [been able to intervene], maybe Gemma would still be working at Epsom College and Letty might have celebrated her 10th birthday this year.”

Ms Maguire argued that the perpetrator’s use of online medical services meant that neither his GP nor the police were aware of changes in his mental health when his shotgun licence was renewed.

Case for mandatory medical markers

Medical markers are digital flags on GP systems indicating that a patient holds a firearm or shotgun licence. They are intended to prompt doctors to consider whether changes in a patient’s mental or physical health should be shared with police firearms units.

Although such markers are now available, their use by GPs remains voluntary. Ms Maguire said that this undermined their effectiveness:

“There is currently no obligation on GPs to use this marker. Their use is left to best endeavours… This cannot be allowed to happen again.”

She cited support for mandatory markers from a wide range of bodies, including the British Medical Association, the Royal College of GPs, shooting organisations and police representatives. Quoting survey evidence, she added that “87% of existing certificate holders believe GPs should inform the police if they become aware of a change of health which could impact a certificate holder’s ability to safely own a gun.”

Balancing safety and rural life

Anticipating concerns from rural MPs, Ms Maguire stressed that her proposals were not an attack on shooting sports or countryside livelihoods.

“Our country is home to proud rural communities and individuals who rely on gun ownership for their work,” she said. “This debate is in no way about firearm ownership… Today’s discussion is on how we can ensure medical professionals have the information required to best support the individuals they serve.”

She pointed to other licensing regimes, such as driving licences, where medical fitness is routinely monitored in the public interest.

Government response

Responding for the government, the Minister acknowledged the tragedy at Epsom College and confirmed that thousands of digital medical markers are already being applied each year. However, he stopped short of committing to make them mandatory, arguing that existing data suggested most GPs were using the system appropriately.

Ms Maguire challenged that position directly in the debate, asking: “If we’re saying there’s no additional cost to it, then I’m struggling to understand why it’s difficult to change the position.”

In her closing remarks, she expressed disappointment at the government’s stance and warned against complacency: “I do not want to be here again talking about another incident. And I truly hope the Minister will go away and really consider this.”

The debate concluded with broad cross-party support for the principle of stronger safeguards, even as ministers resisted calls for immediate legislative change.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Helen Maguire MP speaking in the Westminster Hall debate. Parliament TV

Related reports:

Epsom College murder inquest

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Surrey declares experiment in community engagement a success

16 February 2026



Surrey County Council has endorsed the continuation of its pilot **Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs)**, hailing them as a successful new way of ensuring that “community voices are heard” during the transition to new unitary authorities.

At its Cabinet meeting on 27 January, the Council agreed that the four existing pilot NACs – in Dorking and the Villages, East Elmbridge, Farnham and North Tandridge – should continue operating until the pre-election period in 2026. Cabinet members also backed proposals to share learning from the pilots with the new shadow unitary authorities from May 2026, and to consider expanding the model to one or two further areas.

In a strongly positive Cabinet report, Surrey said the pilots had demonstrated “strong stakeholder engagement and consensus on evidence-based local priorities”. All 24 NAC members who responded to the final evaluation survey supported continuation, with 83 per cent reporting a positive impact on their work.

Council Leader **Tim Oliver** (Conservative) described the pilots as proof of what could be achieved “when communities, councils, and partners work even closer together”, adding that the NACs had delivered “stronger neighbourhoods” and could be scaled up across Surrey.

Senior figures from health bodies, the voluntary sector and district councils also welcomed the model, with supporters arguing that NACs provide a forum for aligning priorities across councils, the NHS, police, education providers and community organisations at a neighbourhood level.

If you have not already done so we do urge you to take part in the Epsom and Ewell Borough Council consultation on creating new Parish or Community Councils and also the Epsom and Ewell Times reader survey designed to offer wider options for you to express your views on.

EEBC CGR Consultation

Click HERE to access the Epsom and Ewell Times reader survey.

Advisory forums – not elected bodies

However, the Cabinet paper and accompanying statements also underline a key limitation: NACs are **advisory and collaborative bodies**, not democratically elected councils.

Membership varies by area and includes appointed representatives from public bodies and voluntary organisations alongside councillors from existing authorities. While Surrey says this flexibility allows NACs to reflect local circumstances, critics argue it also raises questions about accountability, transparency and duplication – particularly as Surrey moves towards unitary local government.

In Epsom & Ewell no NAC pilot currently operates. Under current proposals, the borough will be represented by **10 elected councillors on the new East Surrey Unitary Authority**, covering a population of more than 80,000 residents. Decisions about neighbourhood-level governance will therefore have to sit alongside – or potentially compete with – a smaller number of unitary councillors holding formal democratic mandates.

Parish councils versus NACs

The NAC model also sits uneasily alongside longer-established forms of local democracy, such as parish and town councils, which are directly elected and have statutory standing.

Several Surrey districts, including parts of Epsom & Ewell, have debated whether the creation of new parish or community councils would provide a clearer, more accountable way of preserving local voice following local government reorganisation. NACs, by contrast, have no independent legal status, no direct electoral mandate and no guaranteed budgetary powers.

Supporters of NACs argue that they are intended to complement, not replace, existing councils and that they are

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particularly useful during a period of structural change. The Cabinet report stresses their value in identifying shared priorities, coordinating preventative work and encouraging partnership working ahead of the 2026 unitary elections.

Yet the report stops short of explaining how NACs would interact with elected parish councils where these exist – or whether they risk becoming a parallel governance layer once the new unitaries are fully operational.

A transitional solution?

For now, Surrey's Cabinet appears to see NACs primarily as a transitional mechanism, helping to bridge the gap between the current two-tier system and the new unitary arrangements.

The four pilots ran between July and December 2025, and the decision to extend them only until the pre-election period in 2026 suggests that their long-term role remains unresolved. Expansion to further areas is framed as something to be "considered", rather than guaranteed.

As Surrey moves closer to the creation of East and West Surrey unitary authorities, the key question for places like Epsom & Ewell will be whether neighbourhood engagement is best delivered through appointed partnership forums – or through elected local councils with clearer lines of accountability to residents.

For now, Surrey County Council is celebrating what it describes as a successful experiment. Whether NACs evolve into a permanent feature of local governance, or give way to more traditional democratic structures, is a debate that is only just beginning.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Epsom and Ewell's Local Democracy Debate: What's at Stake as Consultation Enters Phase Two

Letters from local Councillors on Epsom and Ewell parishes

Neighbour Area Committees HERE

Bit of monkey business in Epsom's Town Hall Chamber

16 February 2026



A meeting of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council on 22nd January saw councillors approve a new schedule of planning fees and charges for 2026/27, despite repeated concerns being raised during the meeting about the absence of planning officers, gaps in supporting information, and the committee's ability to scrutinise what it was being asked to approve.

The committee was considering fees for discretionary planning services, including Planning Performance Agreements and tree-related services, rather than nationally set statutory planning application fees.

Early in the discussion, councillors were told that questions on planning matters would need to be answered after the meeting. Chair **Peter O'Donovan** (RA Ewell Court) explained this was because no planning officers were present.

One of the first issues raised concerned retrospective planning applications. Cllr **Phil Neale** (RA Cuddington) recalled

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that councillors had previously discussed introducing higher charges to discourage developers from building first and seeking permission later.

“We get a lot of developers playing the game… trying to do developments without planning and then getting caught and putting in retrospective applications,” he said, adding that he was disappointed not to see such a charge included.

The officer response was that the matter would need to be taken away and clarified with planning colleagues.

During the same exchange, Cllr **Humphrey Reynold**s (RA West Ewell) interjected that “the worst culprit is Hobbledown… application after application retrospectively,” referring to the local visitor attraction.

Concerns then turned to the scale and transparency of proposed discretionary fees. Cllr **Julian Freeman** (LibDem College) questioned why discretionary fees were rising by 4.8 per cent, above the headline inflation rate, and whether councillors had sufficient information to justify approving them.

A officer explained that the increase followed the council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy, which sets fees at CPI plus one per cent, using September inflation figures.

A more sustained exchange followed over officer hourly rates, particularly for tree-related services. Cllr **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) calculated that the proposed hourly rate for a tree officer – £133 per hour – implied an equivalent daily rate of over £1,000. “That’s an extraordinary amount of money to charge,” he said, adding that residents as well as developers were affected by these fees.

An Officer responded that the hourly rates were not based on salary alone and reflected overheads, travel time and the need to maintain regulatory services alongside discretionary work. “These are the prices that we charge for the services we provide,” she said, adding that councils were effectively competing with the private sector for this type of work.”

However, when pressed on the specific breakdown of what residents receive for certain charges – including a £550 fee to plant a tree – officers acknowledged they could not provide detailed explanations during the meeting and would need to come back with written responses.

At one point, Chair Peter O’Donovan cut short the line of questioning, telling councillors: “That’s our charge. People can take it or not use it.”

Cllr Coley responded that this was not always the case, noting that some services, such as tree-related consents, could only be authorised by the council.

Questions were also raised about whether councillors had been given comparative data showing how Epsom and Ewell’s charges stack up against neighbouring boroughs. Officers said some benchmarking had been carried out but accepted that “it’s difficult to compare like for like” because councils offer services in different ways.

Later in the meeting, Cllr Freeman drew attention to newly introduced charges for primate licences, jokingly asking whether the borough was “expecting an invasion from Planet of the Apes”. Officers were unable to explain the origin of the charge at the meeting and undertook to respond later.

Despite the unresolved questions, the committee voted to approve the fees and charges as presented.

After the meeting Cllr Freeman told the Epsom & Ewell Times his view the debate left councillors and viewers “feeling that relevant evidence was not provided to committee members when making their decision”, particularly given that Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is due to be abolished in 2027 as part of local government reorganisation.

“The implication that issues could be looked at ‘next time’ rather misses the point,” he wrote. “There may not be a next time.”

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Sam Jones – Reporter

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PS If you wish to keep a monkey or other primate the fee is £450

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EEBC reports air quality milestone and revised carbon emissions figures

16 February 2026



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Environment Committee has noted a series of climate and air quality updates, including the formal revocation of the Ewell High Street Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and revised figures showing a reduction in the council's own operational carbon emissions since 2019/20.

The update was presented to councillors on 20 January as part of the council's second Climate Change Action Plan, which runs from 2025 to 2029 and sets out measures intended to support the council's stated aim of reaching carbon neutrality by 2035.

According to the report, the AQMA covering Ewell High Street has now been revoked following sustained improvements in nitrogen dioxide levels. The zone was originally designated in 2007 after pollution levels linked largely to road traffic exceeded national limits. The council acknowledged that while local measures played a role, wider national and regional factors, including vehicle fleet modernisation, also contributed to the improvement.

Alongside the air quality decision, the council reported a revision to its historical carbon emissions baseline after receiving more accurate electricity consumption data for Epsom Town Hall, Bourne Hall and Epsom Playhouse. Full-year data for 2019/20 and 2020/21 had previously been unavailable and earlier figures were based on estimates.

The revised baseline places council operational emissions in 2019/20 at 1,487 tonnes of CO_2 equivalent. For 2024/25, emissions are reported as 1,201 tonnes, representing a reduction of around 19 per cent over the period. Most subsequent years were unchanged by the revision, with the adjustments largely confined to the two earliest years.

The report also listed a number of property and energy efficiency measures undertaken in recent years, including replacement of windows at Bourne Hall, LED lighting upgrades at Epsom Playhouse, and the installation of a 177kWp solar photovoltaic system at the council's leisure centre. The council estimates that the leisure centre installation alone could save more than 30 tonnes of carbon emissions annually, based on partial-year data.

In addition, councillors were reminded of partnership schemes intended to support residents in reducing household emissions, including advice programmes and grant schemes for heating and energy upgrades.

Chair of the Environment Committee Councillor **Liz Frost** (RA Woodcote and Langley) said the Climate Change Action Plan was intended to guide long-term changes in how the council operates and delivers services, and highlighted the AQMA revocation as an example of sustained action producing measurable results.

The updated emissions data and air quality decisions form part of the council's annual monitoring of climate-related activity, which is reported back to councillors each year.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

The Mayor of Epsom and Ewell meets local climate volunteers

Surrey County Council's Climate Change Progress: Successes, Setbacks, and the Road Ahead

Epsom and Ewell adopts new Climate Action Plan

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Ex-Gendarme launches Epsom safety awareness programme for children

16 February 2026



A new safety awareness programme for children has been launched in **Epsom** by former French armed police officer Xavier Vollin, who now works in the UK as a close protection officer for foreign diplomats and a behavioural detection instructor. Mr Vollin, who was awarded a Medal for Bravery during his police service, has more than 25 years' frontline experience in law enforcement, personal protection and behavioural analysis. He also trains colleagues in recognising early warning signs and behavioural anomalies in everyday environments. The initiative, developed under his training company XavSafety, is currently being piloted with children aged 9 to 13, with plans to expand to older teenagers and adults.

Seeing what others miss

Mr Vollin said that much traditional safety advice focuses on what to do once a situation has already gone wrong, whereas his approach concentrates on what happens before that point, helping participants notice changes in behaviour, inconsistencies in surroundings and subtle cues that may signal emerging risk. The programme emphasises calm awareness, observation and environmental understanding rather than confrontation or fear-based thinking. It is described as helping children "see what others miss", while remaining age-appropriate, engaging and accessible. Mr Vollin said the aim is not to turn children into "mini security officers", but to help them become more present, confident and aware of how people and environments can change around them.

Pilot programme underway in Epsom

The initial six-week programme began in early January 2026 and has deliberately been kept small to allow the format to be refined and adapted before wider rollout. Sessions combine practical exercises with elements of behavioural observation and pattern recognition, presented in a way intended to remain playful rather than intimidating. Early feedback from parents and children has been positive, although images and evaluation material are currently limited while the pilot phase continues. Future developments are expected to include programmes for older teenagers and adults, exploring the same core skills in greater depth, and Mr Vollin intends to formalise the framework and pursue CPD accreditation.

Focus on awareness in a digital age

Mr Vollin said the wider purpose of the project is to help young people reconnect with their surroundings at a time when attention is increasingly absorbed by screens. He described the underlying idea as being less about strength or reaction, and more about presence, understanding people and recognising risk early, before reaction becomes the only option. The programme is currently launching locally in Epsom, with potential for expansion depending on demand and community interest. Further details about the initiative can be found on the XavSafety website.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Goldman sacks the Epsom and Ewell Residents Association

16 February 2026



A councillor representing Nonsuch ward has become the latest member of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council to change political alignment mid-term, with **Shanice Goldman** joining the Conservative group.

Cllr Goldman, first elected in May 2023, said her decision was based on where she believed she could be “most effective” in achieving practical outcomes for residents, rather than on ideology or internal party politics. She cited concerns about governance, the Local Plan and the council’s approach to parish councils as key factors influencing her move.

Her defection comes amid a period of visible political flux at **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council**, which is currently controlled by the Residents’ Associations (RAs). In recent months, College ward councillor **Julie Morris** left the Liberal Democrats to sit as an Independent, while **Alex Coley** departed the RA group, also choosing to continue as an Independent councillor.

In a statement explaining her decision, Cllr Goldman said she had found it increasingly difficult to support an administration she felt was not sufficiently focused on delivery or long-term outcomes. She said her priorities were better aligned with the Conservatives’ approach to accountability, governance and service delivery, adding that any local government reform should be “resident-focused, evidence-led, and driven by improved service delivery rather than structural change for its own sake”.

She also pointed to Conservative positions on safety, the Green Belt and scrutiny of council decision-making as factors in her decision, while stressing that her core priorities for residents had not changed.

The move was welcomed by local Conservative officers, who used the announcement to criticise the Residents’ Association-led administration’s record on council management, the Local Plan and parish council proposals. They said Cllr Goldman’s arrival strengthened their group’s capacity to challenge the council on behalf of residents.

Cllr Goldman said she would continue to focus on improving safety, quality of life and transparency in decision-making for residents of Nonsuch ward.

Her change of affiliation does not alter the overall control of the council, but it adds to a growing pattern of councillors stepping away from their original party groupings during the current term, raising wider questions about cohesion, governance and political direction at the borough council.

Though Conservative controlled Reigate and Banstead Borough Council has the lowest per capita debt of the 11 Surrey districts councils the three super-league mass indebted Councils were or are run by Conservatives at the relevant period of debt accumulation. See today’s Epsom and Ewell Times editorial: Process matters — but so does the balance sheet.

Sam Jones – Reporter

Epsom and Ewell’s MP in the running for …. running

16 February 2026



A hardy team of **Epsom & Ewell Harriers** women braved freezing conditions for the third fixture of the **Surrey Cross Country League** season at **Oxshott Woods** on 10th January, hosted by Elmbridge Road Runners. The demanding

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woodland course, featuring slippery roots, undulating ground and the infamous hill, tested runners throughout.

Epsom & Ewell fielded two full women's teams and enjoyed an outstanding day in Division Two. The A team produced a commanding performance to take first place, finishing 35 points clear of Reigate Priory, while the B team secured an excellent second place, just behind Wimbledon Windmilers.

Individually, Sophie Glencross (U20) led the Harriers home with a superb third-place finish overall, drawing on her recent Varsity Cross Country experience to handle the tough conditions with confidence. Close behind, Sophie Lomas continued her strong winter form by finishing fourth, following her eighth-place result at the Surrey Cross Country Championships the previous weekend.

Completing the A team scoring positions were Annie Snowball (U20) in 19th, Nicky Stevenson (V45) in 21st and Lily Brown (U20) in 28th. Stevenson also recorded a notable age-group performance, finishing fifth in the V45–54 category with a time of 34:40.

Further strong runs came from Lauren Johnson in 32nd, Amber Brough-Nuesink in 43rd and **Helen Maguire in 44th place — the Liberal Democrat MP for Epsom and Ewell** — competing alongside her local club on a challenging winter course. Also finishing were Sandra Newbury in 86th and Julie Houghton in 98th.

After three of the four league fixtures, Epsom & Ewell sit third in Division Two, with Annie Snowball currently leading the U20 individual standings. With Reigate Priory and Vets AC contesting the top positions and E&E holding a narrow advantage over both Clapham Pioneers and Wimbledon Windmilers for the final promotion place, the concluding fixture at Lloyd Park promises to be keenly fought.

Selected results:
3rd – Sophie Glencross 30:01
4th – Sophie Lomas 30:43
19th – Annie Snowball 34:11
21st – Nicky Stevenson 34:40
28th – Lily Brown 35:22
32nd – Lauren Johnson 35:49
43rd – Amber Brough-Nuesink 36:37
44th – **Helen Maguire** 36:43
86th – Sandra Newbury 40:14
98th – Julie Houghton 42:18

Sam Jones – Reporter



Photo: Courtesy Epsom and Ewell Harriers

Another Epsom and Ewell Borough Council cover-up of criticism?

16 February 2026



Following closely behind the storm over the secrecy around the apparent failure of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council to maintain over 20 years an adequate landlord's oversight of The Rainbow Leisure Centre [see Epsom and Ewell Times and the BBC's LDRS report: Cllr Dallen accused of £1/2 m Epsom & Ewell Council cover-up], Independent Councillor for Ruxley Ward (former RA representative) Mr. Alex Coley has written to the Epsom and Ewell Times about the non-disclosure of a report concerning another Council asset: Bourne Hall in Ewell Village.

His letter is published here: A Decision Not Fully Bourne Out?

In view of the technicalities and jargon involved Epsom and Ewell Times provides this explainer:

When Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Community & Wellbeing Committee met on 13th January, it voted unanimously for greater investment ("Option 2") for the future of Bourne Hall Museum. On the surface, this appeared to be a clear decision to invest in the museum rather than let it drift or close it. See Epsom and Ewell Times report here: Ewell's "UFO"

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shaped Bourne Hall to take off anew

However, Cllr Coley explains in his letter to the Epsom & Ewell Times, the decision sits on top of a missing report, an unresolved funding question, and wider concerns about transparency in the decision-making process.

The three options – in plain English

The committee report presented councillors with three choices for the museum.

Option 1 was to do nothing. This would mean keeping the museum running as it is, within existing budgets, with no major changes or new investment. Officers warned that this approach would slowly reduce visitor numbers, weaken the wider Bourne Hall business plan, and leave the museum vulnerable as local government is reorganised.

Option 2, which the committee chose, was to invest in improvement. This would involve spending money in the short term to modernise displays, improve accessibility, strengthen community engagement, collect better visitor data, and develop a long-term plan. The report presents this option as a stepping stone towards a future where the museum could eventually move to a trust or community-based model.

Option 3 was to close the museum. This would involve shutting it to the public and beginning the lengthy and costly process of disposing of or transferring the collection, a process expected to take many years and carry significant reputational risk.

What “Option 2” actually commits the council to

This is where the language becomes technical, and where misunderstanding can easily arise.

By choosing Option 2, the committee did not approve spending the money. Instead, it agreed that officers should submit a funding request to the Strategy & Resources Committee in March 2026.

The report estimates that Option 2 would cost around £359,000 per year in the first two years, compared with around £236,000 for simply carrying on as now. The difference reflects a proposed investment phase intended to “turn the museum around”.

Crucially, the committee resolution includes a fallback position. If Strategy & Resources does not approve the funding, the council will revert to doing nothing and carry on with business as usual.

In other words, the January vote was not the final decision. The key financial decision still lies ahead.

Why Cllr Coley says the process matters

Cllr Coley’s concern is not about whether the museum should improve, but about how the decision was framed and what information councillors and the public were not shown.

He refers to an LGA Cultural Peer Challenge carried out in August 2025. This is a standard Local Government Association review process intended to provide independent scrutiny and learning, and such reports are normally published in full.

In this case, the full peer challenge report was not included in the committee papers. Instead, only a high-level executive summary was incorporated into the options report.

Cllr Coley says he repeatedly asked when the full report would be published and was told it would appear with the January committee papers. It did not. After the committee vote, he was informed that a decision had been taken to rely on a summary instead.

At the meeting itself, the committee chair accepted that, in hindsight, the full report should have been included after this was challenged by opposition councillors. As of now, it has still not been published.

What the missing report is said to contain

Cllr Coley states that, internally, the peer challenge report is understood to contain findings that are critical of the council’s handling of the museum. These are said to include confusion and mixed messaging about the museum’s closure, the exclusion of stewardship and governance questions from scope, failure to act on recommendations made in a 2023 review, recharge costs that may not reflect the true cost of running the museum, difficulty accessing detailed financial information, and fragmented staffing structures affecting communication and opportunity.

These issues matter because Option 2 is explicitly justified as being based on the service review and peer challenge findings. Without access to the full peer challenge report, councillors and the public cannot independently assess whether the proposed investment properly addresses those criticisms.

Why this matters before March

The Strategy & Resources Committee will be asked in March to approve, or refuse, the additional funding required for Option 2.

Cllr Coley’s central question is whether councillors should be asked to commit hundreds of thousands of pounds without having seen the full independent review that underpins the case for spending it. That is why he has submitted a Freedom of Information request and is pressing for the report’s publication before the funding decision is taken.

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In short

The January vote did not approve spending. It authorised a future funding request. A key independent report cited as evidence has not been published. One councillor argues this undermines informed decision-making. The decisive moment will come in March, when councillors decide whether to fund the plan, potentially without seeing the full peer challenge findings unless they are released.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

Cllr Dallen accused of £1/2 m Epsom & Ewell Council cover-up

A Decision Not Fully Bourne Out?

Ewell's "UFO" shaped Bourne Hall to take off anew

Epsom Councillor claims he is being silenced for his transparency concerns

16 February 2026



A meeting of **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Standards and Constitution Committee** on 15th January exposed sharp tensions over councillors' scrutiny rights and the handling of Code of Conduct complaints, following an unusually fraught exchange between a senior councillor and the committee chair.

Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) claims that his raising of concerns about Council transparency has stimulated official complaints against him inhibiting him further from holding the Council to account.

Councillor declares interest — and raises alarm

Early in the meeting, Councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) declared a personal interest in the final agenda item reviewing Code of Conduct complaints, confirming he was the subject of two live complaints and would withdraw when the item was reached.

In an extended statement, Councillor Ames told the committee that he had chosen to be transparent because the complaints were already referenced in the report and likely to give rise to "public speculation".

He said: "Both complaints are effectively that I raised concerns about transparency failings at the council… I don't believe it's appropriate to use a code of conduct complaint to censor councillors' concerns".

Councillor Ames also argued that there appeared to be no clear written procedure for councillors who are the subject of complaints, beyond guidance aimed at complainants. He said this lack of clarity was itself a governance issue the committee should be concerned about.

The Chair, Councillor **John Beckett** (RA Auriol) intervened to halt the statement, telling him: "This is not really the time and place to discuss the actual complaints against you."

Councillor Ames responded that being required to recuse himself before any complaint was resolved was already preventing him from fulfilling his role: "On the basis of a complaint, this essentially has the effect of censoring me as a councillor."

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Constitution update prompts wider scrutiny debate

The committee later considered an update to the Council's Constitution, including changes to the Scheme of Delegation that governs what decisions officers can take without councillor approval.

Officers introduced a late addendum, explaining that an internal audit had identified an error in the Constitution. A requirement for an annual report to Audit and Scrutiny on "significant delegated decisions" was being corrected to refer instead to "urgent decisions", a defined category already used in practice.

The Monitoring Officer stressed the change was technical: "We're literally just recognising a defined term of decisions that don't exist for one that does. There will be no changes to the process."

However, Councillor Ames used the discussion to raise broader concerns about scrutiny being weakened in practice. He argued that councillors' existing rights to request scrutiny of delegated decisions were routinely ignored. Referring to the Constitution, he said: "There is a right for a councillor here to request that decisions taken by officers under delegated powers are scrutinised… but it doesn't appear to express a right for that scrutiny then to take place." He also mentioned: "Councillor Chinn (Labour Court) and I have been warned to be circumspect about what we can and can't say in public about the scheme of delegation. It's been declared to be an exempt issue."

He proposed amending the wording to make clear that such requests **must** be heard by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee, warning that without this, councillors' rights existed "for no effect". Councillor Ames went further, accusing the administration of blocking scrutiny: "All of the attempts at calling in are being blocked… The main object of the administration seems to be to stop the public finding out quite how bad they are by preventing things being aired in public."

Proposal deferred, constitution changes approved

Officers advised that the proposal should be referred to the **Constitution Working Group**, made up of political group leaders, rather than debated fully on the night. Councillor Ames's amendment failed to attract a seconder but was formally referred to the working group at his request.

The committee then unanimously agreed to recommend the constitutional updates — including the late correction — to Full Council.

Code of Conduct complaints: eight cases, two ongoing

After Councillor Ames left the meeting, the committee considered the report on Code of Conduct complaints.

Officers confirmed that eight complaints were assessed as valid between December 2023 and December 2025. Six had been resolved, with two still ongoing. No councillors were named, with officers citing the need for fairness and natural justice.

The report was noted without debate.

Why this matters

While much of the meeting dealt with technical governance changes, the exchanges revealed deep unease about transparency, scrutiny and the use of conduct complaints, particularly as the Council approaches local government reorganisation.

Whether Councillor Ames's concerns lead to stronger scrutiny powers — or remain unresolved — now rests with the Constitution Working Group.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Cllr Ames at the meeting: EEBC YouTube channel

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