EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

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East Street Development gets Green Light

9 January 2024



At the Epsom and Ewell Planning Committee meeting of 14th December the proposed demolition of 79-81 East Street and the construction of a part 5, part 6 storey building containing 31 residential units faced intense scrutiny and debate.

After a heated discussion, Councillor Neil Dallen (RA Town Ward) proposed to refuse the application, citing concerns about over development, lack of parking provision, and harm to the conservation area. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Jan Mason. However, the committee ultimately voted against his motion (2 For, 6 Against).

Following further consideration, the Acting Chair put forward the Officer's recommendation for approval, subject to conditions and a legal agreement. The committee resolved (6 For, 2 Against) to grant planning permission with conditions and informatives.

Conditions and Informatives: The approval is subject to a Section 106 Legal Agreement, including provisions for 16 affordable rented units, restrictions on parking permits, and a car-club agreement. Conditions include time limits for development commencement, approval of external materials, construction transport management plan, and various pre-occupation and post-development requirements.

The decision reflects the complex considerations surrounding the East Street Development. The approved conditions aim to address concerns raised during the meeting, particularly regarding parking, sustainable transport, and environmental impact. The development now moves forward, albeit with strict guidelines in place.

Ruxley Lane development on casting vote

9 January 2024



Properties on Ruxley Lane in Ewell with sizeable gardens will be demolished and replaced by 14 dwellings in two blocks.

A tied vote of Councillors, at the Epsom and Ewell Planning Committee meeting of 14th December, on granting permission was resolved by the casting vote in favour of acting Chair Cllr Steven McCormick (RA Woodcote and Langley).

The committee approved the application, contingent upon the execution of a Section 106 Legal Agreement. This agreement includes a viability review mechanism to be activated if the development fails to reach the first-floor slab level on both buildings within 20 months of the decision date.

A critical provision in the decision is the requirement for the Section 106 Agreement to be completed by March 18, 2024. Failure to meet this deadline empowers the Head of Place Development to refuse the application based on non-compliance with Policy CS9 of the Core Strategy 2007.

Several conditions were imposed, including a three-year time limit for the commencement of development to comply with the Town and Country Planning Act. The approved plans, covering aspects such as site location, construction details, and landscaping, must be strictly adhered to throughout the development process.

Pre-commencement conditions were also established, such as the submission and approval of a Construction Transport Management Plan, ensuring responsible construction practices and adherence to highway safety regulations.

Post-demolition and pre-above-ground conditions mandate the submission and approval of details related to external materials, access provisions, tracking details, sustainable drainage schemes, and more. These conditions aim to safeguard visual amenities, highway safety, and sustainable development principles.

Pre-occupation conditions cover various aspects, including access closure and remediation, parking and turning layouts, visibility splays, and the installation of electric vehicle charging points. These conditions align with the National Planning Policy Framework's sustainable transport objectives and local development policies.

The committee emphasized sustainability measures, requiring the provision of solar panels, drainage verification reports, and adherence to ecological and sustainable design measures.

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During and post-development conditions focus on groundwater remediation strategies, tree protection, ecological considerations, and sustainable design measures. The approved development must comply with strict regulations to control significant harm from land contamination and ensure the preservation of biodiversity.

The decision also outlines specific conditions regarding construction hours, limitations on additional windows or openings, and the installation of facilities such as refuse/recycling stores and cycle storage.

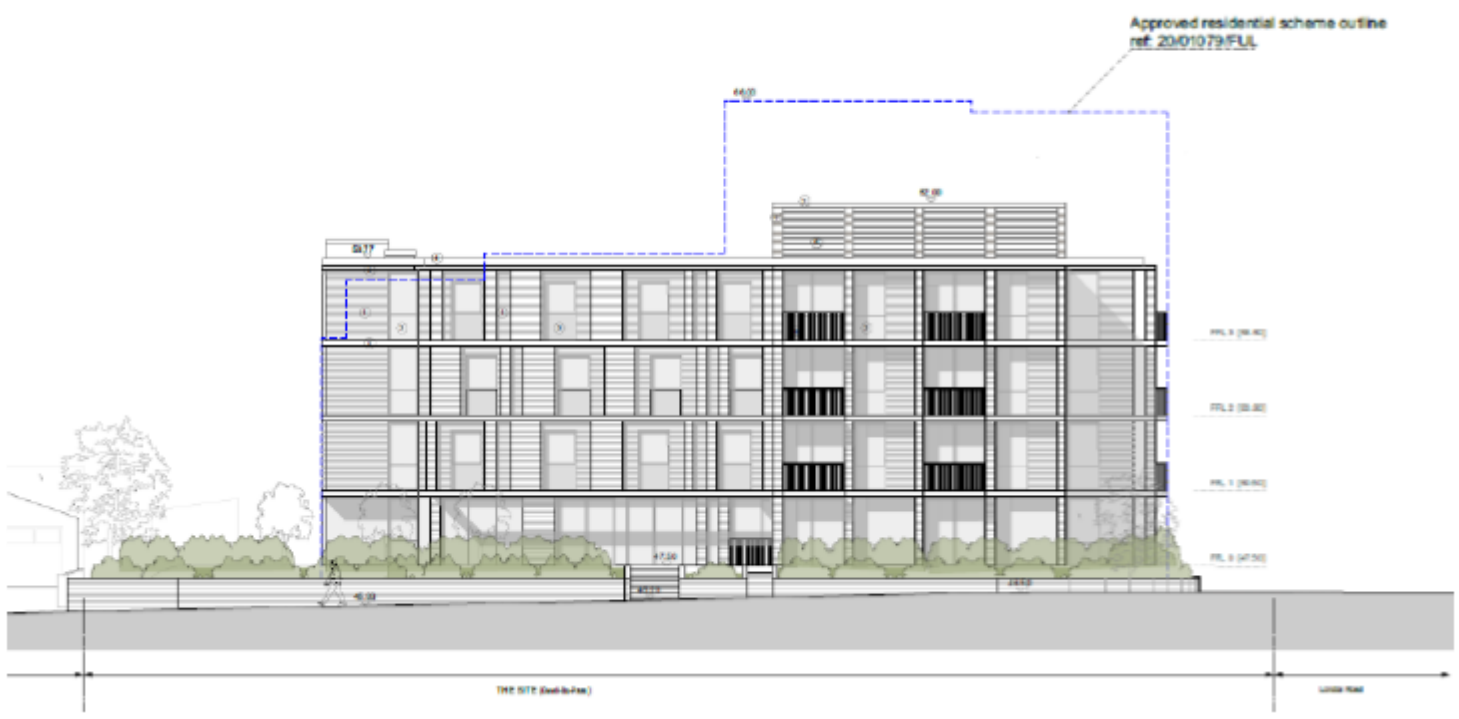
Ewell derelict site gets development go-ahead

9 January 2024



14th December 2023 Epsom and Ewell planning committee granted planning permission for a proposed development on the Ewell-By-Pass / London Road site. The application has come before the committee several times before and now has the go ahead. The plan involves construction of a three to five-storey building plus basement for use as a care home with up to 81 bedrooms and associated communal spaces and services, together with associated car and cycle parking, refuse storage and ancillary works.

Permission was granted subject to an extensive Section 106 Agreement. An agreement where the developer gives money to the Council for related development in the area. The agreement includes various Heads of Terms aimed at enhancing local infrastructure and ensuring compliance with planning policies.



The agreement involve provisions for bus stop infrastructure improvements, push-button controlled pedestrian crossing facilities, and the establishment of a 3-meter wide footway along specified frontages. Additionally, a Travel Plan Auditing fee of £6,150 has been stipulated.

The agreement specifies that if the Section 106 Agreement is not completed by June 14, 2024, the Council can refuse the application, citing non-compliance with key planning policies.

Several conditions have been imposed to regulate the development, including a stipulation that construction must commence within three years of the permission date. Details of external materials, a Construction Transport Management Plan, and a Car Park Management Plan must be submitted and approved before the initiation of construction.

Other conditions address aspects such as the provision of EV charging, pedestrian visibility zones, cycle parking facilities, and a Surface Water Drainage Scheme complying with national standards.

Furthermore, the development must adhere to specific noise control measures, internal noise criteria, and contamination risk management schemes. The planning committee has also mandated the closure of existing accesses, the laying out of parking and turning spaces within the site, and the implementation of measures to safeguard against unexpected contamination during development.

The approved plan emphasizes sustainable development objectives, highway safety, and adherence to national planning policies. The local planning authority has taken a comprehensive approach to ensure the proposed development aligns with visual amenities, character, and safety standards outlined in the Core Strategy (2007) and Development Management Policies (2015).

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The developer must comply with these conditions to ensure the project aligns with national planning policies and local community interests.

The councillors voted 5 in favour and 3 against.

Related reports:

Care home plan lacked the “wow” factor

“Blot on the landscape” – Ewell care home inked in

Something special for Surrey athletes

9 January 2024



Special Olympics **Surrey Athletes** Gear Up for Inaugural National Winter Games. In an exciting development for Special Olympics Great Britain, the country’s leading sports training and competition provider for individuals with intellectual disabilities, the spotlight is on six talented athletes from Special Olympics Surrey. These exceptional individuals are set to represent their region at the upcoming inaugural National Winter Games organized by Special Olympics GB.

The event, scheduled to unfold in Folgaria, nestled in the picturesque northern Italian region of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtiro, will feature alpine skiing and figure skating competitions for athletes with intellectual disabilities. From January 27 to February 3, the participating athletes will showcase their prowess on the icy slopes and the glittering rink.

A total of 73 athletes hailing from England, Scotland, and Wales will participate in the Special Olympics GB National Winter Games, and among them are the six accomplished athletes from Special Olympics **Surrey**:

- **Mikey Lines** – Alpine Skiing, SO South East – SO Surrey
- **Bartholome Meredith-Hardy** – Alpine Skiing, SO South East – SO Surrey
- **Stef Nakoneczny** – Alpine Skiing, SO South East – SO Surrey
- **Karen Oosthuizen** – Alpine Skiing, SO South East – SO Surrey
- **Elanor Sinden** – Alpine Skiing, SO South East – SO Surrey
- **Alice Willans** – Alpine Skiing, SO South East – SO Surrey

Colin Dyer, Chief Executive of Special Olympics GB, expressed his enthusiasm about expanding their competition calendar with the introduction of the National Winter Games. He highlighted the transformative impact of national and international events on athletes, inspiring them to develop life skills and make positive changes, supporting their independence and career growth.

Special Olympics GB is extending its gratitude to Special Olympics Grampian club for their dedicated planning efforts as the host club. Additionally, Inclusive Skating has been recognized as the delivery partner for all figure skating events. The Ski Company and Alpe Cimbra are providing crucial support to ensure the success of the National Winter Games.

Dyer emphasized that this competition will play a pivotal role in selecting athletes for the subsequent Special Olympics World Winter Games, slated for Torino, Italy, from March 8 to 16, 2025. Team Special Olympics GB will be represented by eight alpine skiers and two figure skaters, marking their return to the global stage since 2017.

Across England, Scotland, and Wales, Special Olympics GB’s impact is evident, providing regular sporting opportunities for over 6,600 athletes with intellectual disabilities. With 95 accredited clubs offering training and competition in 27 different sports, a devoted team of 3,800 volunteers ensures the success of the programs.

Established in 1978, Special Olympics Great Britain is a non-profit charity dedicated to providing year-round sports coaching and athletic competition in summer and winter sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities. With 95 accredited programs across England, Scotland, and Wales, the organization offers coaching and competition opportunities in 27 sports, supported by over 3,800 volunteers benefiting more than 6,600 athletes.

Special Olympics GB goes beyond sports, transforming lives by boosting confidence, realizing potential, enhancing physical fitness and mental well-being, fostering courage, and fostering new friendships. Financial support from individuals, trusts, and corporate donations is crucial for the continuation of their impactful work.

Founded in 1968, Special Olympics is a global movement aimed at ending discrimination against individuals with intellectual disabilities. Using the power of sport and programming in education, health, and leadership, Special Olympics fosters acceptance and inclusivity.

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With over six million athletes, Special Olympics Unified Sports® partners, one million coaches, and volunteers in over 200 accredited programs, Special Olympics organizes more than 30 Olympic-type sports and over 100,000 Games and competitions annually. Learn more at www.SpecialOlympics.org.

Epsom and Ewell schools get new CEO

9 January 2024



The new chief executive of one of the country's biggest multi academy trusts has a busy schedule in place as he prepares to visit all 42 schools under his watch during his first term.

Julian Drinkall, the new CEO of GLF Schools, has started 2024 with a pledge to visit all schools within the Trust, located in Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Surrey, West Sussex and the London Boroughs of Wandsworth and Croydon, during the spring term.

GLF's schools in Surrey are Banstead Infants, **Cuddington Croft Primary** (Cheam), **Danetree Primary** (West Ewell), **Glyn** (Ewell), **Rosebery** (Epsom), The Beacon (Banstead), **The Vale Primary** (Epsom), Warren Mead Infants (Banstead), Warren Mead Juniors (Banstead), Cordwalles Juniors (Camberley), Frogmore Juniors (Camberley), Hammond (Lightwater), Lightwater Village, Pine Ridge & Lorraine Federation (Camberley). Lime Tree (Merstham), Merstham Park, Merstham Primary, Salfords Primary,

Mr Drinkall replaced the outgoing and founding CEO **Jon Chaloner**, who stepped down from his role last month after 11 years of leading the organisation through a period of continued growth. The pair worked together in the weeks leading up to the Christmas break to help the transition before the New Year. [Many will remember Jon Chaloner during his headship of Glyn School in Ewell.]

Mr Drinkall said "GLF Schools is in an enviable position, with many great schools and poised to go from strength-to-strength. I intend to visit all our schools in my first full term. Context is everything in schools and, as with our children, each and every one of them has different needs at different moments in time.

"It is that context and that ambition that I want to learn about, and I am looking forward to getting to know as many of our staff as possible, as well as our students, parents and carers, schools and communities, and hearing about the incredible work that everyone is engaged in and committed to."

Mr Drinkall has held a variety of education CEO roles and was CEO of the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET), leading its turnaround over a five-year period. He said he was both 'delighted and proud' to be starting work for GLF Schools, which provides education to over 17,000 young people aged from two to 19, in a diverse array of settings and employs around 2,500 members of staff.

He added: "I'm looking forward to establishing new dreams and possibilities for our Trust, and I'm committed to finding innovative and supportive ways to make that happen for all our children and young people."

Surrey getting greener?

9 January 2024



Following its declaration of a climate emergency in 2019, **Surrey County Council** has been on a mission to combat climate change and significantly slash carbon emissions. The council aims to achieve net-zero status for its own operations by 2030 and is rallying for county-wide support to hit the same target by 2050.

Organizational Emission Reductions:

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In a comprehensive effort to curtail its carbon footprint, Surrey County Council has assessed key areas within its operations. Notable accomplishments include:

- 7% of the council's vehicle fleet is now comprised of low-carbon alternatives.
- The council has scrutinized 83 buildings across the county to gauge their potential for low-carbon integration.
- Over 3,300 staff members have undergone climate change awareness training, reinforcing the commitment to sustainability.
- 83,000 low-energy streetlights have been installed throughout the county, contributing to substantial energy savings.
- £2.8 million has been saved in the council's annual energy bill through dedicated efforts in energy efficiency.

Empowering Residents and Businesses:
Surrey County Council has not limited its endeavors to internal initiatives but has actively engaged residents and businesses in the fight against climate change. Highlights of these collaborative efforts include:

- Facilitating the planting of an impressive 470,000 trees, contributing to enhanced biodiversity and carbon sequestration.
- The introduction of 31 electric buses now operational in the county, marking a significant stride in public transportation electrification.
- Hosting 13,000 electric vehicle charging sessions across the county, promoting the transition to cleaner transportation options.
- 88 Eco-Schools have been awarded green flag status, recognizing their commitment to sustainable practices.
- A collective effort has resulted in saving an estimated 20,000 tonnes of carbon emissions.
- Addressing fuel poverty, the council has treated 1,350 homes, ensuring they are energy-efficient and economically sustainable.
- Over £1.9 million in grants have been awarded to support small to medium-sized businesses, yielding an annual saving of £821,000 through improved energy efficiency measures.

For those eager to delve deeper into Surrey's climate change initiatives, a wealth of information is available on the council's dedicated climate change webpage.

Related reports:

Draft advice may lead to energy savings

Surrey schools fly their green flags

Local action to tackle global climate crisis

Image courtesy SCC

Green Belt off or relaxed a notch?

9 January 2024



Excitement has been stirred by **Michael Gove**'s announcement 19th December that housing targets are advisory not mandatory. This change *may* mean a shift in **Epsom and Ewell**'s Draft Local Plan away from earmarking any Green Belt for housing developments.

The local campaign group **Epsom and Ewell Green Belt** has reacted to the news. In a press release issued today they urge **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council**: "Together with the Surrey Branch of the **Campaign to Protect Rural England** (CPRE), is calling on the Council and its Councillors to instruct the planning officers to republish its Local Plan within the next few weeks, removing all greenbelt sites, reducing the housing target to a rational approximately 3,500 homes for the Plan period, and focusing on developing all available brownfield sites. We have produced a list of the changes that would need to be made to the draft Plan so that it complies with the Government's revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)."

However, accompanying the publication of the revised NPPF Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities Michael Gove said "The new NPPF was not a route to the evasion of responsibilities. Local authorities must

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provide rigorous evidence justifying their departure from assessed housing needs. They must do everything to identify other lands suitable for development." He added "While the planning inspectorate will respect well-made cases, it will not accept undershooting that is not firmly rooted in environmental or other safeguards. This is about sensitive adjustment in housing targets, not their abandonment."

Related reports:

Green Belt development objections excluded

Public meeting on Local Plan dominated by greenbelters.

Green-belters belted up and beltless

Green-belters seeing red on Local Plan?

and many more – search "Local Plan".

Epsom Pianist scores 50 out of 101

9 January 2024



In 2022 **Epsom Choral Society** celebrated its centenary. For very nearly half that century **Marion Lea** has accompanied the singers on the piano.

Marion Lea, an acclaimed freelance pianist and accompanist, has performed in recitals and concerts of the highest calibre, working with the likes of the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the Bolshoi Ballet. As well, Marion has played an integral part in the local music scene. She has accompanied Operatic Societies, Choral Societies and any number of other talented musicians. As she approaches her **50th anniversary with Epsom Choral Society**, they celebrated the immense and invaluable contribution she has made to the choir with a presentation on Saturday at their annual Christmas concert.



In 1973, **Jon Pullinger**, the ECS president, suggested to Marion that she should apply to become the new rehearsal pianist for the Epsom Choral Society. On arrival at the audition, Marion fell into conversation with the then Musical Director, **Richard Fentiman** and Chair, **Dr Barbara Mitchell**, and happened to mention that, as a student, she had been invited to perform at one of Vaughan Williams' famous parties. They realised it was testament to her exceptional

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musicianship and waived the audition!

Since then, Marion has been the ECS rehearsal pianist for innumerable Wednesday nights; has accompanied the choir in hundreds of concerts; playing continuo on harpsichord and little organ; and even taken the spotlight on occasion as soloist.

She has supported learning of all styles of music, from the renaissance to the modern. She has played Debussy solos for ECS; played piano duets and, of course, most recently, played the 'concerto' piano part in Lambert's Rio Grande, to great acclaim.

As ECS approach Marion's Golden Anniversary with them, **Isobel Squire**, Chair, reflected on how lucky they are to have had such an accomplished pianist all that time: "On behalf of all our singers, I want to say how privileged we feel to be able to work with Marion, and how much we value her wonderful support in our rehearsals, and enjoy her sparkling performances in our concerts."

Related reports:

Epsom Choral works 100 years

Epsom Choral Society opens its centenary celebration 2022

Expect miracles from Epsom Choral Society

Photo credit: Anne Richardson

Epsom and Ewell Borough of Sanctuary

9 January 2024



Epsom and Ewell is now poised to be a Borough of Sanctuary. Largely due to the extraordinary efforts of **Nina Kaye** and **Jo Sherring** of the Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network our Town's welcome to and support for refugees of all nationalities is recognised by this new status. Tuesday 12th December the Council approved a motion to establish the title of "Borough of Sanctuary."



Janice Baker leads English classes in central Epsom for refugees of all nationalities.

Proposing the motion Cllr **Neil Dallen** (RA Town Ward) said: "The Epsom and Ewelll Refugee Network has been now going for over 10 years. 700-plus people have signed up to receive information on a regular basis from the Refugee Network. There are over 200 refugees registered, there's approximately 40 hours a week given for people whose first language is not English, and there are 85 refugees that take advantage of that. They are part of The Good Company, which is the Food Bank, Epsom Pantry and East Surrey Poverty Truth Commission. These are organizations that are good in their own right. They're saving the borough money, doing an enormous amount of good work, and providing a humane service to refugees that happen to end up here."

Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) seconded the motion and said "Everyone deserves a safe place to live where they can thrive, build the life they want, and get the support when they need it. This government is creating a hostile environment for many people living in our communities by pursuing policies that divide and exclude people with migrant and refugee backgrounds."

"Shouldn't Epsom be offering a positive vision of a culture of welcome and hospitality to all? Create opportunities for relationships of friendship and solidarity between local people and those seeking sanctuary. Recognize and encourage partnership working and network development across the borough. This government's policy is to send people who are fleeing persecution and conflict to Rwanda. It says it gave £140 million to Rwanda last year, and on December 7th, the

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Home Office civil servant said that a further £100 million had been given, with a payment of £50 million anticipated for next year. Today, I hear it's actually £400 million. Now we hear the Home Office has earmarked at least £700 million to manage the arrival of migrants in small boats."

"So, they've just allocated £700 million to supporting these policies that are hostile, muddled, and expensive, with no benefit for people seeking sanctuary in this country. The Borough can contribute to changing the narrative of this government. The sanctuary movement not only offers a chance for individuals and groups to challenge the way the asylum debate is framed in the UK, but is also concerned with creating a culture in which the virtues of welcome and hospitality are valued and through which asylum seekers and refugees are free to make a full contribution to their cities and to engage with local communities."

Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) said "Last year as mayor, I got some insights into the work of the Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network and our own team, the Community Development Team, in their work with refugees, and I think it was quite inspiring, but also to actually meet some of those refugees and see what we do for them, we the community, and how much it's appreciated. I think over the last year or so, working together, Epsom and Ewell Council and the Refugee Network have done some exceptional work delivering extremely positive outcomes, helping refugee households settle within our borough."

The Homes for Ukraine scheme launched in March 2022, and since then, we've supported over 160 Ukrainian families. Working together, Epsom Council and the Refugee Network have provided extensive support to those families, some of whom have had very complex needs and have been through some traumatic experiences. There's no doubt that the consequences of the war in Ukraine triggered a step change in the borough's requirements to support refugees, which was fairly small-scale when it was limited to Syrian and Afghan families. But collaborative working has been crucial to our ability to scale up our responses and to do some proactive work in sustaining the relationships between hosts and guests, which has had an enormous impact. I think only two or three families are presented as homeless, so that's a remarkable achievement when you think that Ukrainian families have been living with host families since the onset of the war and it saved us, as well as giving them security, it saved this Council a lot of money."

Responding to the decision Nina Kaye told the Epsom and Ewell Times: "We support over 200 families with over 400 refugees and EERN provides over 40 hours of English lessons each week.

"We are delighted that Epsom & Ewell Borough Council have overwhelmingly passed a motion pledging to work with us to make Epsom & Ewell a Borough of Sanctuary as part of the City of Sanctuary Local Authority Network (https://la.cityofsanctuary.org/). We work closely with EEBC to support refugees and asylum seekers fleeing violence and persecution. We are very pleased that the Council want Epsom & Ewell to be recognised as a Borough of Sanctuary. We feel this reflects the huge support we receive in this area to help those who have been forced to flee their countries and find themselves in our community."

Related reports:

Hosts of Ukrainian refugees appreciated

Flight of refugees: history repeating?

Breaking the mould for Ukrainian refugees

Local refugee cash appeal

Image: Raimond Spekking

Two Q or Not to Q? That was the Q....

9 January 2024



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council debated public participation in its committees on Tuesday 12th December. A proposed amendment to standing orders has the effect of restricting a member of the public to asking only one question on a topic and being confined to one supplementary question on that topic only if it arises from the answer given to the first question. And this remains the case even if there is no other member of the public wishing to use what may remain of the 30 minutes the rules provide for public participation at the meeting.

Cllr Chris Ames (Labour Court) was unhappy with this apparent restriction on residents taking part in local democracy. He moved an amendment to send back the proposal to the Council's constitution drafting sub-committee for a re-think.

He said the rules should "not only encourage but also should not unduly restrict the right of residents to participate in public meetings."

In relation to the rules determining whether a resident's question qualified to be asked he emphasized the importance of avoiding unnecessary administrative burdens on officers while promoting transparency in the democratic process.

Cllr Liz Frost (RA Woodcote and Langley) chair of the sub-committee did not accept Cllr Ames amendment and so a

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debate ensued.

Cllr Ames went on to argue the Council should actively encourage residents who voted for them to participate in the democratic process. In his view, the rules in question imposed unnecessary restrictions on residents, hindering their ability to engage effectively in public meetings. He expressed concern about the potential detachment of councillors from the residents.

He described the new rules as a retrograde step.

One specific point of contention for Cllr Ames was the addition of the words “and final” to an existing rule, which, in his interpretation, unnecessarily restricted the order in which questions could be asked. He called for moral courage if the Council indeed intended to restrict residents to two questions and suggested that any such restriction should be clearly stated, perhaps subject to the chair’s discretion and the existing 30-minute time limit.

He also disputed the notion that residents asking more questions would significantly burden officers, pointing out that the Council had constructed a set of rules making the process labour-intensive in the first place. In his view, the focus should be on eliminating cumbersome rules that deter resident participation.

Additionally, Cllr Ames challenged the alleged rule that a second question must be on a separate topic from the first, deeming it as another way of stifling debate. He brought up an incident where a resident was initially invited to ask a supplementary question but was later told he could not ask a second question on the same issue.

As a journalist Cllr Ames drawing from his extensive experience with Freedom of Information requests, shared his insights into how public bodies tended to complain about the cost of answering questions while simultaneously relying on rules and restrictions to avoid transparency, particularly when uncomfortable issues were raised.

He concluded by urging the Council to discard what he termed as ludicrous rules and embrace a more open approach, allowing residents to participate even if it meant confronting uncomfortable truths. Despite his impassioned plea, Cllr Frost reiterated her rejection of the proposed amendment and the “clarified” rule on public questions was approved by the majority of Councillors.

Related Reports:

Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?

Image: Cllr Ames rises in the Council Chamber. Epsom and Ewell Borough Council Youtube channel.

Epsom and Ewell Council staff awarded 6%

9 January 2024



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council 12th December agreed to award its staff a 6% increase to their salaries. Councillors had been advised that despite inflation moderating to some extent through 2023, there have been widespread strikes and industrial action across the public sector in response to pay deals. For 2024/25, the government has accepted the recommendations from a number of independent pay review bodies to award millions of public sector workers including police officers and teachers, pay awards in the range of 5-7%.

Additionally the Council was warned the cost of any deal is crucial, with the council already facing a budget deficit of £1.1m in 2024/25. In budget planning for the medium-term financial strategy pay has been assumed to be 3% for the next 4 years, therefore any award above 3% will increase the council’s projected deficit and result in additional, compensating service income or savings having to be identified.

Cllr Robert Leech (RA Nonsuch) said “I support the 6% pay rise. In recent years, we’ve given the staff 3%, which is less than the rate of inflation. This means that in real terms, our officers have taken a pay cut. I do not think it’s sustainable for a third year. I realize that the rate of inflation has come down, but that only partly compensates for the reductions in previous years.”

Cllr Alison Kelly (LibDem Stamford) said “I agree that we need to support the 6%. We must make sure that all our staff are feeling that they’re well-treated and they shouldn’t be looking elsewhere just to be able to live. With staff retention being such an issue for all councils, I think it’s vital that the pay is appropriate.”

Cllr Hannah Dalton (RA Stoneleigh) said “I want to use this opportunity to thank all of our officers for all that they do. They work really very, very hard for us. If Councilor Beckett was here, he would be reminding us how many officers there were when he first joined the council, and it’s significantly reduced.”

The recommendation was carried by a majority in the Council Chamber.

Related report

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Council staff to get 6% pay increase?

Alderman awards for Epsom and Ewell trio

9 January 2024



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council Tuesday 12th December conferred the title Alderman of the Borough on three men who long served the district as local councillors.

Former Councillor Eber Kington (RA), a stalwart in local governance, dedicated an impressive 36 years of service as an Epsom and Ewell Borough Councillor, presiding as Mayor of the Borough in 1999-2000 and Deputy Mayor in 2000-2001.

Similarly, former Councillor Chris Frost (RA), with 24 years of devoted service from May 1999 to May 2023, held the role of Mayor of the Borough in 2015-2016 and Deputy Mayor in 2014-2015.

The late former Councillor Clive Smitheram (RA), who served for 23 years until April 2022, receives his recognition posthumously. His term included the role of Mayor of the Borough in 2010-2011 and Deputy Mayor in 2011-2012.

During the meetings Councillors Peter O'Donovan, Clive Woodbridge, Liz Frost, Neil Dallen, Alex Coley, Jan Mason and Hannah Dalton (RAs) paid tributes to each nominee.

At 9:55 pm the motion carried unanimously in the absence of LibDem and Labour councillors, who earlier had left the Chamber.

Related reports:

Local Council stalwarts up for local honour

Long serving Councillor Clive Smitheram dies at 76

Image: Chris Frost, Eber Kington and Clive Smitheram

Local Plan costs eat into Council reserves

9 January 2024



An officers' report to the Council advised a further £629,000 is required to progress the Local Plan 2022-2040. The matter was considered by Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Strategy and Resources Committee Tuesday 13th December.

The report provided an update on the financial position on advancing the Local Plan toward submission and subsequent adoption, aligning with the timelines outlined in the recently published Local Development Scheme (November 2023). Following a public consultation on the draft plan earlier this year, an extraordinary Council meeting in March 2023 decided to temporarily halt the Local Plan. It was subsequently resumed in October 2023, accompanied by an updated timetable.

The financial crunch, estimated at £629,000, revolves around progressing the plan to Regulation 19 and concluding the Local Plan Examination. To address this, the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee recommended allocating £629,000 from the Corporate Projects Reserve. However, this move comes with significant financial implications, as it would reduce the reserve balance from £2.98 million to £2.35 million. If an additional request to use this reserve, hinted at in reference to a matter concerning the Council's commercial property – which was excluded from public and press scrutiny, is approved, the balance would further decrease to £1.85 million.

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The item from which the press and public was excluded concerned drawing half-million pounds of taxpayers' money from the Council's reserves – we quote from the Local Plan item in public view: "Should the separate request to use this reserve at Agenda item 4 also be approved, the reserve balance will further decrease (from £2.35m) to £1.85m." The ground of exclusion was to protect financial information of third parties. Do you think such interests should out-weigh taxpayers' interests in what might justify £1/2 million being taken from reserves? Write to Epsom and Ewell Times.

The Council is facing a projected revenue budget deficit of £1.1m from 2024/25 (as reported to Strategy & Resources Committee in July 2023) and reserves are likely to come under substantial pressure in future years and may fall below the recommended level of £1 million.

The officers' report underscored the importance of maintaining staffing levels and securing external technical support to ensure a robust and timely Local Plan. Any deviation from the Local Development Scheme could amplify costs and resource implications. Despite the financial challenges, the Council was urged to use existing in-house resources wherever possible, given the projected revenue budget deficit.

Cllr **Alison Kelly** (LibDem Stamford) queried whether it was necessary to extend officers' contracts to 2026 when the Local Plan is to be submitted in 2025. The Council was advised that the opportunities for legal challenges and so forth would extend to 2026 and therefore they needed to budget for extending officer employment contracts by two years.

Cllr **Robert Leach** (RA Nonsuch) vented his frustration thus: "I probably have to support this recommendation, but I should do so with gritted teeth. This local plan just seems to be a bottomless pit. I understand that it has cost one and a half million pounds already, and that's probably only half the amount that we will waste. In my opinion, it is a waste of £3 million when the whole project of coming up with a local plan and planning applications could be done more simply. This filled me with horror.

In a recent RA meeting, I pointed out that this worked out at £50 for every household in the country. I asked the people there to put their hands up if they were happy for £50, which is, in effect, their money, to be spent on producing this rather than having £50 to spend on food and energy bills. The number of hands that went up, in round numbers, was a round number. The residents, I think, share my view that we are just wasting money.

I realize that we have to meet a legal obligation, and I would certainly never advocate that the council breaks the law. But I think we should point out that this is being imposed on us by central government. They provide us with no grant at all, apart from perhaps a few specific pet projects of their own. While we have to carry on with the local plan, we should make it clear that we do so reluctantly, only because the law forces us to do so, and that we should make clear to our residents that central government is the villain in this pantomime.

The present government is about to announce a new planning policy. If we have a general election next year with a Labour government, they have said that they will just ride roughshod over local authorities. I shall support the motion, and I shall do so with great reluctance."

Following these two contributions from the Chamber the committee proceeded to unanimously accept the recommendation to draw £629,000 from reserves to fund the ongoing Local Plan process.

The contribution to the prolongation and additional cost of the Local Plan process arising from the unpopularity of the original draft's proposals to develop Green Belt was not mentioned by any Councillor.

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and many many more (search "Local Plan")

Surrey County chief talks to the BBC

9 January 2024



Cllr Tim Oliver, Conservative Leader of Surrey County Council was interviewed this morning on BBC Radio 4's Today programme by Amol Rajan. Also Chairman of the County Council Network he welcomed further devolution of financial powers that could lead to a tourist tax and the need for more money to meet burgeoning demands for special educational

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needs and school transport.

The Epsom and Ewell Times has prepared a tidied up transcript of his interview in full.

- Nottingham City Council became the latest local authority to issue what's called a section 114 notice, which means it will halt spending on anything not required by law. Let's talk to Councillor Tim Oliver, who's a Conservative and leader of Surrey County Council. How big a problem are we facing, and what's driving it?

TO: Well, it is a significant problem. We're talking about large councils that deliver social care to our most vulnerable residents. We have seen a huge increase in demand for those services, whether it's for adult social care or for children's services. And we've now got to the point where really well-managed councils are running out of road financially.

- And what sort of situation are you in, Surrey County Council?

TO: I'm also chairman of the County Council's Network, so I represent all of those large councils, and the problems are the same. We've seen a decrease in our budgets and our funding from central government. What's different now is that last year, the chancellor gave us a not inconsiderable sum to support adult social care. But we've seen a huge demand for services to children with additional needs. The cost of placing those children in specialist facilities has risen exponentially. And a particular area of concern for us is the rising cost of home-to-school transport. Across the whole system, that currently costs about a billion pounds a year, and that's projected to increase to about 1 and a half billion by 2028. So these are real day-to-day issues. And our plea to the government is to recognize that we're supporting those most vulnerable members in our communities.

- Would more fiscal devolution help? Do you need more money from the centre, or do you just need more control of the money you get from the centre?

TO: This government had pledged to pursue a devolution agenda, and indeed they have done that. That has been more about controls and levers rather than about fiscal devolution. But yes, I think many of us would welcome that opportunity. That would give us the flexibility to raise taxes locally if that was appropriate, perhaps around tourist tax and so on.

- The Times reported yesterday that middle-class parents are blamed by some councillors for driving the surge in plans for special needs schooling. Is that a problem where you are?

TO: The County Council's Network, and I am certainly not blaming any individual parents or different groups. We absolutely understand that parents want the best for their children. They're going to push for that. It's really important though that we do make sure that the limited funds that are available, that public pound, is used most effectively.

The County Council Network is the voice of England's counties. Representing the local authorities in county areas, the network is a cross-party organisation which develops policy, commissions research, and presents evidence-based solutions to issues on behalf of the largest grouping of councils in England

Image: Tim Oliver credit LDRS – Surrey Live

Anchored in reason on local housing need?

9 January 2024



The Draft Local Plan lacks a proper negotiating position on future house building numbers in the Borough of Epsom and Ewell. So said an unnamed member of the public who addressed last week's Licensing, Planning and Policy Committee.

Let Epsom and Ewell Times know your view. Is he right or wrong? Here is his speech in full:

"Good evening, everyone. The first thing they teach you about negotiations at business school is the power of anchoring. Government has deployed this tactic very successfully. Government's standard method results in a target of 10,368 new dwellings over the Local Plan period. Let's be clear: this target is government's negotiation anchor. It is not our borough's actual housing need; it is simply designed to pressure you into setting a high housing target.

You might not realize that you are in a negotiation, but you are. Although the draft Local Plan recognizes that

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government's target is unachievable, it has still succeeded in anchoring council's thinking throughout the Local Plan. First, you note that your 3,700 from brownfield sites only meet 36% of government's anchor. Then you use that fact to declare exceptional circumstances. Afterward, you set your own housing target at just over half of government's anchor. That is the classic response of an inexperienced negotiator.

What the draft Local Plan did not discuss was our actual need for new dwellings. Strategic plans should always be based on the best available information, and yet the draft Local Plan did not even mention our actual need for new housing. It is very important for the council to prominently and clearly explain within the Local Plan why government's anchor of 10,368 is flawed and why our actual housing need is for just 2,664 new dwellings. By doing this, you will demolish government's anchor and replace it with the council's own anchor. It is absolutely critical to anchor everyone's thinking to the real needs of our borough.

The figure of 2,664 new dwellings is obtained by making just two changes to the standard method: firstly, replacing the outdated 2014 household projections with the more up-to-date 2018 data, and secondly, removing the flawed 40% affordability uplift. The theory behind this uplift is that by flooding the market with new homes, you will drive prices down. This theory is flawed for two reasons: firstly, house builders engage in land banking; they hold back most of their consented land and drip-feed new houses onto the market at a rate that matches demand and maintains prices. Secondly, the affordability uplift assumes that Epsom is a separate market for housing—it is not. If the Competition and Markets Authority were to look at this, the first thing they would do would be to define the relevant markets. They would note the existence of an unbroken chain of substitution across the whole Greater London Commuter Zone and conclude that Epsom just forms a very small part of a very large market. Flooding with new homes will not reduce house prices in the borough due to any supply-demand imbalance. Any reduction in local house prices will be as a result of the borough becoming a less serene and less attractive place to live.

According to paragraph 1.61 of the draft Local Plan, the balance between protecting our environment and enabling development is at the centre of our spatial strategy. At present, the Local Plan is unbalanced. You are planning to build more than twice the number of new dwellings that we actually need by sacrificing some of our best-performing Greenfield Green Belt sites."

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MP's housing solution for Epsom and Ewell

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