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Mayor’s electrifying car decision

10 August 2022



The new civic car leased by the **Borough of Epsom and Ewell** will be a plug-in hybrid vehicle, according to a recent decision by the Council’s Strategy and Resources Committee.

The current vehicle, a black 5-door 1.4 TSI Skoda Superb, is to be replaced with its hybrid version at an annual cost of £3,760, as the 5-year lease agreed in 2017 expired at the end of July and could not be extended.

The option was welcomed unanimously by the members of the Committee, who discussed the choice in a brief debate, chaired by **Cllr. Neil Dallen** (RA Town Ward), before casting their vote.

The price for the new car will be covered adequately after the previous budget of £3,060 was uplifted by £700 in line with Consumer Price Index inflationary increases. The fresh sum, however, would not secure the lease of a full electric car that meets all the requirements of the Council.

Electric vehicles “are very expensive,” said EBBC’s Head of Corporate Assurance, who outlined the different available options to Councillors. “What we could afford is quite a small electric car”, which would not be comfortable for those sitting in the back seats.

Officers conducted market research to present a comprehensive list of alternatives to be considered. Along with the recommended model, the current vehicle could be replaced with the same petrol version for an annual cost of £3,650. This possibility, seen as the most disadvantageous, would not be consistent with the Council’s environmental commitment and might burn finances through the current ballooning oil prices.

A greener and cheaper solution seemed to come with the Hyundai Kona, a subcompact SUV that would cost £2,736 annually, later dismissed for practicality reasons.

Only two, full-electric models were available for leasing. The Nissan Leaf would be within budget, at £3,084 per year, but would not overcome the constraints of smaller cars. Conversely, the Hyundai Ioniq 5 would be a bigger choice, but above the Council’s spending plan.

Doubts on the favoured option were voiced during the meeting, with **Cllr. Alan Williamson** (RA West Ewell Ward) worried that a more expensive and non-full-electric vehicle might harm the public image of EEBC.

“Being seen to be doing the right thing is as important as actually doing the right thing,” he said. The plug-in hybrid Skoda Superb “seems to compare negatively to the Nissan Leaf,” which would rather draw “some favour from residents.”

The mileage averagely carried out to chauffeur the Mayor and his Deputy when undertaking official duties is estimated to be around 3,000 miles per annum. Although the vehicle agreed by the Committee would still be partially dependant on refuelling, the relatively short distances travelled would allow to save more than £400 on oil every year, while being climate-friendly, according to projections published by the Council.

Along with the new civic car, members were asked to endorse the installation of a reserved charging point. This would attract a one-off cost of approximately £1,500.

Traditionally, the vehicle is meant for the sole use of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor and would otherwise remain parked. Some wondered whether the car, and the charging point that is to be installed, could be employed as a common good at the community’s disposal.

“It does seem as a sort of asset” to use for other opportunities, said **Cllr. Colin Keane** (RA Nonsuch Ward). “Other people can use the charging point” once the Mayor’s car has moved away, echoed **Cllr. David Gulland** (Liberal Democrat College Ward), who showed disagreement with the recommendation of fitting the station within the garage.

McTaggart embraced Keane’s suggestion, but rejected the proposal coming from Gulland. “It is to do with the speed of how quickly this particular model has to be fully charged to then click into electric,” she said. “If someone was already using the charging point, you then could not recharge the vehicle.”

According to data published by **Surrey County Council** in 2017, the number of electric vehicles registered in the County topped 2,500. As the interest and awareness generated in recent years only raised, the current digit is certainly higher.

As reported by Zap-Map, a leading platform for EV drivers throughout the UK, there are 14 charging stations available in Epsom and Ewell, but more spots might be needed in the area to satisfy the increasing demand.

In a recent consultation by Surrey County Council, residents were asked where they would like their charge points. An online map has been set up to pin favourite locations and leave a comment.

Ideally, charge points should be installed in zones where use would be high, where vehicles can be parked legally and safely, with enough pavement space, and where power supply can be easily accessed.

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With the first 80 charge stations being put in place in Guildford, Spelthorne, Waverley and Woking boroughs, 52 spots have been already suggested within the area of Epsom and Ewell.

Surrey County Council, which has just obtained £482,250 to fund the endeavour, will decide where to install a further 110 on-street points across six boroughs in the coming months.

“Surrey County Council has a role to ensure charge points are installed in the right locations so we can achieve a wide network that meets the needs of Surrey residents,” said **Matt Furniss**, Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Economy.

Related article: Yet more on ULEZ….

Council targeting the homeless

10 August 2022



In a vote dominated by abstentionism, a service-specific savings target of £243k to offset this year’s potential overspending for homelessness, was approved by **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council** last Tuesday.

The measure was discussed at the meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee of 26th July, chaired by **Cllr. Neil Dallen** (RA Town Ward), as part of the strategic financial planning for 2023/24 to balance the books, following the unprecedented impact that the pandemic has had on different Council service areas.

“We have to take an educated guess as to how many people/families will be homeless in Epsom and Ewell next year,” said Dallen. “If we underestimate the issue, the budget is not enough; if we overestimate it, we underspend the budget, but that means we will have unnecessarily reduced other budgets and therefore services for our residents.”

The decision was only achieved with the vote of the Chair. Two Councillors voted against, two voted in favour and five abstained, after a string of concerns over the target were raised. [See today’s editorial.]

“I don’t believe our homelessness problem will improve,” said the substitute for Cllr. Monica Coleman (RA West Ewell Ward), **Cllr. Alex Coley** (RA Ruxley Ward), who abstained from the vote as he disagreed with the cut. “The after effects of the pandemic and the unfolding cost of living crisis” can’t be ignored.

According to a report presented to the Committee, the proposed target considers a neutral scenario ahead, but current projections might be short-sighted at a time when rising inflation and the consequences of other major international events might hold significant sway on those residents at risk of becoming homeless and requiring immediate assistance.

“I think the numbers will continue to rise for a long time,” said **Cllr. Kate Chinn** (Labour Court Ward), who voted against the proposal. “It will put officers under pressure.”

Other councillors saw the target too important to be rejected. The savings would cover the further £243k funding that would be required in the neutral scenario to support an average of 82 families in temporary accommodation throughout 2022/23. Should the pessimistic situation materialise, officers would need to sort out compensating underspends or additional income, or ‘ringfence’ an additional £250k as a contingency, funded from the Council’s General Use Reserve that now holds a balance of £2.672m.

“I don’t have to vote on the basis targets will be kept under review,” said **Cllr. Eber Kington** (RA Ewell Court). “We have a team here, who year on year have found new ways to look after our residents, find properties and do different things.”

Every five years, the Council is required to conduct a review to assess the nature and extent of homelessness in the borough, after which a strategy is developed to address the ongoing issues and prevent future episodes of homelessness and rough sleeping. A consultation will be open until 23 August 2022 to share views and suggestions with officers who are now drafting an **Action Plan**.

In documents seen by Epsom and Ewell Times, councillors’ doubts might prove well-founded, as official data for the last three quarters seem to depict a gloomy picture. In 2022, already 314 approaches for advice and assistance regarding homelessness have been conducted by the borough’s **Housing Options Service**. The total number of last year’s actions was 316.

In a draft from the Action Plan, the Council shared six objectives to achieve by 2027. Among them, officers aim at early identifying homelessness, so as to intervene on and prevent it. Rough sleeping must be reduced, through the development of a Delivery Plan, the exploration of a ‘Housing First’ model and the collaboration with external partners to maintain the provision of effective services. The health and wellbeing of homeless people ought to be corrected, with a **Make Every Contact Matter** ethos and a close relationship with local health services. Accommodation options are also to be considered. Their number must be increased via social rented housing, private rented accommodation or supported and

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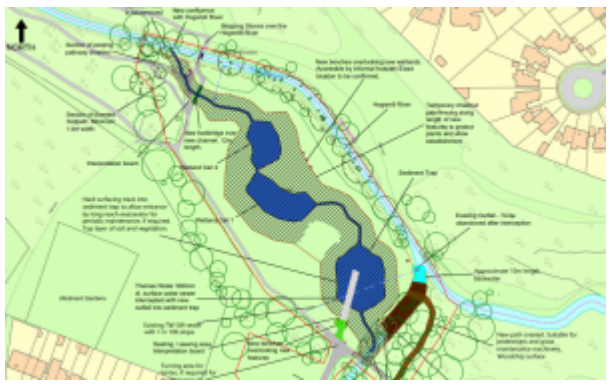
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in-borough temporary lodging.

“Homelessness is one of the Council’s greatest risks; we don’t want anyone to be homeless.” It is “a lose:lose scenario” for both the people becoming homeless and the Council, said **Dallen**. But “we don’t have unlimited money.”

“Garden of Eden” coming to West Ewell as Wetlands Plan is approved. Will this stop pollution?

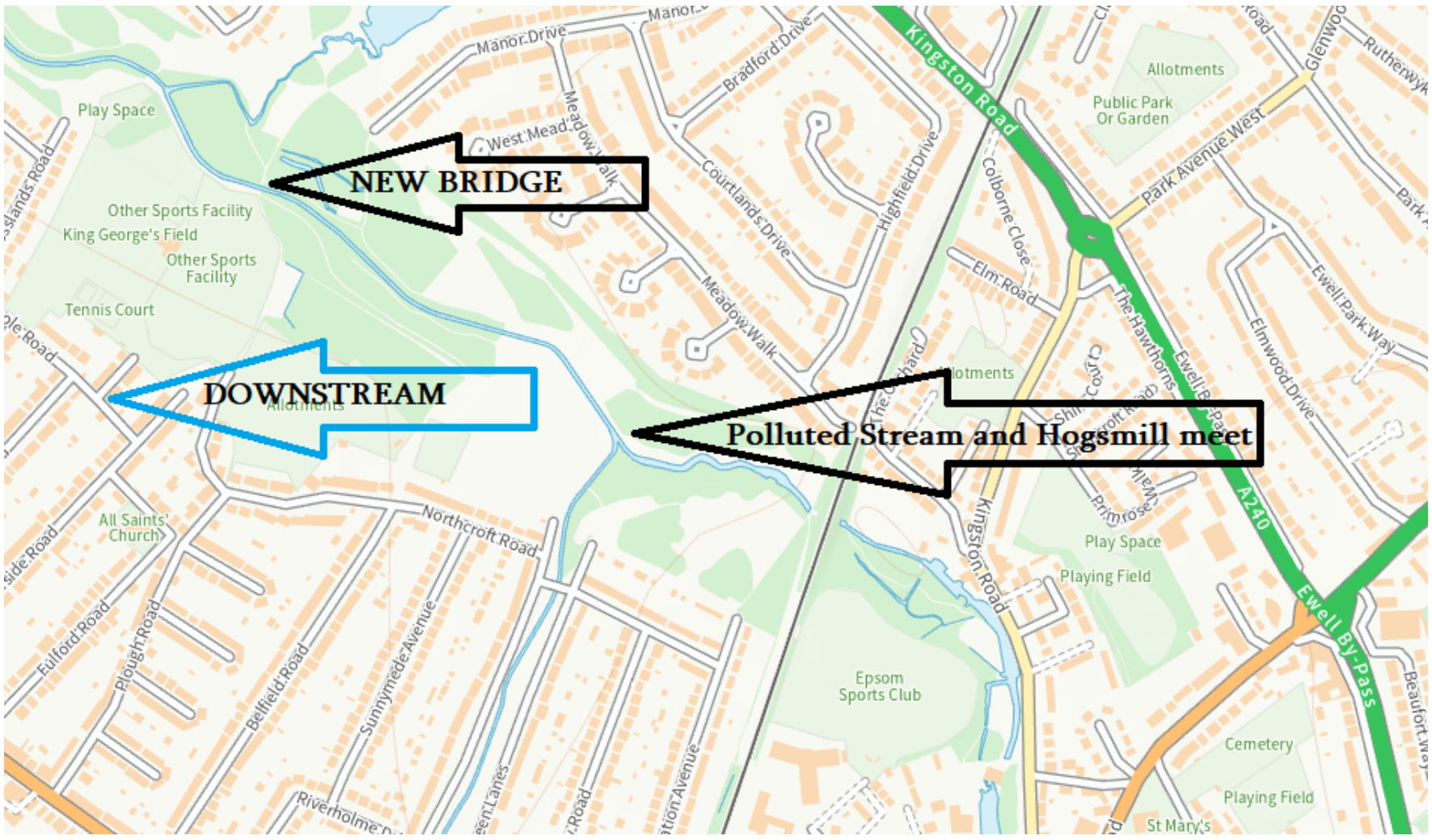
10 August 2022



A plan to mitigate some of the environmental impacts of sewage on the **Hogsmill River, in West Ewell**, was finally approved by **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council** Thursday 21st July.

The scheme submitted by local charity **South East Rivers Trust** in May 2021, was granted by councillors after a 30-minute meeting of the **Planning Committee**, chaired by Cllr. **Humphrey Reynolds** (RA Ewell Ward). Cllr. **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote Ward) abstained from the vote.

The project will divert the **Green Lanes Stream** approximately 50m upstream from its current confluence with the Hogsmill River . The Stream will flow along a new winding channel through **Chamber Mead meadow** within the **Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve**, passing through a constructed sediment trap and wetlands, before entering back into the Hogsmill River approximately 200 metres further downstream from its original confluence. Up to 1,000 m2 of wetlands habitat will be created and the flow of the new channel will attenuate the sewage brought to the watercourse from road runoff, misconnections, and overflows from Epsom Storm Tanks.



Map view of area where wetland will be developed

“I hope it will become like the Garden of Eden,” said Cllr. **David Gulland** (Liberal Democrat College Ward) during the meeting.

According to the application, sediment and contaminants would be trapped, and a level of treatment would be provided to the polluted water in three different forms. A biological treatment would naturally occur with the uptake of aquatic plants and metabolism; a chemical treatment would act on pollutants with the employment of dissolved nutrients, such as nitrate and phosphate; and a final treatment would be carried out physically, harnessing the decrease of flow velocities caused by the sediment trap, to settle sediments and pollutants via gravity.

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View toward Chamber Mead open space from the end of Green Lane

In addition to the creation of the new channel, a 12-metre bridge was proposed to let pedestrians, including wheelchair users and cyclists, reach the stepping stones from the south of Chamber Mead.

”It’s a very welcome improvement to reducing and mitigating the impact of pollutants entering the chalk stream river and the discharges of sewage,” said **Cllr. Kate Chinn** (Labour Court Ward).

Pollution has long been a scourge for a river that is internationally recognised as one of the only 200 chalk streams on Earth, and its chemical concentrations even led the **Environment Agency** to issue a ‘fail’ status in 2017. Warning signs have been put up advising people not to attend the area.

After the application was submitted, 527 letters of notification were sent to neighbouring properties to advertise the plan. As of July 2022, more than 35 letters of support have been received. Nevertheless, one of the recipients manifested their objection, as pollution “should be addressed at source.”

Despite the worthy purposes of the plan and the actual benefits this could achieve, failures at Epsom and Manor Drive Storm Tanks, Hogsmill A Wastewater and Cso At St. James’s Road stewer storms – all managed by the private utility company **Thames Water** – appear to be the real problem.

In 2021, a total of 159 hours of untreated sewage contaminated the river across 47 incidents, according to data published by The Rivers Trust.

“We support the scheme to reduce the impact of some of the pollution, however it will only do this on a fraction of the pollution coming into the channel,” said **Mark Todd**, local entrepreneur and member of Epsom and Ewell Labour Party, whose petition asking the company to stop the pollution has recently topped a thousand signatures. “Thames Water must, must, must stop overflowing so much sewage deliberately into the streams for wildlife to survive and for the streams to be safe for kids.”

In a letter sent to the company and reviewed by Epsom and Ewell Times, the signatories of the petition demand that Thames Water upgrade their “inadequate infrastructure,” as “local residents and community groups are very concerned about what is going on and are very disappointed.”

Along with coliforms, raw sewage discharge from the sewage network is seen as one of the two “major issues to tackle,” according to a joint opinion piece from Professor Chris Whitty, Chief Medical Officer for England, Jonson Cox, Ofwat chair, and Emma Howard Boyd, Environment Agency chair, released in June 2022. “The principal public health responsibility for ensuring human faeces and viable human faecal bacteria do not get into waterways people might use recreationally, rest squarely with the water companies and their directors.”

A spokesperson from Thames Water, although acknowledging the risks of pollution, seemed to disagree. “We certainly can’t do it on our own,” they said.

A Greener Future in Partial Sight As Verges To Be

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Left Unmown

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Roadside verges in Surrey will be cut less frequently to foster biodiversity, according to Highway Authority, Surrey County Council. In a move to ease the pressure on native nature from human activity, around 700 species of wildflower will be left unmown, and plants and wildlife in the area restored. “It’s time to redefine our ideas about what well-managed public spaces look like,” said **Andrew Jamieson**, Projects Director at **Surrey Wildlife Trust**. “It’s an essential part of our joint plan to restore and support Surrey’s plants and wildlife and take a first step towards a greener future for the neighbourhood.”

Feature photo: *credit Jon Hawkins – Surrey Hills Photography*

The decision builds on the **Climate Change Delivery Plan** published in 2020 to respond to Surrey County Council’s climate emergency declaration and set a target for Surrey to be net zero by the half of the century. Supporting and increasing biodiversity will contribute to become a carbon free county by 2050, said **Matt Furniss**, Conservative Cabinet Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Economy, in the press release. “Vegetation has fantastic benefits for both Surrey’s wildflowers and wildlife.”

According to research, over 97 per cent of UK wildflower meadows, equal to 3 million hectares (7.5 million acres), have been lost since the 1930s and replaced with monocultures with a lower ability to store carbon.Emissions relating to the consumption of goods and services by Surrey residents and businesses are estimated to be more than twice greater than those measured as part of the net zero targets.

According to the Climate Change Delivery Plan, land can naturally reduce the county’s carbon emissions by 3%. Not surprisingly, the strategy includes the **Growing Back Greener programme**, through the facilitation of planting, the reduction of flooding and the support to native biodiversity, as one of the main goals to achieve. Surrey itself aims at growing 1.2 million trees over the next decade.

Although nature and its safeguard are known to lead to multiple accomplishments, mixed concerns among residents were stirred after the measure was announced. “Many people fear a tick population explosion because of ‘wild’ grassland: where you have wild mammals, you have ticks,” said **Kim Spickett** of **Epsom and Ewell** based **Surrey Wildflowering Project**, a community-led initiative to promote and celebrate the borough’s diverse environments. “But ticks frequent parks and gardens too, not just countryside. Our nature reserves have safe paths that you can use to walk safely with dogs and children.”



Roadside verges, that tend to thrive on the sides of highways, might also cause safety issues if left untilled as sightlines might be affected. “A sightline for traffic can be cut and the rest left to bloom,” said Spickett. “That said, wiping out or “scalping” makes no sense. Mowing blades can have the height adjusted to “top” the grass and leave shorter flowers intact.” Echoing Spickett, SCC acknowledged the risk to sightlines and promised to ensure safety while pushing to keep the verges intact. “Highway safety remains paramount, and sightlines will be kept clear,” said Furniss. “Any issues with vegetation impairing visibility can be reported via our website.”

Advice on ticks and tick bites can be found on the NHS website.

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