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Bucha Ukraine “ducks missiles while Epsom Council mucks about”

16 July 2026



A proposal for Epsom and Ewell Borough Council to support in principle a twinning arrangement with Bucha in Ukraine was **defeated** only after Strategy and Resources Committee Chair Councillor **Neil Dallen** (RA Town) used his casting vote against it.

The vote at the committee’s meeting on Tuesday 14th July was tied, with three councillors supporting the declaration and three opposing it. Cllr Dallen then exercised the Chair’s casting vote, saying: “It’s going to leave it to me, and I will vote against that.”

The rejected wording would have approved “in principle the objective of establishing a twinning arrangement between Epsom and Ewell and the City of Bucha in Ukraine”.

The committee did agree that its Working Group should continue examining who could initiate and administer the borough’s existing twinning with Chantilly and, if approved in principle at some future point, any relationship with Bucha, and how both might continue after Epsom and Ewell Borough Council disappears in April 2027.

However, it rejected the declaration of friendship its supporters had sought.

“Bucha is waiting patiently”

Earlier in the meeting **Roy Deadman**, Chair of Surrey Stands With Ukraine and a committee member of the Bucha Epsom Association, spoke during the public-participation session.

He told councillors: “Bucha is waiting patiently for a clear response from this borough.”

Mr Deadman accepted that local government reorganisation raised practical questions about who would administer a twinning relationship after April 2027. But he argued that those questions did not prevent the Council giving immediate support to the principle. “There is a distinction between approving a principle and settling every future administrative detail,” he said.

“This is not a financial commitment. The report itself says there are no immediate financial implications, nor would there be a practical burden falling upon this Council.”

He said the day-to-day relationship could be developed by volunteers through the Bucha Epsom Association, involving schools, charities, cultural groups and residents. “Bucha is not asking Epsom and Ewell for a blank cheque,” he said. “It is asking for friendship.”

Mr Deadman warned that the real risk was not acting too quickly but that “repeated referral, further delay and a general offer of friendship is allowed to wither”.

He asked the committee to recommend that Full Council support twinning in principle, leaving the formal structure to be resolved later.

The **Mayor of Bucha**, Anatoliia Fedoruk, has expressed a wish for Epsom and Ewell to become the Ukrainian city’s first twinning partner in the United Kingdom. Local volunteers have sent substantial humanitarian support to Ukraine, while Ukrainian families have been welcomed into the borough.

Epsom and Ewell MP **Helen Maguire** had also written to committee members supporting the proposal. Cllr Dallen summarised her position at the meeting as supporting “twinning between Epsom and Ewell and Bucha”. Her letter highlighted the 100 year Partnership Agreement between the United Kingdom and Ukraine, signed in January 2025, which envisages partnerships at local levels.

Chinn: offer “the hand of friendship”

Councillor **Kate Chinn**, (Labour Court), proposed the amendment giving support in principle.

She questioned why the Bucha proposal had become tied so closely to the existing Chantilly arrangement, saying a constituted community organisation already existed locally with strong links to Bucha.

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Cllr Chinn said Epsom and Ewell's relationship with Ukraine was "really quite special", referring to the welcome given to Ukrainian families and the cultural contribution they had made locally.

"We are a very fortunate generation that we haven't been in that place where we are under attack," she said. "I really think it's important that we offer the hand of friendship to Bucha."

Responding to suggestions that twinning might be an inappropriate distraction for a city at war, she said: "It's Bucha who want this. Bucha want it very much, and they want it to happen as soon as possible. It's not Epsom and Ewell imposing their twinning on the town, and maybe it is in times of conflict when you do need the hands of friendship and support the most."

Warning against the "long grass"

Councillor **Steve McCormick**, (Conservative Woodcote and Langley Vale), seconded Cllr Chinn's amendment and warned that the borough was running out of time before its abolition.

"We do run the risk of just running out of time and just kicking this can down the timeline," he said. He described approval in principle as "a good positive first step of action, rather than just delay, delay, delay and delay".

"There's work to be done, but we can get this done," he said. "If we kick it into the long grass, it's never going to get done before this Council basically wraps up."

Councillor **James Lawrence** (Independent College) also argued that it should be for Bucha to decide how it used its own resources.

"If they wish to pursue twinning with us, then I would let them be the final arbiters of that decision, rather than us try and second-guess their resourcing," he said.

He noted that there was no legal requirement for one single twinning association to manage every relationship for the same geographical area. The Council's Monitoring Officer confirmed that this was a matter of "custom and practice" rather than a legal obligation.

Opposition during wartime

Councillor **Phil Neale** (RA Cuddington) said he supported Ukraine and had contributed financially, materially and voluntarily. Nevertheless, he questioned whether twinning was appropriate during the war.

"At the moment, it's totally irrelevant, and it will be totally lost with LGR," he said. He suggested that twinning should wait until peace returned and the rebuilding of Ukraine was under way.

Councillor **John Beckett** (RA Auriol) said he was uncomfortable approving the principle without first understanding possible costs and demands on Council officers. "If we were to approve this in principle, what would be the costs? What would it actually take? Have we got the officers to actually deal with it?" he asked.

Cllr Chinn responded that councillors had repeatedly been assured the relationship would not consume Council resources. Chief Executive Jackie King confirmed that the present Chantilly arrangement required the Council to do little more than put its name to the charter, saying nothing had changed in that respect.

The committee report itself said there were no immediate financial implications and no anticipated Section 24 implications if a Bucha twinning agreement proceeded. It acknowledged that any later commitment of Council resources would have to be identified, costed and separately approved.

Principle rejected, process continues

After the tied vote and Cllr Dallen's casting vote rejected support in principle, councillors approved further investigation.

The Working Group must now clarify who could initiate and administer the Chantilly and Bucha arrangements and how they could continue after "vesting day" on 1st April 2027. It must return with another report to a future committee meeting.

Lionel Blackman, Director of Surrey Stands With Ukraine, commented after the vote: "Extremely disappointing. Bucha ducks missiles while Epsom Council mucks about with meetings and petty analysis. Twinning with Bucha has been on the agenda for over a year now. Anybody's guess what motivates Councillors to kill off this initiative and why they want to bury it in endless committee meetings."

He added: "With the rejection of a simple and cost free statement of support for twinning in principle, we will be lucky if we maintain Bucha's preference for Epsom in all of the United Kingdom. Probably, since World War Two there has been no comparable volunteer community effort experienced in our Borough as that of the support for Ukraine. Demonstrated by sending so far in excess of £5 million of humanitarian aid."

The result leaves the machinery of the proposal uncertain without any statement of support its local advocates had requested.

Sam Jones – Reporter

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Image: Days after the liberation of Bucha 31.03.2022: Creator: Oleksandr Ratushniak. Copyright: Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

[Ed. note: Today Bucha has physically recovered but its people remain scarred by the Russian atrocities that became infamous worldwide.]

If you wish to support Ukraine see www.surreystandswithukraine.org.uk

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