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Gatwick 2nd runway sneaking in?

20 December 2023



Protesters against the expansion of Gatwick airport have said a new consultation on planning changes is an attempt to “sneak” a second runway through the back door.

Gatwick Airport is polling residents about changes it wants to its multi-billion pound expansion plans.
The operator wants to double capacity and create the equivalent of a second Heathrow Airport in the south east by creating a fully functioning two-runway airport capable of handling 75 million passengers a year and space for an extra 100,000 flights.

The bid is due to be examined by planning inspectors during a six-month hearing, expected to conclude in June 2024. These last minute tweaks by the airport will be submitted it says after the public has its say.
Critics however argue the changes are anything but minor and the timing of the changes could result in people who have already had taken part thinking they have played their role.

The Campaign Against Gatwick Noise Emissions (CAGNE) said: “These are not minor changes to the application for a new runway and Sussex Gatwick. CAGNE feel they should consult all who have already registered an interest with the Planning Inspectorate. This added consultation would appear to be a way for the airport to implement changes that could be sneaked through due to people believing that they have already passed judgement on the plans for a new runway.

“What is proposed could see a vast increase in lorry movements by replacing an incinerator with a waste sorting plant, not included in the Development Consent Order, traffic modelling or air quality, an incinerator that at the time of obtaining planning permission was meant to heat the north terminal.

“We do not accept that a reed bed will deal with the flooding issues that a new runway will create with significant increases in new construction field side and with a new highway and the ever-increasing heavier rainfall predictions by the Met office.”

“CAGNE, the umbrella aviation community and environment group for Sussex, Surrey and Kent, has requested that they be permitted to be party to this consultation but as yet Sussex Gatwick management have not responded favourably.”

The airport is proposing three separate changes.

The first is to increase the North Terminal International Departure Lounge southern extension; the second to reduce the height, and change the purpose, of the replacement Central Area Recycling Enclosure; and the third is to revise Surface Water Treatment Works.

It will be for the Planning Inspectorate to decide if the changes can be made to the application and included in the examination. The consultation will close at 11:59pm on January 21 2024.

Airport operators say expansion would create around 14,000 new jobs and inject £1 billion into the regional economy every year.

Tim Norwood, Chief Planning Officer, London Gatwick, said: “Our engagement with the public and stakeholders to date has been invaluable in helping us shape our Northern Runway plans. However, since the submission of our DCO application we have identified a number of small improvements we would like to make to our proposal. “We are therefore asking for views on three discrete changes to our plans and would welcome any feedback people may want to make.”

Related reports:

Gatwick expansion plans revealed

Gatwick to get 2nd runway?

Classic growth versus environment dilemma

Report against airport expansion

Image: Gatwick Plans (Image PINS / Gatwick)

Surrey borough kicks up a stink about stink

20 December 2023

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More than 200 tankers of human poo were shipped in to Camberley from across Surrey, Hampshire and London, saving Thames Water millions in potential pollution fines and its sewage trucks from “exploding”. This comes at the expense of 11,600 residents who got nothing in return, save for a summer of vile stench, a committee heard.

Chiefs from the utility firm were called in to Surrey Heath Borough Council to answer questions as to how 12,000 cubic metres of raw untreated sewage and sludge was left to fester in the heat – forcing thousands of people to stay inside with their windows closed during the summer.

The committee also challenged water bosses over pledges they thought had been made on compensation to Camberley residents who “bore the cost” so the company, which recorded a total revenue of £2.3 billion last year, could profit.

Councillors said they were led to believe Thames Water would contribute towards a playground as a goodwill gesture to children who had been forced to stay indoors, with committee chair, Councillor Rob Lee, going as far as to say Thames Water should offer “a year’s free water bills” to those affected.

Thames Water’s representatives said they never made a firm commitment to contribute to any scheme. The company claims they have made organisational improvements since.

The committee heard that Thames Water could not have made any offers of goodwill as the people attending the meeting did not have the power to do so.

In the end, Thames Water’s leadership offered to let staff have a charity day to support building a local project that never got off the ground.

The sewage started being shipped into Camberley Sewage Works in February this year and by March the two 6,000 cubic metre tanks were “completely full”.

At the time, the committee heard, odour suppression was in place but it wasn’t 24/7 and didn’t cover the entire tank, which also suffered from maintenance issues.

By June, the council began to receive formal complaints. Initially the council was told the problem was due to blockages and drainage.

It took until the middle of July for Thames Water to publicly admit it was a holding tank with a “large quantity of sewage sludge within it”. It would remain untreated until the beginning of August with the tanks finally cleared and cleaned of waste on September 25.

Speaking to the committee was operations director James Bentley. He apologised “unreservedly” and said: “We didn’t get everything right in that process and we’re not here to pretend that we did.” He said the firm should have put in odour controls in place and communicated with residents much sooner. He said: “We had been experiencing a very extreme sludge event…where our system across the whole of the Thames Water estate, was overloaded. Not only with liquid sludge but also with cake which is the solid material when we process sludge and remove a chunk of the water from it. That system was overloaded on the liquid and solid side.”

Thames Water staff told the meeting it left them with no choice but to put liquid sludge into reserve tanks. Mr Bentley said: “It has to go somewhere, it cant just be discarded into the environment. We have to store it until we are able to treat it.” His colleague added: “If we didn’t move the sludge we’d have pollution trucks potentially exploding, and that’s why we’d done it.”

Cllr Rob Lee said: “You act in the shareholders best interest, you don’t intend to cause a substantial sewage leak unless its a commercially managed one, you don’t intend to cause a Heath and Safety Executive incident, so what you did was you moved the sludge to Camberley. So the people that bore the cost of that were the residents of Camberley, substantially through the summer, through their loss of enjoyment and I think it’s understanding the loss position those residents bring.

“They are your customers, they pay you money, and they missed out substantially on the enjoyment of their summers. Raw sewage smell around your home is pretty different to that in a treatment plant as that is your job. You need to consider a gesture of goodwill to residents. A starting point is a year’s complimentary water bill. It clearly saved Thames Water in material terms millions if not tens of millions of pounds, so I think we need to start exploring that avenue.”

The two hour meeting concluded with the Thursday, November 28 executive partnerships select committee agreeing to formally ask for a “decision maker who has the ability to sign off on compensation” to appear before the next meeting, in March.

The council’s executive team will also write to regulators Ofwat, MP Michael Gove and the environment secretary to ask them to consider the wider sense of pollution and whether Thames Water diverted the risk of fines by increasing the air pollution in Camberley.

Image: Thames Water Meeting (Surrey Heath BC)

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Surrey set for the first ever Festival of Skills

20 December 2023



Hundreds of young people are set to be fired up about their futures at Surrey's first ever Festival of Skills.

The free one-day careers event will provide local students with the chance to connect with and learn more about some of the county's brightest businesses and training providers.

Up to 1,500 young people from schools and colleges across Surrey are expected to attend the event later this month (23 November 2023) at Sandown Park Racecourse.

The Festival of Skills will feature more than 60 exhibitors, including Samsung, British Airways, Pfizer, Haleon, and BAE Systems.

Public sector institutions will also be represented with the Animal & Plant Health Agency, NHS, armed forces and Surrey Fire & Rescue among those attending.

The event has been organised and funded by Surrey County Council, with support from the Association of Learning Providers Surrey (ALPS) and Surrey Event Professionals.

Cllr Matt Furniss, Surrey County Council's Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport & Economic Growth, said: *"The first-ever Festival of Skills is set to be a day to remember – providing young people with the chance to rub shoulders with major employers and be inspired about their futures.*

"Such interactions can change people's paths for the rest of their lives, which is why we are delighted to have so many businesses, public bodies and training providers exhibiting at the event.

"Providing opportunities for employers to connect with the county's future workforce is integral to our wider Skills agenda and achieving our mission to ensure No One is Left Behind."

The Festival of Skills is open to young people in education aged 14 to 18. Those attending will have access to inspirational talks and interactive displays, while also learning about potential career opportunities.

Sectors represented include the creative arts, construction, cyber security, health and social care, technology, engineering, public sector, and hospitality.

The event will also host the official launch of the new **Surrey Careers Hub**, which will work with the county's secondary schools, special schools and colleges to ensure every young person can find their best next step.

Schools and colleges are still able to **sign up to the Festival of Skills for the remaining afternoon slots**, but pre-booking is essential.

A small number of exhibitor stands are also available. Employers interested in attending must **register their interest via the Festival of Skills website**.

For further information visit **www.surreyfestivalofskills.co.uk**.

AI training hub coming to Surrey

20 December 2023



Surrey is set to become home to a high-quality training hub in Artificial Intelligence (AI), a move which could have transformative impacts in the way vulnerable residents engage and access public services.

Government announced last week that the **University of Surrey and the StoryFutures unit at Royal Holloway, University of London (RHUL) will be the home of a new Centre for Doctoral Training (CDT) in AI for Digital Media Inclusion**.

The funding will help establish a unique creative industry hub for high-quality training in responsible AI, inclusive design, and creative skills within the county.

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In addition to creating 80 PhD posts, the centre will look at using AI to transform digital media into intelligent content that adapts to individual preferences, such as age, language, and sensory and physical abilities.

The ambition is to place Surrey – and the UK as a whole – as a world leader in media inclusion.

Surrey County Council is proud to back the bid and keen to work with the new centre to establish how public services could be made more accessible to its 1.2 million residents.

In a letter of support, Cllr Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council, said: *"We are excited by the Centre for Doctoral Training's (CDT) proposed approach to responding to the national need for a new community of experts who individually and collectively will deliver resilience for our digitalised Critical National Infrastructure.*

"We recognise and support the CDT's aim to develop the underpinning research, training, community-building, and knowledge exchange, contributing 80 highly skilled and connected resilience experts to the workforce.

"The funding bid and subsequent CDT and associated research and expertise will have a significant positive impact on our organisation's ability to deliver high-quality and sustainable services for all."

Cllr Oliver added the local authority was interested in exploring how new technology could improve the way its most vulnerable residents accessed its services.

There was also potential to look at increasing engagement with businesses, fire prevention, community safety services, and greener futures and net zero.

The Surrey hub will be one of 12 Centres for Doctoral Training in AI across the country that will benefit from £117 million of funding through UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

It was **announced at the global AI Safety Summit held at Bletchley Park last week**.

Cllr Oliver added that Surrey County Council has an established track record of working successfully with the county's universities to drive innovation and economic growth.

Last week the local authority's cabinet agreed to investment £3 million to support the establishment of a new **CoSTAR (Convergent Screen Technologies and performance in Realtime) satellite studio and incubator space** on the RHUL campus.

The new centre for the creative industries – which will have direct links to the national lab based a short distance away at Pinewood Studios – will create 300 jobs, support 200 businesses and contribute £30 million to the Surrey economy.

The Council was also partner in a **successful bid by Surrey's Guildford Games Cluster and Warwickshire's Silicon Spa for £1.5 million from Research England**.

The funding will support two of the UK's biggest gaming clusters to work with higher education to drive innovation, invest in infrastructure and support growth in the wider regional economy through the Games and Innovation Nexus (GAIN) project.

Cllr Matt Furniss, Surrey County Council's Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth, said: *"The games industry is one of Surrey's real success stories, showcasing our county and its talented workforce on a global stage.*

"This funding has the potential to take this growing, innovative sector to new heights, creating high-quality jobs and generating inward investment into our communities – both of which would be good news for our residents."

Famous 16th Century Surrey pub saved, for now?

20 December 2023



A 16th century pub in the heart of the **Surrey Hills** has been saved from developers after plans to convert one of the last remaining Abinger watering holes into houses, holiday-let pods, and a new bar area were thrown out.

Mole Valley Borough Council's planning committee met on Wednesday, November 1 to hear proposals from developers, **JPW Osprey**, to turn the Volunteer pub in Sutton Abinger, near Dorking into self-catered holiday lets.

The plans were voted down eight to six as councillors sided with resident groups, formed to save the pub, as well as **Abinger Parish Council** which had lodged formal objections.

Addressing the meeting was **Paul Clever** who was part of a community group that had raised £600,000 in a failed bid to purchase the pub and save it. He said: "The aim of this application is to close the Volunteer, replace it with an unviable alternative which gets through planning. The new entity will last as long as needed to prove that it is not viable and the

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developer will then sell the asset for multiples of what it cost."

He added: "The Volunteer is being closed and the new layout and proposed service will ensure the new venture in the new area will fail. The planning application and the planning report refer to the pub being unviable and that is simply not true. The Volunteer Community Group has proof of this for the year preceding the sale, during the worst trading conditions ever for publicans.

"The Volunteer is viable and very precious to its community, known far beyond the boundaries of Surrey. It should not be allowed to go the way of so many other pubs near and far, especially when there are so many people willing and able to make it work as a public house and community facility."

The pub sits on the western side of Water Lane within the hamlet of Sutton Abinger, close to the boundary with Guildford. The land is designated Metropolitan Green Belt, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Area of Great Landscape Value.

The surroundings, the officer report said, "lend the pub an engaging verdant setting and areas of the garden afford views over rolling wooded countryside to the south taking in attractive historic properties, some of which are listed."

The Volunteer had been owned and operated by the Dorset-based brewery, Hall and Woodhouse, until 2022 when it closed and sold to the applicant.

In Novermber 2022 the pub was listed as an Asset of Community Value having been nominated by the Abinger Community Pub Group as a building that furthers the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community.

Speaking on behalf of the the application was **Simon Best** who told the meeting it was the best way of bringing the pub back in use. He said: "Change is not always a bad thing and it is clear from previous failures that diversification is needed to ensure the Volunteer can run as a viable entity. Holiday lets will support and enable the pub to continue."

Councillor **Margaret Cooksey**, who moved that the plans be rejected said: "If they kept the public house building as is and used what is going to be the extension as accommodation that would have made much more sense. They have got it the wrong way round. It would have been better a different way round and hope they take note of that and come back with a better proposal next time round."

She added: "They've got it horribly wrong".

Image: The Volunteer Pub (Mark Davison)

Surrey College fraud probe leads to housing plan

20 December 2023



Warnings a failed subcontracted apprenticeship scheme was a "major risk" were ignored leaving a Surrey college with a £25million financial time bomb that it now hopes to solve by selling land for 320 homes.
Brooklands College in Heath Road, Weybridge, borrowed a large sum from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) with the money given to SLC Security to run apprenticeship programs at the school between 2011 and 2019.

When SLC Security collapsed, a formal review was launched by the Department for Education's further education commissioner – and soon after Scotland Yard began its own three-year fraud investigation which closed in May with no arrests – leaving the college holding the can.

The school's solution has been to look to sell land to developers Cala Homes for a £45 million project to cover the money it owes to the ESFA and a modernisation of its campus. The planning application is due to be decided by Elmbridge Borough Council in November, potentially drawing the saga to a close.

In the months leading up to SLC's collapse concerns of the school's financial health had already caught the attention of the Department for Education and the college's "capacity and capability" to get out of the mess, questioned.

The commissioners said the subcontract was a "major risk" and recommended the college "undertake further work to understand the risk associated with this contractor and to immediately review subcontracted provision".

The school's governors, on the other hand, told commissioners they had been given "numerous assurances" by the principal and chief executive over the college's financial stress testing and auditing of its subcontractors which "showed no issues regarding eligibility, existence of learners or their employment status".

At no point had any thought had been given by governors to develop a Plan B should the investigation find the college financially liable for any failings, the report read.

The college's senior leadership team and governors at the time believed "they had undertaken all necessary and appropriate checks and due diligence on all sub-contracted SCL Security provision and from the work they have done, believed that the risk of clawback was low" according to the commissioners' report.

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A spokesperson for the Department for Education said it does not comment on individual cases but that colleges are required to ensure any education subcontractors adhere to regulations.

They added: “In all cases where apprenticeship provision does not meet the funding regulations it is standard procedure to recover those funds.”

A liquidators’ statement for SCL Security published on January 4, 2023, revealed that colleges and the ESFA have claims worth £22.5 million against the company. However, it shows there is only about £6.5m available, far short of how much the college must return to the ESFA.

Brooklands College also plans to seek damages for breach of contract, although this will require “further work” to adjudicate.

A spokesperson for the Metropolitan Police said: “In June 2020, the Metropolitan Police received an allegation of fraud relating to a college based in Heath Road, Weybridge, Surrey. The allegation related to financial transactions between 2011 and 2019. An investigation was undertaken which included assessing all available evidence and speaking to staff at the college. No arrests were made in connection with the investigation. In May 2023 a decision was taken to close the investigation and the college has been informed of this outcome.”

A three-year repayment plan is now in place between the college and the ESFA. The college has also put in place a new leadership team and is working with Cala Homes on a joint planning application. The £45million scheme, the college says, will enable its Grade II listed mansion to be refurbished and restored, open 12 hectares of woodland to the public, provide a community-accessible sports centre, as well as the 320 homes – 128 of which will be classed as affordable housing.

The public consultation into the plans closed on October 23 with 235 people voicing their support for the project against 22 letters of objection.

A spokesperson for the college said: “A new leadership team and a revitalised Board of Trustees have been focussed on putting the college on a solid, long-term, financial footing and have developed a plan to repay the debt and safeguard the college’s future. Our plan will upgrade our teaching facilities to create a modern learning environment that will meet future educational needs, inspire the next generation of students, and secure a sustainable future for Brooklands College in our community.”

Image: Visualisation of completed Brooklands College campus site (Cala Homes/Elmbridge BC)

Thames Water left human waste to fester

20 December 2023



Thames Water has been accused of backtracking on a goodwill gesture after subjecting Camberley residents to a “disgusting” summer of stench caused by raw, untreated, human waste left to fester in the heat.

Last summer Camberley experienced a “persistent and intolerable” rancid odour the seeped from sewage works operated by Thames Water, a full meeting of Surrey Heath Borough Council heard.

Following a series of meetings, with councillors and MP Michael Gove, Thames Water spoke of its desire to make a financial contribution to a local community project to acknowledge the impact on residents over a five month period, according to a motion that was backed unanimously by councillors.

Introducing the motion was Councillor Jonathan Quin, leader of the Labour group and ward member for St Michaels. He said: “Disgusting sewage odour… plagued Camberley for over a five month periods from May to September. The odour caused by the Camberley sewage works run by Thames Water can not be described as anything minor. It was so awfully disgusting and strong that many residents…could not open their windows or hang their washing outside during the summer.

“The distress and impact caused to mental health… has been shocking.” He added: “Thames Water agreed to meet with councillors and the MP to discuss possible compensation to make up for missing five months going outside.”

The meeting heard that a children’s playground in St Michaels was suggested as a goodwill gesture and that there had been a “meeting of minds” with the utility firm, with the only thing remaining being the exact amount of money Thames Water would put forward.

He said: “Rather than agreeing to meet us in person again, Thames Water has since backtracked on its decision to make a contribution. I’m absolutely disgusted and disappointed at the disregard shown.”

Cllr Lisa Finan-Cooke (LD, Watchetts) told of how the problem began after Thames Water started shipping in human waste into Camberley that led to more than 11,000 complaints to flood in.

She said: “Between February and April more and more sludge was imported on to the site, and let’s be honest what we

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are talking about was raw human sewage which was just stored in vast open tanks to just fester away, and as the weather warmed up, the sludge began to produce an unbearable odour."

She added: "That's five months of people feeling sick in their own homes, of not wanting to open their windows, of not letting their children out to play in their gardens, not being able to hang their washing out to dry, cancelled birthday parties and family events. The site wasn't sufficiently resourced to process the sludge in the first place."

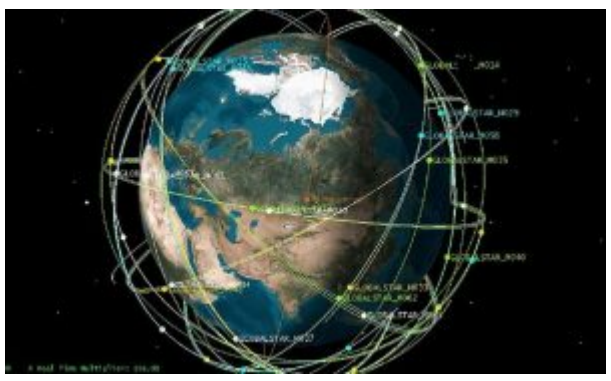
The Wednesday, October 25 meeting noted the problems caused by Thames Water and called on the private utility firm "in the strongest possible terms" to honour its previous commitment to make a financial contribution to a community project.

It was also agreed to write Thames Water and the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to express dissatisfaction over the importation of sludge to Camberley.

Camberley Sewage Treatment Works (Image Google)

Satellite comms. pass Surrey Uni test

20 December 2023



A satellite company called Eutelsat OneWeb recently made a big advancement. They successfully connected their low Earth orbit (LEO) satellites to a 5G mobile network for the first time. This achievement is a big step towards bringing super-fast internet to people in remote and rural areas.

They were able to do this with the help of a partnership called the Sunrise Programme, which is supported by the European Space Agency. In a test, researchers from the **University of Surrey** used these satellites to connect to a 5G network. These satellites are orbiting the Earth and make up the second-largest satellite constellation in the world.

During the test, they checked things like video calls, streaming videos, online gaming, virtual and augmented reality, and web browsing. With the LEO satellites, they were able to provide fast internet with very little delay, or "low latency." They also made sure that users could smoothly switch between the satellite network and regular mobile networks, providing a seamless 5G experience.

Barry Evans, Professor of Satellite Communications at the 6G/5G Innovation Centre (6G/5GIC) at the University of Surrey, said: "It was thrilling to see no degradation when using the 5G connection made possible by the LEO constellation. This is a step closer to increasing internet access for more people around the world – a privilege that many of us take for granted. The work performed in the 5G pilot tests has demonstrated the feasibility of 5G backhaul over LEO satellites."

Eutelsat OneWeb's technology is similar to what we have with 4G, and they matched the quality of 5G in the mobile network with 4G quality in the satellite network. This allowed them to support all the applications they tested.

Eutelsat OneWeb has also made a deal with Telstra in Australia to support their 4G and 5G networks.

Overall, this is a significant achievement in bridging the gap in internet access and improving connectivity for people in remote areas. It's also a testament to the Surrey's leadership in space and telecommunications technology.

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Bloomin' marvellous for Epsom and Ewell

20 December 2023



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Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, Go Epsom Business Improvement District, and dedicated volunteers from across the borough were delighted to pick up a number of awards for Nonsuch Park, Epsom Town Centre and Ewell Village at this year's South & South East in Bloom awards.

For the first time, Nonsuch Park picked up two awards, a prestigious Gold Award for Large Conservation Area and a Silver Gilt Award for Heritage Park.

Judge **Peter Holman**, who is also Chairman of the South & South East in Bloom scheme, praised the efforts of the Nonsuch Voles Volunteering Group, and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Operational Services and Countryside Team, who all work together for the overall benefit of the park.

Mr Holman said, "Woodland management, planting new trees and beds, and uncovering and restoring horticultural features all add value. Since my last visit, it's good to see progress and the natural areas of the park are an excellent example of what can be achieved to benefit wildlife."

Ewell Village kept its Silver Award status in the Large Village of the Year category and was congratulated on the efforts of the community volunteers who help maintain the Gertrude Longhurst Memorial Garden and Bourne Hall Park.

The council's work at Bourne Hall was also praised. The judges said, "With its historic grounds, Bourne Hall showed noticeable improvements to the area at the rear of the building, which now forms an outdoor extension to the café area. It is understood that planting to soften its appearance is planned along with a new children's play area. Adjacent to the pond, a new pollinators bed has been successfully planted and looked attractive.

"The Wheatsheaf public house was pleasing to see and welcoming. Also of note was the work at Gertie's garden."

Epsom Town Centre entered the Business Improvement District category and retained its Silver Award status. The judges noted the planting schemes in Rosebery Park, the 'Pocket Park' in South Street and the new planters outside TK Maxx, they were also impressed with the murals around the Town Centre and the Lidl Living Wall in Upper High Street.

Councillor **John Beckett**, Chair of the Environment Committee, said "I am pleased to see the hard work and dedication of the council, Go Epsom, businesses, residents and volunteers has been formally recognised at this year's South & South East in Bloom awards.

"Maintaining our standards by winning Silver Awards in Ewell Village and Epsom Town Centre again and improving on last year's awards tally by winning Gold and Silver Gilt for Nonsuch Park is a brilliant achievement.

"Plans are already being put in place for the borough to take part in Bloom next year. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who is committed to ensuring our borough is the best it can be for the local community, visitors and wildlife all year round."

Karen Pengelly, BID Manager at Go Epsom said, "Epsom is a lovely town, and the introduction of planters, murals and general greenery are welcome additions to our street scene. Visitors and local workers have commented on how much they appreciate the efforts of everyone involved in making Epsom look even better. Onwards and upwards for 2024 – there's always more to do!"

The awards were held at RHS Wisley on Friday 29 September 2023.

South & South East in Bloom is part of Britain in Bloom and runs annual competitions across the counties of Kent, Surrey, East & West Sussex, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, East & North Dorset and East Wiltshire.

Related reports:

Bloom awards for Epsom and Ewell (2022)

Image: Rosebery Park in Spring: © Copyright Marathon and licensed for reuse under this Creative Commons Licence

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Thames Water rebate

20 December 2023



Thames Water has been ordered to pay back more than £100million to its customers by regulators.
Water watchdog Ofwat ordered the under-performing company to return the money following a string of failings, it announced today, September 26.

The rebate follows its assessment of Thames Water's performance with customers seeing the results on their bills next year. Ofwat's decision was published in its annual Water Company Performance Report, which rates companies based on pollution incidents, customer service and leakage.

Targets are set to incentivise water companies to deliver more for customers and the environment, Ofwat's report read. It

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added: “Where they fall short, we reduce the amount of money companies can collect from customers.” On Thames Water customers receiving £100 million back next year, it said: “While that may be welcome to billpayers, it is very disappointing news for all who want to see the water sector do better.”

David Black, Ofwat chief executive said: “The targets we set for companies were designed to be stretching – to drive improvements for customers and the environment. However, our latest report shows they are falling short.” He added: “It is not going to be easy for companies to regain public trust, but they have to start with better service for customers and the environment. We will continue to use all our powers to ensure the sector delivers better value.”

It is yet more bad news for the firm following the report in July that found Thames Water among worst in country due to standout levels of pollution and poor monitoring left if joint last among the country’s “very disappointing” water and sewerage companies.

Thames Water is the largest water company in the country and serves 15 million people including many in Surrey and Kent. It is owned by a consortium of pension groups and sovereign wealth funds and, in 2023 reported an annual loss of £30.1 million.

Environment Secretary Therese Coffey has now written to Thames Water informing it to expect a meeting in order to scrutinise its improvement plans.

A spokesperson for Thames Water said “Our customers expect a great service from us every time, and we’re sorry when we fail to deliver at the first opportunity. In 2022-2023 , we met 55 per cent of our annual performance commitments.

“While it is our job to deliver our services whatever the weather, our performance last year was severely affected by the summer drought and December freeze/thaw event. In March this year our shareholders injected £500million of new equity into Thames Water to help fund improved operational performance. Our shareholders are willing to provide a further £750million of equity funding before 2025, subject to certain conditions.

“They also acknowledge that additional equity funding, indicatively of £2.5billion, will be required during the next regulatory period, 2025-2030, to further improve operational performance and financial resilience. This is the largest equity support package ever seen in the UK water sector and underscores our shareholders’ commitment in delivering Thames Water’s turnaround and life’s essential service for the benefit of our customers, communities, and the environment.

“Our turnaround is already delivering performance improvements. Our complaints fell by 28 per cent, the second consecutive significant year-on-year reduction and we have seen improvements in several key performance commitments including a reduction in sewage discharges, internal sewer flooding, and sewer blockages.

“We’re making progress and we’ll continue to engage and work with Ofwat as we implement our plan. We’re determined to do better for our customers and the environment.”

Related reports:

Thames Water among worst in country

Wasting water?

Local sewage uploaded

Image: Hogsmill river in Ewell where there were sewage leaks.

Healthy future for Epsom’s restored White House

20 December 2023



The **White House**, located at 16 Waterloo Road, **Epsom**, nestled between Blacks Burgers and Nandos, is a Grade II listed building that dates back to the early 1700s. Recently, it has undergone a beautiful restoration in preparation for an exciting new phase in its rich history.

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The new owner has successfully preserved the building's charm and character, while modernizing its internal features to create comfortable and contemporary treatment and therapy spaces. The White House is transformed into a Health and Wellness Centre, where professionals with various skills can utilize rooms once occupied by two historically significant individuals, as confirmed by the plaque on the building's front, visible from the pathway.

Around 1800, Prince George and Mrs. Fitzherbert resided in the same building now known as The White House. However, the question arises: What became of Princess Caroline, the woman Prince George married just five years earlier, and why is her name absent from the plaque?

While King George III led a scandal-free life, the same cannot be said for his son, Prince George, who lived an extravagant lifestyle characterized by heavy drinking and entertaining mistresses. Burdened by mounting debts, Prince George sought financial assistance from his father, who agreed to help him under the condition that Prince George marry his cousin, Princess Caroline of Brunswick.

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Although Prince George had previously secretly married the twice-widowed Maria Anne Fitzherbert, this marriage was invalid because King George III had not consented to it. On April 8, 1795, Prince George married Princess Caroline at the Chapel Royal, St. James's Palace. However, the couple proved incompatible despite Caroline giving birth to Princess Charlotte, George's only legitimate child, just nine months after their wedding ceremony.

Upon their first meeting, Prince George called for a glass of brandy, while Princess Caroline commented on how much thinner and more handsome George appeared in the portrait she had seen of him. Prince George found his wife unattractive and "unhygienic" and could not bear to have intimate relations with her (he ensured he was drunk on the night of their wedding). Princess Caroline, on the other hand, was beloved by the public, who generally despised her husband, "the Prince of Pleasure," due to his continuous overindulgence and accumulating debts.

On January 29, 1820, George ascended to the throne as King of the United Kingdom and Hanover, with Caroline becoming Queen Consort in name. George sought a divorce from Caroline but couldn't obtain one due to the weak evidence against her. This was partly because Caroline was held in high regard by the public, who viewed George's conduct as immoral.

Caroline was barred from attending King George IV's coronation on July 19, 1821, and subsequently fell ill in London. Tragically, she passed away three weeks after the coronation she had not been allowed to attend. Her funeral procession moved slowly through London en route to Brunswick, where she was laid to rest. This allowed George to continue his romantic attachment to Maria Fitzherbert and entertain other mistresses.

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The brass medallion, which I purchased a few years ago at **Oxfam in Epsom High Street**, likely belonged to one of Queen Caroline's supporters before her death. It resembles a miniature portrait, much like the one of Prince George shown above. "Caroline Queen of England" is inscribed around the perimeter of the medallion, featuring a bust of King George IV's lawful wife.

The brass medallion serves as a poignant reminder of how poorly Queen Caroline was treated by her husband, King George IV, and underscores the ongoing need to ensure that women from all cultures and walks of life are shown respect and treated fairly in today's modern society.

Pot of gold for Rainbow?

20 December 2023

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Rainbow Leisure Centre in East Street Epsom has been shortlisted for a prestigious award from trade association UK Active.

The centre – which was renovated recently- boasts a 25m pool, dance studio, large gym and over-60s social room. As a result, it has been nominated for 'Local and Regional Club/Centre of the Year' in recognition of its huge contribution to the local community.

Rainbow caters to customers of all ages with an innovative programme that includes fourteen classes dedicated to people over 60, plus swimming, gym sessions and classes for the centre's junior members – currently numbering more than 500. The centre is also used by three disability clubs and four special needs schools who participate in tailored activities such as ping pong, dance and Boccia.

Customers are kept involved in the centre's plans with social events and 'Meet the Manager' sessions. Currently, they are accepting almost 30,000 bookings per month.

The centre is run by charitable social enterprise GLL under the 'Better' brand. The organisation's ethos is to reinvest profits to support local communities and Rainbow is an important part of this commitment.

Darren Pope, Rainbow's General Manager, comments, "We couldn't be prouder to have been shortlisted for the best centre/club in the South of England. Making the shortlist would not have been possible without the incredible work from the staff at Rainbow. No matter what the result, I am very proud of my team's achievements this year."

UK Active award winners will be announced at the end of October this year.

Better was founded in 1993 as a charitable social enterprise with seven leisure centres in Greenwich. In 1996 the social enterprise started expanding outside of the London Borough of Greenwich and now runs all kinds of community services and spaces across the UK. Now renamed Better, over 250 public sport and leisure centres and 57 libraries are managed in partnership with more than 30 local councils, public agencies and sporting organisations. Membership to the organisations' centres has increased to over 650,000 with 40 million visitors a year.

"The Gas" and brewery back Cuddington community

20 December 2023



Wandgas Sports and Social Club in Cuddington is very proud to announce their partnership with **Shepherd Neame**. An open day was held on Friday 25th August, with the Kent brewery – the oldest in Britain – showcasing real ales and an impressive selection of wines to the locals.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Councillor **Kim Spickett** said "This is a wonderful facility, offering sporting opportunities to all ages and abilities. It is a social hub for us too – the Jubilee and Coronation Beacon ceremonies for Cuddington took place on the field, organised by Cuddington WI, who hold their monthly meetings at the clubhouse.

Shepherd Neame are already a big name in the cricket world, sponsoring Kent and Surrey County Leagues, so it is a good fit! Their event has been most enjoyable – we even had a wine expert on hand! Having decent real ale available where you live is wonderful."

Cricket at Wandgas is year round, with net sessions throughout the winter in floodlit nets. Youth cricket takes place every Thursday throughout the summer from mid April. "Cricket For All' for players with special needs starts in April.

The club also hosts adult and youth football sides. A "Football For All" section for players with disabilities train on a Saturday morning – two under 16 and 3 adult teams.

Wandgas also run a community football 'turn up and play' for Under 7's. Two dart teams and a pool team play in local

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leagues.

Wandgas is unique in having developed a corner of the grounds into an area for a Sensory Garden. They are currently working with teachers and parents from Linden Bridge School and Orchard Hill College.

Chairman **Dennis Jones** said “the idea is to introduce children and adults with special needs to nature and the rhythms of the seasons through gardening”.

Wandgas Sports and Social Club in Cuddington is on Grafton Road, Worcester Park in the Borough of Epsom and Ewell. Across the road **Linden Bridge School** enjoys open access to the ground. The Club will allow any local group reasonable access and fosters a continuing relationship with sports development officers at Epsom & Ewell Borough Council.

The Club was developed in 1938 to provide sports and social facilities for gas industry employees of SEGAS. Known by the locals as “The Gas”

Wandgas has a determination to retain the site as an open field sports facility for the local community as its key objective.

Image: Councillor Spickett, Gary, Dennis, Sam, Alison, David and Gary.

Objectors fail to tear a strip off

20 December 2023



An Epsom strip club has had its licence renewed despite dividing residents on what it brings to the town.
Stir, in the town centre’s East Street, has run as a sexual entertainment venue since 2011, though operations manager **Damon Wellman** has been running it as a bar since 2007.

Residents who wrote to the council about the application raised concerns about going into town late at night because of it, while another in support said the bar did not have the “creeps” you would find in other venues.

A licensing sub committee meeting at **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council** on Thursday (August 24) granted renewal of the venue’s licence, which was due to expire.

Stir is Epsom and Ewell’s only establishment licenced as a sexual entertainment venue.

The sub committee considered six letters of support and four objections to the application, as well as hearing from Mr Wellman in the meeting.

Letters of support included one person who used to live very close to the venue, who said they were being followed home one night by three men having left another nearby pub. The letter said: “It was late and we had to walk past Stir bar so we asked the doormen if they could help and they were brilliant. “They let us stay in the bar for free, offered to call the police if the men stayed outside, which they did not, and then after some time walked us back to our flat. After that we would sometimes just go in there for a drink as it was a really nice bar and never had the creeps that we would encounter in other bars.”

But one objector said she would not go into town late at night because of the club, saying she had “seen the men coming in and out” and felt “unsafe”.

Another person who wrote in support said they understood people’s “reservations to this sort of thing”, but added “it’s important that perceptions and prejudice do not take precedent over facts and reality.”

Another letter said the venue “tainted” the town, raising concerns about it being so close to a nursery and to a residential area. They went on to say: “I write to and on behalf of the young women who walk home late at night and ask you to reconsider your renewal and shut the premise down and protect young adults from these dangers.”

While another letter claimed there had been a “significant increase in anti-social behaviour associated with the establishment”, Mr Wellman disputed this in the meeting.

He produced a response to a Freedom of Information request he had submitted to the council regarding complaints, whether noise or otherwise, about the premises which said there had been none in the last five years.

Mr Wellman said: “We have to run a venue like this strictly. That’s why we have a great reputation. We are phenomenally strict. We are very strict on who we let in. We’re not a volume-led venue, this industry generally isn’t.”

The licence was granted, with minor changes including removing the words “female only” from a condition regarding the

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locations where “exotic dancing” could take place.

Report against airport expansion

20 December 2023



Airport expansion benefits a “small and wealthy subset of the British population” leaving the rest to deal with its environmental impact, according to a new report.

The paper, **Losing Altitude** the economics of air transport in Great Britain, was published just weeks before plans to double capacity at Gatwick were made public for the first time.

It argues that the “significant” environmental downsides that come with the growth in flight numbers is not matched by its economic benefit – and that data arguing otherwise is out-dated.

However, while it says overall tourism in the UK is harmed by increased aviation, Surrey and the south east benefit.

Gatwick Airport says a second runway would bring an extra £1billion to the south east and that its “detailed economic analysis is robust and is based on UK-specific data”.

It has submitted proposals to the Planning Inspector to add a permanent second runway to allow an extra 100,000 flights a year. A six-month enquiry is set to start later this year to determine the matter.

The report, by **New Economics Foundation**, read: “The Government continues to provide conditional support to air capacity growth on the, often tacit, basis that the economic upsides outweigh the negative impacts and future risks. “But, the economic assumptions that underpin this position favouring growth are dated and have not been reviewed for some years.

“Given the urgent and sizeable nature of the climate risk, it is imperative that the evidence, and relative balance, of the economic and environmental impacts of air transport growth are kept up to date and under constant review.”

The last comprehensive Government review of the economic impacts of air travel was in 2012 and the industry has “changed dramatically” since then, the report argues.

Growth in business travellers has effectively ceased and new passengers are “exclusively from the leisure market” – in particular, “growth has been driven by wealthy British residents rather than foreign tourists or those on lower incomes”. The pandemic, it says, accelerated the trend.

Welfare, jobs and wages, tourism.

It said the social benefits that access to international travel brings to UK residents can be vast but is “typically captured by a small and wealthy subset of the British population while, each year, around half of British residents do not fly at all. Furthermore, the welfare benefit must now be offset against welfare losses resulting from greater environmental damage; these are substantial”.

On job creation, it said that aviation “supports a large number of British jobs, but the amount of employment created by growth has been diminishing over time” and has now become “one of the poorest job creators in the economy per pound of revenue” – due to automation and efficiency savings.

It also found productivity growth failed to translate into increased wages; after inflation.

On tourism it said there are now two decades of evidence showing air transport does not help the UK domestic tourism industry with cash instead flowing overseas.

The exception to this is in Surrey, London and the wider south east, where the majority of foreign tourists visit.

Dr Alex Chapman, senior researcher at the New Economics Foundation (NEF), said: “For years, this government has let the air travel industry balloon in size, based on dangerously outdated claims that it is boosting the UK’s economy. The reality is declining business air travel, declining wages for air travel workers, declining job numbers, and declining domestic tourism spending in the UK.

“And that’s before you consider the rise in noise, air pollution and dangerous emissions driven by UK airports. So who exactly is benefiting from ever more air travel? You needn’t look much further than the highly paid executives, the private

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shareholders, and the wealthy minority of ultra-frequent flyers."

Cait Hewitt, policy director at the **Aviation Environment Federation**, said: "The question of whether or not airports should expand is often assumed to be about balancing environmental harms against economic benefits. This new analysis suggests we should think again; while flying definitely causes harm in terms of noise and emissions, it's uncertain if it actually brings any economic benefits.

"Obviously people benefit from going on holiday, but policies that support British tourism and leisure – rather than increasing travel abroad – would be good for the UK economy as well as the climate."

A London Gatwick spokesperson said: "We are aware of the… report and its claims, however our detailed economic analysis is robust and is based on UK-specific data. Our analysis shows that the Northern Runway plans would deliver 14,000 new UK-based jobs and inject £1 billion into the economy of the south east every year.

"Our plans would also benefit many communities across the south east by providing new economic and business opportunities as well as benefits for tourism and international trade.
"We recognise the climate emergency and the need for the whole aviation industry to act to reach net zero by 2050.

"To that end, we accelerated our plans to achieve net zero for airport emissions, Scope 1 and 2, by 2030 and will invest over £250 million so that we achieve this 10 years ahead of our previous target. The government is also committed to work with airlines to ensure they meet a trajectory of reducing carbon emissions to get to net zero, 2050, through measures including airspace modernisation; sustainable aviation fuel, electric, hydrogen and hybrid aircraft and setting carbon budgets for airlines."

Related Reports:

Gatwick expansion plans revealed

Gatwick to get 2nd runway?

Chance for Epsom and Ewell's say on Heathrow flights

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