

Surrey County new land management framework



Surrey County Council has launched a new Land Management Framework, setting out best practice guidelines for managing its own land as well as striving to inspire other landowners and stakeholders to adopt and deliver similar approaches. The new framework aims to ensure Surrey’s countryside is managed in a way that maximises its ecological, educational, social and economic value for the benefit of generations to come.

Like other counties, Surrey’s natural environment is under unprecedented pressure from climate change, biodiversity loss, and increasing demands on land use. The new framework provides principles and policies to guide evidence-based decisions, manage risks, and seize opportunities.

The county council owns and manages 10,000 acres of Surrey’s countryside and has a duty to manage its own land responsibly and sustainably. By implementing the new Land Management Framework, Surrey County Council will lead by example, inspiring other landowners and stakeholders to adopt sustainable land management practices.

Marisa Heath, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for the Environment comments: *“The council’s ambition is to act dynamically to ensure the future sustainability of our land-based assets, both financial and environmental, through embedding nature-based solutions, community action, and new technology into our land management and decision-making.*

“The county’s countryside and water bodies offer numerous benefits, including recreation, wellbeing, livelihoods, food production, wildlife habitats, and community cohesion.

“Our land will be more resilient to economic and environmental shocks and climate change, support growing biodiversity, and have strong local community engagement and ownership.”

Surrey’s new Land Management Framework is timely as Government has recently launched a national conversation about land use, encouraging feedback to a consultation that will inform the development of a national Land Use Framework later this year.

Read more about Surrey’s framework by visiting our website: **Land Management Framework - principles and policies - Surrey County Council.**

Local Epsom LibDem leader leaves her Party



An Epsom councillor who has been a leading Liberal Democrat in the area for over 20 years has defected to become an independent member. After several changes, including upcoming local Government reorganisation, Cllr **Julie Morris** has taken the decision to continue serving College Ward as an Independent councillor.

She has served on Epsom and Ewell Borough Council for almost 20 years, her old party described her as “experienced local champion”. A spokesperson for the party said on social media: “We want to express our gratitude for the years of service Julie has given to the Epsom and Ewell Liberal Democrats.”

Stepping into the well-worn shoes of the former leader, Cllr **James Lawrence** (also of the College Ward) will now take over. Only three Lib Dem councillors will now sit on the council, along with 25 Residents Association members, three Labour, two Conservative and now two Independent.

According to the Lib Dem website, Cllr Morris has led a number of environmental campaigns including: leading the charge against the Aldi food store plans for Epsom in 2015, a local campaign to stop builders developing back gardens, the campaign to preserve part of the Mill Road railway cutting as a wildlife sanctuary, as well as helping the residents of many roads in College ward deal with commuter parking problems.

“The Liberal Democrat group will continue to work closely with Julie for the residents of the college ward,” the spokesperson added.

Cllr Morris declined to make a statement at this time.

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Parliament motion to reinstate Surrey County May elections



Surrey elections could still go ahead if a “fatal motion” (*see below) to overturn the decision to cancel the May 2025 ballot wins out. This year’s local elections were postponed until at least May 2026 after the Government passed legislation to delay the vote in order to allow councils to focus on devolution.

Its argument, backed by Surrey County Council, was that it would free officer time to focus on merging the lower layers of government while being overseen by more experienced politicians. It would also save millions of pounds as any newly created councils would need to hold their own polls soon after. Opponents to the delay argue that cancelling elections robs people of their right to vote and that elected officials only have authority by virtue of being backed by residents – and nobody voted for them to be in power this long.

Leader of the Conservative Party Kemi Badenoch had previously tried to stop the order passing in February, and now the fight has been picked up in the House of Lords with a debate set for March 24 to annul the government’s decision to cancel the election. Devolution would result in Surrey and its 11 boroughs and districts merging into either two or three mega councils overseen by a single mayor.

Two fatal motions put by Green Party Baroness Jenny Jones and the Liberal Democrats’ Baroness Pinnock will be debated, along with a Conservative Regret Motion. It calls on the order to be annulled as it “denies timely democratic representation to a substantial portion of the electorate; undermines local democratic accountability; disrupts established electoral cycles; lacks sufficient consultation; and erodes the democratic mandate for major restructuring of local government.”

Baroness Jones said: “I believe that a majority of peers are against the Government cancelling elections in May.” She added: “The government can’t guarantee that some areas won’t have a second year of cancelled elections as they try to impose mayors that will spend more time talking to ministers than local people. There has been no attempt to gather consensus within two-tier areas or to consult local residents about what they want. The government know that the elections in May would become a referendum of their plans to sideline local communities, and they might not like the answer that voters give.”

*Epsom and Ewell Times adds:

The phrase “**fatal motion**” is a specific parliamentary term used in the UK House of Lords. It refers to a type of motion that, if passed, effectively **annuls** or **blocks** a statutory instrument (a form of secondary legislation made by the government).

In this context, the “fatal motion” being debated on **March 24** aims to **overturn the government’s decision to cancel the May 2025 local elections**. If the motion succeeds, the original order delaying the elections would be nullified, and the elections could go ahead as planned.

This type of motion is distinct from a “**regret motion**,” which allows the Lords to express disapproval of a government decision but does not actually stop it from taking effect. The **fatal motion, on the other hand, has binding consequences** if passed.

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Surrey’s BIG debt question in local government reorganisation



Plans for what Surrey could look like in local government reorganisation have been agreed but questions remain over looming debt. Councillors demanded to know how debt would be managed before the county is divided up.

The government outlined plans for a major reorganisation of local government in December. Two tier councils will be dissolved into unitary authorities which will carry out all local government functions like planning, bin collections as well as education and social care.

Members of the County Council have agreed on March 18 two proposals for how Surrey could be carved up in the most dramatic reorganisation of local services in 50 years. Serving 1.2m people, Surrey’s current matrix – consisting of 12 borough and district councils and one county council – could be split into two or three new local authorities.

Leader of Surrey County Council, Tim Oliver, said he believes reorganisation is the “opportunity to turbo charge localism”. He said: “Single councils are clearer for residents, have greater accountability, are more efficient and effective for delivery and strip out unnecessary bureaucracy and duplication.”

Option 1, and the Conservative-run cabinet’s preference, is to cut Surrey in half to create an east and west, or north and south. Exactly which councils will be included in the new authority are still yet to be determined, for instance whether Spelthorne borough is either on the east or west side.

Option 2, put forward by the majority of district and borough councils, consists of three new local authorities in the form of north-west, south-west and south-east Surrey. Again, full details of which councils would be included is still in the draft stages.

The two outline plans will be submitted to the central government on Friday March 21, who will ultimately have the deciding power on the new face of Surrey. Meanwhile, the local authorities will keep working to produce a final proposal by May 9.

With over £5.5bn worth of crushing debt across the county, members publicly urged the government to solve Surrey’s financial issues before reorganisation. Cllr Catherine Powell said there needs to be “a clear path on the £5.5bn of debt” as it could create “significant imbalances” leading one council “more likely to fail”. The Residents’ Association and Independent Group Leader said she does not feel Surrey can propose new authorities without a solution.

Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, Cllr Paul Follows, said the councils’ debt is “so toxic it will pollute the rest of this county”. He lamented that reorganisation will not be about what is best for residents but about how money will be spent.

Speaking to the council, the leader said the government has “made it clear it does not intend to write off all of Woking’s debt”. Cllr Oliver said he will be having detailed conversations and Surrey will “have to come up with plan B”.

Creating two councils in Surrey could save £27m after five years but three authorities could potentially make a loss of £8m, according to the county council’s report. But the district and borough councils argue three unitary authorities would only save slightly less money than two and not be in a deficit.

However, Cllr Oliver said they have not taken into account the cost of reorganising services, such as adult social care, which could add substantial added costs. The leader claimed splitting into two is the best value for money for residents.

“There is no desire for Ashford to sink in with Godstone should the boundaries be cut [one] way,” said Cllr Robert Evans OBE. He explained slicing Surrey into two would only reveal some towns would have little in common with villages they may have not even heard of.

Creating two unitary councils with a population of around 600,000 each, opponents slammed the proposal as bad for local democracy and eroding distinctive community identities. Members also flagged there would be significantly less councillors looking after greater areas.

But those batting for a dual council-led Surrey said few residents even identify with the council and local identity would be strengthened by working with community groups and local healthcare networks.

Questions about services like adult social care as well as children and education services were raised as major issues. Cllr Sinead Mooney said splitting the adult social care beyond two units would complicate the service and people could “fall through the gaps”. Cllr Clare Curran highlighted the potential difficulties in retaining and splitting staff to more than two councils, meaning experienced teams could leave.

Cllr Fiona Davidson called for a need to assess how many children homes, specialist school places and demand for foster children to ensure Surrey is covered with the right services. Members agreed it was not just about making services cheaper and simpler- they had to be run better than currently.

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Epsom & Ewell’s Local Plan under the Green microscope



Epsom Green Belt Group Lodges Formal Complaint Against Borough Council Over Local Plan Submission

The Epsom Green Belt Group (EGBG) has submitted a formal complaint to Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) regarding the council’s Local Plan submission, raising concerns over procedural irregularities and transparency in the consultation process.

In a detailed letter dated 14 March 2025, EGBG congratulated the council for submitting the Local Plan before the 12 March deadline, ensuring it falls under the provisions of the December 2023 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). However, the group identified what it describes as significant flaws in the submission, particularly concerning documents that were not made available for public scrutiny before submission.

Concerns Over Topic Papers

A key contention in the complaint is the inclusion of seven Topic Papers—covering areas such as the Green Belt, economy, housing, spatial strategy, heritage, and Gypsy and Traveller accommodation—without prior consultation or approval by councillors. EGBG argues that these documents were neither included in the consultation evidence base nor subjected to review by the Local Plan Policy Committee (LPPC) or Full Council before submission. This, they claim, violates the requirements of the *Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012*.

The group asserts that these documents were not made available to the public in accordance with regulatory requirements, including being published on the council’s website and made accessible at the Town Hall or local libraries during the consultation period. Furthermore, some Topic Papers were dated after the consultation closed, raising concerns about their legitimacy as submission documents.

EGBG has called on EEBC to take one of three actions: withdraw the Topic Papers from the submission, conduct a retrospective consultation, or submit an explanatory statement to the examiner clarifying the lack of prior consultation.

Criticism of the Consultation Statement

EGBG’s complaint also highlights alleged shortcomings in the Consultation Statement submitted by EEBC. The group argues that:

- The statement underrepresents the weight of objections by counting consolidated group responses as single representations, despite EEBC’s guidance encouraging collective submissions.
- The narrative summary is not impartial, as it includes the council’s views rather than an objective summary of objections.
- Several key issues raised by EGBG in its formal response were omitted or misrepresented, particularly concerning specific development sites such as Hook Road Arena and Horton Farm.
- The Sustainability Appraisal was described as ‘robust’ despite extensive criticisms submitted by EGBG, including claims that certain rankings were ‘misaligned’ and descriptions ‘bore little or no relation to supporting evidence.’

EGBG has requested that EEBC revise and republish the Consultation Statement to accurately reflect public concerns.

Council’s Response

When Epsom and Ewell Times approached for comment, EEBC provided a brief response, stating:

“Any complaint made to Epsom & Ewell Borough Council will be dealt with according to our Complaints Policy, published on our website: Complaint Policy V1.pdf.”

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Surrey ratches up record fines for education failures



Surrey County Council is on pace to be hit with more than £1 million in fines and redress payments due to its repeated failures within its education service over the last two years. The council says the system doesn’t work for families, schools, or local authorities – and has lobbied the government for changes, additional

funding, and urgent reform.

The “record-breaking” fines, which have climbed from £47,000 in 2020 to more than half a million pounds last year and almost double its previous high of £258,730 in 2023, show the council has “lost control and continues to put vulnerable people at risk,” according to opposition leaders. Now, Surrey County Council has paid £239,510.75 in financial remedies in the first six months of this financial year – putting it on track to hit £470,000 for the full 12 months and a million pounds in the past two years. The majority, £220,965.00, relates to its education services, with the largest individual payments arising from complaints about missed education or missed provision, reports show. These are made when a child is unable to attend school because appropriate or alternative support has not been provided, or where the provision agreed in an Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP) has not been put in place.

The three largest individual remedies paid out so far this year are about £11,000, £8,900, and £8,353 – primarily in recognition of time missed. The largest fine or payment in its Children’s Social Care services so far is £8,325.12, in relation to “errors.”

Clare Curran, Surrey County Council cabinet member for children, families, and lifelong learning, said: “We are working hard to reduce spend on fines, which we know is higher than it should be. Provision and support for children with SEND is a systemic issue that councils up and down the country are grappling with. The national system is not working for families, schools, or councils, and we and other bodies are consistently lobbying the government for wider system changes, additional funding, and urgent reform.”

She said the council had also been working to improve the service with £15m put into a “three-year multi-agency recovery plan” in 2023, which was “now showing clear performance improvements.” Cllr Curran added: “The volume of stage one complaints received in the first six months of this year has decreased compared to the same period in the last two financial years, reflecting the efforts made by services across the council to resolve complaints early on and in the timeliness of responses. We also recognise that delays in issuing Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) have historically contributed to missed provision and subsequent fines, however progress is being made in this area too.

“Our average EHCP timeliness levels in Surrey over the six months from September 2024 – February 2025 is 72 per cent, well over the national average of 50.3 per cent. We have also caught up on the backlog of Education, Health and Care needs assessments, and over 75 per cent of overdue annual reviews have now been brought up to date. We expect these improvements to start having an impact on the number of Local Government Ombudsman cases in the near future.

“We are resolute in our ambition to continue to improve services and outcomes for children and young people with additional needs and disabilities so that they are happy, healthy, safe, and confident about their future.”

Councillor Paul Follows, Liberal Democrat group leader at Surrey County Council, said the authority had been promising to fix children’s services for years but has had little to show for it so far. He added: “Surrey County Council have for years been promising families that they would get a grip of children’s services and SEND provision, and as these record-breaking fines indicate, they have lost control and continue to put vulnerable people at risk.”

New Surrey County Council HQ, Woodhatch Place on Cockshot Hill, Reigate. Credit Surrey County Council

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has no choice but to vote for its own demise



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council Divided Over Local Government Reorganisation

An extraordinary meeting of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council was held on **18th March 2025**, where councillors engaged in an extensive and, at times, heated debate over the future structure of local government in Surrey. The meeting, convened in response to the Government’s **English Devolution White Paper**, saw councillors grapple with the contentious question of whether Surrey should be reorganised into **two or three unitary authorities**.

Abolition of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council Inevitable

Councillor **Hannah Dalton**, (RA Stoneleigh) Chair of the Standards and Constitution Committee and ruling Residents Association leader, acknowledging the gravity of the decision before the Council. “Tonight, colleagues, you have before you a report which will undo 50 years of local government,” she said. She stressed that while she would not have chosen this path, reorganisation was now unavoidable due to central government’s ambitions for devolution.

Dalton proposed a motion advocating for the creation of **three unitary authorities** in Surrey, arguing that this model would better maintain local democracy and ensure decision-making remained close to residents. She cited concerns that larger unitary councils could become remote and unresponsive, particularly to distinct local needs such as those of urban Epsom versus rural areas further south.

The Case for Two Unitaries

However, opposition to the three-unitary model came swiftly. Councillor **Bernie Muir** (Conservative Horton) raised concerns that splitting Surrey into three could strain service delivery, particularly for essential areas like **adult social care and children’s services**. “It’s not just about population size, but the nature and needs of our communities,” she stated, highlighting the complexities of recruiting skilled staff across multiple authorities and the risks of disrupting services that are already under strain.

Echoing these concerns, Councillor **Julian Freeman** (Liberal Democrat College), who served Sutton Council for several years, warned against prioritising political considerations over operational efficiency. “Dividing an already overstretched county into three is not going to fix its problems,” he said. Freeman pointed to **Surrey County Council’s existing financial difficulties**, suggesting that smaller councils might lack the resources to deliver critical services effectively.

Democracy and Accountability at Stake

Others, including **Councillor James Lawrence** (LibDem College), pushed back, advocating for three unitaries as a way to preserve **local democratic accountability**. He cautioned against forming excessively large authorities, citing the example of North Yorkshire’s unitary council, which has struggled to maintain strong community ties. “If we follow Surrey County’s preference for two unitaries, we risk creating councils that are simply too large for residents to engage with effectively,” he argued.

Meanwhile, Councillor **Alan Williamson** (RA West Ewell) expressed frustration with the process, describing the reorganisation as being “**railroaded through**” by the Government. “This is not about efficiency or saving money; it’s about centralising power,” he said. Nevertheless, he reluctantly backed the three-unitary model as the closest approximation to Epsom and Ewell’s current system.

Cllr **John Beckett** (RA Auriol) said “Money is driving this. You look at all of the reports that support whether it’s a two unitary or a three unitary. It’s down to pounds, Shilling and pence. I personally feel that our residents will lose out it.”

Cllr **Christine Cleveland** (RA Ewell Village) said “We’re Residents Association. I’m proud to be a residents association councillor, because I think that brings me right smack back into the local people where we live, and that’s who I care about, and that’s who I’m hoping to represent. I think the bigger you do these authorities, the less that voice is heard.”

Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) said “I am sceptical that local government reorganisation will bring many benefits for our residents. The savings won’t be as much as predicted, the costs will be far higher, and we will end up with a local government structure that is far less local than before. What is being proposed is not devolution, but to a large extent the reverse, taking many decisions about the services that local government delivers further away from residents and more towards the centre”.

Labour councillors also contributed to the debate, with **Councillor Chris Ames** (Court) raising concerns about transparency and the accessibility of council discussions. “This is a public meeting. We shouldn’t be putting things in code that are baffling to the public, that we’re asking to engage in our democracy,” he said, urging fellow councillors to ensure their discussions remained comprehensible to residents.

Councillor **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) added that while the reorganisation was inevitable, it was vital to ensure that it worked for all residents. “The Labour Party tried to make the districts and boroughs fit better, and it’s quite difficult because of the different socio-economic differences in different boroughs and districts,” she remarked. She praised the efforts made in the proposal, stating, “They’ve done the best we can do, and I don’t see why we’re noting it and not voting to approve it”

What Happens Next?

With emotions running high, the meeting, following an amendment of Cllr **Alex Coley** (RA Ruxley) to approve not merely note, ultimately saw councillors **vote to approve** the submission of the interim proposal to Government, with a majority supporting the three-unitary preference. This recommendation will now be submitted as part of Surrey’s interim plan for reorganisation, though the final decision will rest with the Government.

Local residents are encouraged to follow developments closely, as the reorganisation will have a profound impact on how services are delivered in Epsom and Ewell in the years to come. The debate may be over in the council chamber, but the future of local government in Surrey remains uncertain.

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Who will be saddled with Spelthorne’s and Woking’s £3 billion debts?



The Surrey Borough of Spelthorne’s financial crisis is “even more critical”, with millions in cuts needed to avoid catastrophic bankruptcy, says new report.

Best value inspectors were called in to review the council’s finances in May 2024 in light of extremely high levels of debt and borrowing. Spelthorne’s debt reached £1.096 billion in March 2023 – the second highest level of debt for a district council in England at the time.

The findings of the inspection have been published today (March 17). The report highlights that the council “is in a critical financial position, burdened by unsustainable debt levels, significant investment risks, and systemic governance weaknesses”.

Between 2016 and 2018, Spelthorne Borough Council borrowed around £1 billion to invest in a commercial portfolio of Grade A office buildings and residential land in and around the borough. But slow progress on regeneration and housing projects highlights a limited understanding of regeneration delivery as well as finance and risk, the inspectors said.

Best Value Inspectors concluded: “The council’s use of its resources is inadequate”. In the damning report, they said Spelthorne’s approach to property acquisitions “lacked due regard to long-term planning and risk management” and had an “overly-optimistic reliance on consistency” of the market that the Council first entered.

The report said: “The combination of voids, expiring leases, and falling income streams from the investment portfolio threatens the stability of its budget. Adding to the strain are the ongoing revenue costs of housing and regeneration projects, which were suspended in late 2023. Despite these mounting financial pressures, no clear path forward has been outlined to address them.”

The recovery process will be overseen by government-appointed commissioners. Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, Jim McMahon, wrote to leader Cllr Joanne Sexton to say the local authority is failing in its ‘best value’ duty to residents, essentially meaning the authority is defecting on its ability to make decisions that are economic, efficient and effective and work towards continuous improvement.

Inspectors said the council has a “poor record” of fully and effectively implementing recommendations from external reviews. The report read: “Senior officers display an optimism bias and a lack of awareness of the true situation facing the council. We do not believe the council has the capacity and capability to make the urgent changes needed without significant external support.”

Both the inspection and the recent external audit found errors in the council’s financial practices including the miscalculating the minimum amount Spelthorne needs to keep paying back its debt, incorrectly classifying expenses as assets, further undermining the revenue budget.

“The outline budget report for 2025/26 to 2028/29 presented to members on December 9, 2024 shows the need to deliver £8.6 million in savings by 2028/29, equating to 64 per cent of the council’s core spending power for 2024/25, or 33 per cent of the net budget, assuming contributions from commercial income. In our view, even these projections are understated. Despite this, we have seen no credible strategy in place to achieve savings of this level,” said the report.

Leader of Spelthorne Borough Council, Cllr Joanne Sexton, said, “This Group Administration has faced a challenging time and has been actively pursuing the right solution to manage the historical debt that it has inherited. We have met with the Local Government Minister from central government, and we have agreed to work in partnership to take decisive action in the remaining time we have before local government reorganisation is implemented. Our pledge remains that we will always put residents at the heart of everything we do.”

The council’s senior management team also came in for criticism in the report. Inspectors said the team seemed “overly confident” and “appear to underestimate the scale of the financial risks”. Member challenges remain “limited” according to the report, with many councillors not fully understanding the risks at hand. Inspectors highlighted there was a “wider breakdown” of relationships between senior management and the political leadership.

The findings of the inspection highlight the council is failing to meet best value standards in five critical areas:

- Use of Resources;
- Continuous Improvement;
- Governance;
- Leadership;
- Culture.

Inspectors have published thirteen recommendations for Spelthorne:

1. Commissioner-led intervention
2. Comprehensive commercial strategy
3. Review and strengthen asset management
4. Review of the Council’s Minimum Revenue Provision
5. Revised Medium-Term Financial strategy

6. Debt reduction strategy

7. Transformation strategy development

8. Review and strengthen finance function

9. Improvement and recovery plan

10. Revised Corporate Plan

11. Audit Committee structure

12. Culture and relationship building

13. Housing delivery

Emily Dalton

Spelthorne Borough Council offices in Knowle Green, Staines. Credit: Emily Coady-Stemp

Chris Caulfield compares Woking and Spelthorne:

The “critical” state of Spelthorne Borough Council’s finances means it must cut at least £8.6 million from its budget by 2028. To put that into perspective, bankrupt Woking Borough Council made £8.4 million in cuts last year in an effort to right its own mess. It managed it by cutting 20 per cent of its workforce, scrapping all grant funding to community groups, and shutting services such as public toilets.

Spelthorne Borough Council’s finances are “unsustainable”, with a £1 billion pound debt and a falling income stream. It means the authority must also cut millions in services to avoid the catastrophe of bankruptcy. The damning critique of the north Surrey council’s situation was published today, Monday, March 17, on the back of a best value review into the way the borough has been managed.

Spelthorne Borough Council, like Woking, borrowed heavily to invest in property and used the income to pay for services above and beyond what it could have otherwise afforded. And, again like Woking, it failed to put enough money aside to cover the cost of debt interest repayments.

“In essence, the council’s revenue budget is under far greater pressure than recognised by the council. Inherent risks are beginning to materialise, and could accelerate rapidly”, the Spelthorne Borough Council: Best Value Inspection report read.

It comes as the government confirmed it was proposing an intervention package, including appointing commissioners to oversee changes in how Spelthorne Borough Council is run because the borough lacks experience needed to make the cuts and had “no credible strategy in place to achieve savings of this level.”

Spelthorne has to shed £8.6 million from 2028/29 budget. Last year Woking Borough Council – the only local authority with a higher per capita debt than Spelthorne – achieved £8.4 million in savings.

This is how residents and commuinty groups in Woking were affected. It is being used to paint a picture of what cuts at that scale look and feel like

How Woking achieved its savings.

- Centres for the community and day care facilities closed and merged
- Sports pavilions transferred to sports clubs to take over and “ensure as many of these facilities can remain open”.
- Grants to voluntary and community groups stopped
- Woking Community Transport reduced but reviewed annually as part of the council’s Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
- Grounds maintenance and street cleaning services scaled back to statutory levels.
- Independent living and family services transferred to Surrey County Council or other boroughs, which means they will continue to operate as normal with no impact to services users.
- Business liaison and support services will be scaled back
- All public toilets closed, except those located in Victoria Place and Wolsey Walk in Woking Town Centre.
- Fees and charges increased
- Loss of up to 60 council staff
- Council tax was also increased that year by 10 per cent. Since then it has risen by a further 2.99 per cent.

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Epsom & Ewell ranks in the middle of Surrey Councils’ tax charges



Residents will face another jump in council tax bills from April 1 as local authorities have announced their budgets for the coming year. Surrey County Council, the Police and Crime Commissioner, and each of the county’s 11 districts and boroughs, confirmed their increases separately last month, with council tax bills and collection being the responsibility of the districts and boroughs.

Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend confirmed a rise of £14 per year for residents amid an increase in national insurance contributions and officer pay rises. While Surrey County Council, responsible for adult social care as well as services including road repairs and schools, increased its tax by 4.99 per cent on Band D homes.

Meanwhile, many local authorities have had to make tough decisions to balance the books. Councils slammed the government for giving an ‘unkind’ or ‘difficult’ financial settlement, meaning they have had no increase in spending power. Inflation, wage rises and rocketing costs for employer’s national insurance contributions have all pulled at the seams of councils’ pockets.

Borough Council		Band D	
1	Woking	£	2,482.03
2	Reigate and Banstead	£	2,448.79
3	Elmbridge	£	2,442.06
4	Surrey Heath	£	2,439.20
5	Tandridge	£	2,436.24
6	Epsom and Ewell	£	2,416.84
7	Spelthorne	£	2,412.78
8	Waverley	£	2,397.78
9	Guildford	£	2,388.01
10	Mole Valley	£	2,381.20
11	Runnymede	£	2,380.06

Table created by Epsom and Ewell Times

Where the thousands of new homes will be built in Surrey’s smallest borough - Epsom and Ewell



“Critical” details on nearly 5,000 homes across 35 sites in Epsom and Ewell have been laid out after the borough council submitted its planning masterplan.

The local plan will shape the future of the borough’s jobs, environmental protections, and leisure development – as well as allocating land for new homes and much-needed infrastructure improvements, the council said.

The single largest development will be in Horton Farm, between Horton Lane and Hook Road, where more than 1,250 homes are earmarked to be built alongside business spaces, a community building and park.

The plan will go before public examination by an independent inspector later this year for sign off.

Councillor Peter O’Donovan, chair of the licensing and planning policy committee, at Epsom and Ewell Council said “I am very grateful to officers who have worked diligently to reach this milestone, ensuring that the local plan is assessed against the framework to which it was developed.

“Overall, it has been a huge undertaking.”

The council has been set housing targets of about 4,700 homes with the local plan identifying a supply of 4,914.

He added: “I know that the plan will not please everyone.

“However, I believe it is a huge step forward for our borough and our communities, and if adopted it will help ensure that all Epsom and Ewell residents can enjoy the benefits that this strategic plan aims to deliver – whether their focus is on access to affordable homes, leisure facilities and green space, to jobs and economic growth.”

Included in the target are 456 homes that have already been built. Green belt land will be used to provide 1,580 homes.

The council says its planning bible will create “new vibrant communities” centred on currently underdeveloped transport hubs or development of larger sites.

It hopes these new developments will “form new communities and grow to be distinct places with their own identities.”

To support this, they will need to be “supported by appropriate investments in community and transport infrastructure to ensure existing and new residents are supported in terms of movement, health, education and other services.”

Epsom town centre will also be redeveloped to create improved retail space.

“It is important that the town centre continues to diversify and attract uses other than retail to the town centre to reflect the social and economic changes that have affected demand for retail and office space and investment.

“Developing the night-time economy is a key opportunity, with recent investment in a new cinema and the Playhouse Theatre”, the submitted plan read.

So far 35 sites have been allocated for redevelopment. Some, such as the 455 homes and a bespoke performing arts centre for the Laine Theatre Arts at the Southern Gas Network Site have already begun working through the planning system.

The 35 site allocations the council hopes will deliver a significant proportion of the Local Plan’s housing requirement.

- Southern Gas Network Site Allocated for: Approximately 455 dwellings and a bespoke performing arts centre for the Laine Theatre Arts
- Hook Road Car Park Allocated for: Approximately 150 dwellings
- Solis House, 20 Hook Road Allocated for: Approximately 20 dwellings
- Bunzl, Hook Road Allocated for: Approximately 20 dwellings
- Epsom Town Hall Allocated for: Approximately 90 dwellings
- Hope Lodge Car Park Allocated for: Approximately 30 dwellings

- Former Police and Ambulance Station Sites Allocated for: Erection of a new 85 bedroom residential, nursing and dementia care home for the frail elderly
- Epsom Clinic Allocated for: Approximately 30 dwellings
- Depot Road and Upper High Street Car Park Allocated for: Approximately 100 dwellings and a decked public car park
- 79-85 East Street Allocated for: Approximately 35 dwellings
- Finachem House, 2 – 4 Ashley Road Allocated for: Approximately 20 dwellings
- Global House Allocated for: Approximately 75 dwellings
- Swail House Allocated for: Refurbishment of Swail House for residential use and the provision of replacement purpose-built specialist accommodation for the RNIB consisting of approximately 45 dwellings (net) located to the rear of Swail House
- 60 East Street Allocated for: Approximately 30 dwellings
- Corner of Kiln Lane and East Street (101b East Street) Allocated for: Approximately 5 dwellings
- Land at Kiln Lane Allocated for: Approximately 40 dwellings
- Hatch Furlong Nursery Allocated for: Approximately 30 dwellings
- Land to the Rear of Rowe Hall Allocated for: Extra Care Accommodation comprising 96 self-contained apartments, staff and communal facilities
- 7 Station Approach Allocated for: Approximately 5 dwellings
- Esso Express, 26 Reigate Road Allocated for: Approximately 10 dwellings
- Richards Field Car Park Allocated for: Approximately 7 dwellings
- Etwelle House, Station Road Allocated for: Approximately 20 dwellings
- 140-142 Ruxley Lane Allocated for: Approximately 12 dwellings
- Garages at Somerset Close & Westmorland Close Allocated for: Approximately 6 dwellings
- 64 South Street Epsom Allocated for: Approximately 6 dwellings
- 35 Alexandra Road Allocated for: Approximately 8 dwellings
- 22-24 Dorking Road Allocated for: Approximately 18 dwellings
- 63 Dorking Road Allocated for: Specialist Care Home with ancillary nurses accommodation (equivalent to 6 dwellings)
- 65 London Road Allocated for: Care home up to 81 bedrooms
- Epsom General Hospital Allocated for: Approximately 305 units older people’s accommodation (Use Class C2), 24 key worker dwellings and a children’s nursery
- Land at West Park Hospital (South) Allocated for: Approximately 50 dwellings
- Land at West Park Hospital (North) Allocated for: Approximately 150 dwellings
- Land at Chantilly Way Allocated for: Approximately 30 dwellings
- Hook Road Arena Allocated for: New Sports Hub for the borough to include playing pitches (grass and artificial), a new pavilion and changing facilities. The provision of approximately 100 dwellings on the eastern part of the site
- Land at Horton Farm Allocated for: Approximately 1,250 dwellings including some specialist housing and self-build plots, 10 gypsy and traveller pitches, business incubation space, community building and a public park of approximately 7ha in addition to other green and blue infrastructure.

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