

Fresh Local Plan row as residents challenge legality of latest Epsom and Ewell consultation

2 June 2026



A fresh dispute has erupted over Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's embattled Local Plan process after residents challenged the constitutional validity of the council's latest planning consultation.

The row follows an email issued by the council's Planning Policy Team reminding residents that consultation remains open until 15 June on "Additional Documents Submitted by the Council during the Local Plan Examination", ahead of a further examination hearing scheduled for 2 July at Epsom Town Hall.

The consultation concerns documents submitted during the government inspector's examination of the borough's long-running Local Plan — a process that has already generated years of political controversy, debate over Green Belt development, and repeated questions about governance and committee oversight.

In one of a number of near-identical emails reportedly circulated by concerned residents to councillors and senior officers, resident Philip Brown argued that the current consultation "appears to have been launched in breach of the council's constitution" and therefore could not be regarded as valid.

Mr Brown's complaint centres on the role of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee (LPPC), the council committee whose constitutional terms of reference include responsibility to "consider and approve" Local Plan documents for public consultation. According to the resident correspondence, there is no evidence in the published minutes of LPPC meetings in late 2025 and early 2026 that the seven consultation documents had been reviewed and approved by the committee before the consultation was launched.

The email goes further, alleging that at the LPPC meeting of 10 March 2026, "the Chair explicitly declined a request to allow the committee to review the Local Plan documents".

On that basis, the resident contends that "the current consultation appears not to be constitutionally compliant and is therefore invalid", adding that it would be "both inappropriate and pointless for consultees to comment on an invalid consultation". The email asks the council to arrange for the documents to be considered by LPPC and then to issue what it terms a "constitutionally-compliant consultation".

The issue touches on themes previously explored by the *Epsom and Ewell Times* during coverage of the borough's Local Plan disputes.

The Local Plan has divided opinion sharply over housing targets, Green Belt release, infrastructure pressures and the extent of member oversight of the process. Recent EET reporting on the LPPC proceedings highlighted tensions over whether councillors were being afforded sufficient opportunity to scrutinise crucial planning material and the degree to which committee oversight was shaping the evolving plan.

The controversy arrives against a backdrop of political transition. Following local government reorganisation, powers will ultimately pass to the new East Surrey Council in 2027, although Epsom & Ewell Borough Council remains the planning authority for the present Local Plan process.

Among those responding to the resident correspondence was David Buxton OBE, Liberal Democrat Shadow Councillor for Epsom West and Shadow Cabinet Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Health on East Surrey Council.

Cllr Buxton stated that he was not involved in the current EEBBC Local Plan process and therefore could not determine whether the consultation complies with the borough council's constitutional requirements, saying those matters are for "the Borough Council, its officers and, where necessary, independent legal advice".

However, he described the issues raised as "important matters" and said he would encourage relevant officers "to provide clarification so that residents can have confidence in the process and in any representations submitted".

Cllr Buxton also cautioned elected members involved in future Local Plan deliberations against prejudging specific proposals, saying councillors should remain able to consider evidence, hear residents' views and participate fully in future decision-making processes.

Restating the Liberal Democrats' previously expressed planning position, he said development should prioritise brownfield sites first, "underused land second", and only consider Green Belt land "as a last resort", adding: "no GP provision, no infrastructure, no development."

The latest consultation was initiated following a request by the government-appointed planning inspector in a letter dated 23 April 2026, according to the residents' correspondence.

EEBBC has advised that interested members of the public may attend the further examination hearing on 2 July as observers. Those wishing actively to participate must indicate this in their consultation response and notify the

Programme Officer before the consultation closes.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Related reports:

[Epsom and Ewell Local Plan next phase](#)

[Did Epsom and Ewell councillors approve more Green Belt release?](#)

[Persand parses the Local Plan process in Epsom](#)

[Next phase in the journey of the Epsom and Ewell Local Plan announced](#)

[Epsom and Ewell Local Plan tensions surface as committee debate curtailed by chair](#)

[Fresh Local Plan row as councillor questions Green Belt revisions and governance at Epsom and Ewell](#)

[Epsom & Ewell's Council responds to Local Plan concerns](#)

and many more search "Local Plan"

Epsom Councillor's disclosure claims Bourne out on review

2 June 2026



The future of Bourne Hall and its museum has become one of the most contentious issues in Epsom & Ewell local politics in recent months. Debate has ranged from ambitious proposals for the landmark "UFO-shaped" building's revival to sharp disagreements over governance, transparency and access to information. Earlier this year, councillors on the Community & Wellbeing Committee challenged elements of the Council's approach, while a decision connected with the matter was later suspended by the Council's Chief Executive acting in her statutory capacity. Central to the dispute has been a service review of Bourne Hall Museum, parts of which were initially withheld from councillors and the public.

In the following letter, Independent councillor Alex Coley sets out his view following a review and the subsequent disclosure of much of the report's contents.

A fuller background is provided in the following Epsom and Ewell Times reports:

[Bourne Hall row escalates as Chief Executive suspends councillors' decision](#)

[Ewell's Bourne Hall plans knocked back by scrutiny](#)

[Independent view of Ewell's Bourne Hall](#)

[Ewell's "UFO" shaped Bourne Hall to take off anew](#)

Letter to the Editor — Cllr Alex Coley

Dear Editor,

Amidst all the excitement of the Annual Council meeting on Tuesday 26 May, I received the outcome of an internal review into the FOI request that I submitted for the Service Review of Bourne Hall Museum at the beginning of February.

We should be very grateful to the service review author for the depth of understanding and breadth of appreciation for the questions they were asked to explore. This document is absolutely fundamental for elected members to deliberate the future of the museum. It should never have been withheld.

Comparing the redacted and unredacted versions side by side, it becomes apparent that an almost paranoid sensitivity to potential embarrassment has played a part in non-disclosure.

Unredacted sections describe the absence of any visitor data or visitor research, siloed working at EEBC, and the lack of

structured objectives for the museum. Yet all these were laid bare in the LGA Cultural Peer Challenge and disclosed in full.

Recognising and acknowledging these issues are crucial to assuring councillors that the issues are understood sufficiently and that an injection of new funding will be used appropriately and effectively. This cannot be achieved behind a veil of secrecy. Trust must be earned rather than demanded.

From the original FOI request to the delayed response took 109 days — almost four months. The normal expectation is 20 days. The initial response was a mish-mash of erroneous case law and political deflection disguised by the application of Section 43(2) of the Freedom of Information Act — “to prejudice commercial interests”.

I had to make a formal complaint to the Information Commissioner’s Office when our Council failed to conduct an internal review within 40 days. The resulting correspondence makes it clear that it was ICO intervention which led to the information being disclosed properly.

Subsequently, the Council has disclosed most of the information unredacted.

However, the belated introduction of Section 36 of FOI in the response is an intriguing piece of code-switching. This relates to the “effective conduct of public affairs” and was not used in the original response. In layman’s terms, this concerns the ability of council officers to give free and frank advice.

Section 36 was engaged as a reason not to disclose advice given by a consultant to council officers. While I agree that it is important for such advice to be given freely, the need to do so openly, honestly and transparently is critical when spending public money — not least to the decision-makers who are accountable for public expenditure.

Fortunately, with ICO involvement, a strong public interest has been shown to outweigh concerns.

For those who explore the response in full, you will note that the respondent decides: “the majority of the report contains high-level, non-controversial analysis and recommendations that do not meet the threshold of demonstrating a likelihood of prejudice.”

Well, hurray!

I must conclude that significant effort and energy is being expended by both officers and councillors in battles over secrecy. This is a waste of public money and an affront to the representation of electors. Councillors should not have to become investigative journalists to know what is going on in the organisation they have been appointed to run.

Transparency is significantly better value for money and, as the unredacted contents of the service review reveal, a far better means for deciding how public money should be spent in future. Democracy should be done and seen to be done.

I hoped that this item would be brought back to the Community & Wellbeing Committee to be determined in the manner it always should have been — openly and with all the information available.

However, recent correspondence to councillors on Thursday 28 May seems disconnected from the FOI request. It refers to a Special Community & Wellbeing Committee on 9 June and states:

“Following the invitation to revisit the non-inclusion of the Bourne Hall Service Review in the previous committee papers, it is the decision of the Council’s Proper Officer for access to information that the decision will not be overturned.”

The missive goes on to say:

“However, in order to move this item forward, the Council’s Proper Officer proposes to limit access to the Bourne Hall Service Review to the voting members of the Community & Wellbeing Committee that shall be in attendance at the 9 June special meeting and she will be present to discuss why the information will remain restricted.”

Finally, the message concludes:

“Please note that no photographs or copies of the exempt document are permitted to be taken.”

Readers of a certain vintage may recall sitcoms of the 1970s and 1980s — Dad’s Army, ‘Allo ‘Allo and, of course, Yes Minister. What a pity the writers never delved deeper into local government. There is a richness of material for satire and farce that is unmatched.

Perhaps we should reach for some of that Sir Humphrey comedy wisdom:

“If the right people don’t have power, do you know what happens? The wrong people get it. Politicians, councillors, ordinary voters!”

As we say in Epsom & Ewell: None Such.

Alex Coley
Independent Councillor - Ruxley

A motion in note or a note in motion?

2 June 2026



Dear Editor,

Thank you as always for your coverage of last night's council meeting.

You correctly report that the mayor refused to allow councillors to debate my motion on the constitution, falsely framing it as an attempt to change the constitution, and that I denied this.

As both councillors and the public were prevented by the mayor from even seeing the motion, I thought your readers might like to. It was not a motion to amend the constitution but to amend the recommendation in the report, to add two unarguable factual points. Both were framed as to "note", meaning that no action was required.

Had they been allowed, councillors would have been invited to:

- Note that, while the constitution states at paragraph 2.1: "The Code of Conduct for councillors is available in Appendix 1 and the arrangements for making a complaint and dealing with complaints can be found in the council's Operating Framework", no such arrangements exist in the Operating Framework.
- Further note that while the live register of delegations and the Terms of Reference for the Full Council and other Council Committees, Sub-Committees, Advisory Panels and Joint Arrangements delegate to hearings panels the determination of complaints referred by an Investigating Officer regarding alleged breaches of the councillors' Code of Conduct, neither document provides any authority for such panels to issue any sanction.

It was my intention to draw the attention of councillors and the public these deficiencies in the constitution that councillors were being asked to approve, but with no attempt to amend it, as claimed by the mayor.

To be fair to Cllr McIntyre, it was obvious that she was merely reading from a script given to her by the administration, probably by those who are responsible for ensuring that the constitution is fit for purpose and who have a vested interest in concealing its failings. It was her first meeting as mayor and we might hope that she will learn from the incident.

My mistake was not that I submitted the amendment to the recommendation "late", as there was no requirement to submit it in advance, but that I submitted it in advance at all, giving the administration the opportunity to engage in procedural shenanigans. I will learn from this.

Of course, as Cllr Lawrence eloquently and movingly attested, the absence of a proper procedure for complaints against councillors has real world consequences. The administration has targeted a number of opposition councillors, including myself, with code of conduct complaints while shielding senior Residents Association councillors.

Finally, you are right that the underlying problem with the meeting was that many councillors regard a meeting where matters of such importance as the council's constitution are considered as a purely "civic" event, and any discussion to be keeping them from the refreshments provided at council tax payers' expense.

Cllr Chris Ames

Labour, Court Ward

Related report:

[May's heat infuses Epsom and Ewell Council Chamber with leadership closely contested](#)

May's heat infuses Epsom and Ewell Council Chamber with leadership closely contested

2 June 2026



On one of the hottest days of the year, with councillors and guests in Epsom Town Hall using agenda papers as improvised fans, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council held what was in effect the beginning of its final chapter — the Annual Council meeting that will oversee the borough's last year before abolition under local government reorganisation.

The evening of 26th May combined civic ceremony, nostalgia, political tension and procedural wrangling, culminating in a knife-edge vote for Council leadership and a heated row over the Council's constitution.

Councillor **Lucy McIntyre** (RA) was elected Mayor for what will be the borough's final mayoral year, with veteran Independent councillor **Julie Morris** chosen as Deputy Mayor.

McIntyre, among the younger and longer-serving members of the chamber, described the appointment as "particularly special because this borough really has always been my home", speaking movingly of family ties, her late brothers, and the borough's impending disappearance into the new East Surrey Council.

"This will be the final mayoral year of Epsom and Ewell in its current form, as we know it," she said. "It makes it even more of an honour and a privilege to serve you all."

Her chosen charities include Fab for Epsom & Ewell, Girlguiding Epsom District and Sunnybank Trust, with ten principal events planned during the roughly ten months remaining before the borough's end. "The countdown has already begun," she told the chamber, "because after all, it's the final countdown — so let's make it unforgettable."

Outgoing Mayor Councillor **Robert Leach** offered a characteristically humorous farewell, reflecting on a year that took him from the Derby and Buckingham Palace to community groups, Ukrainian refugees, disability charities and opening Primark.

"It has been a great honour to be the mayor of the borough for the last year," he said. "This was a position I had not expected and... not one that I sought." He praised the borough's "more than 100 charities and voluntary groups", remarking that a mayoral visit "means so much to the people", and expressed hope that some civic role might survive local government reorganisation.

But the political temperature rose sharply when councillors turned to the appointment of Council Leader.

Councillor **Hannah Dalton** (RA), the incumbent leader, was nominated by Councillors **Liz Frost** and **Christine Cleveland**. Frost urged members to back continuity in the borough's final year.

"This... is going to be the last year of the council," she said. "It is really, really important that we all pull together... and leave the council in a good position."

Cleveland praised Dalton's work through "very turbulent times" in local government and added: "It would be really nice to end our time in Epsom with a female leader of the council as well."

The challenge came from Independent councillor **Alex Coley**, once a prominent Residents' Association figure before breaking away from the ruling group.

Nominating Coley, Councillor **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) launched a stinging critique of the outgoing year.

"Last year this council agreed strategic priorities," she said. "It's safe to say these did not go according to plan."

She referred to "a committee meeting where the leader of the council [was] absent from a vote to fund a strategic priority" and another where "an RA CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) bid was proposed and not voted through by the RA members."

"If the leader stays the same, these priorities will not be worth the paper they are written on," she argued. "We need a new leader... one who will deliver and work across all political groups... As long as this ship is still afloat, we must look after it. But it's time for a new captain."

The most striking intervention came from RA Councillor **Kim Spickett**.

Visibly framing her choice as a painful one, she revealed the intensity of lobbying behind the scenes.

"The choice today... has been very difficult for me," she said. "I've had a lot of calls, I've had a lot of messages, and I've had a lot of pressure put on me. I'm not happy about it. It's made me very sad."

Declaring pride in the borough and its people, she nevertheless backed Coley as the person to steer the authority through its closing months.

"We need the proven leadership of a councillor who's dedicated to delivery and puts outcomes first... somebody I'm proud to call my friend."

"Delivery is what we need to set this community up for success... and I believe Alex will deliver."

The vote that followed demonstrated just how finely balanced the chamber had become.

Dalton survived — but only narrowly.

The official tally: **15 votes for Hannah Dalton, 14 for Alex Coley**.

Having retained the leadership by a single vote, Dalton struck a conciliatory note.

"Being leader is never easy, and you're not going to take everybody with you all of the time," she said. "I'd say the last year to 18 months has been the hardest it has ever been."

She acknowledged the challenge of leading a Residents' Association group that, she insisted, operates without a formal whip: "Whatever they do say, they do not have a political whip, and they discuss everything."

In remarks that reflected the strains of both local government reorganisation and evident political divisions inside the chamber, she appealed for unity.

“We’ve got to deliver a lot. We need stability. We need to get to the end of next March in one piece, without ripping each other apart, or leaving this council in a really bad way.”

“We’ve been here for 90 years, we’ve done an incredible job together. Let’s keep it together, just for the last ten months.”

If the leadership contest exposed the chamber’s political fault-lines, the next item — approval of the Council’s constitution — produced a procedural clash that left tempers noticeably frayed in the overheated room.

Mayor McIntyre announced that a late proposal concerning the constitution would not be accepted, ruling that substantive constitutional changes required proper routing through the Standards and Constitution Committee, officers, or a formal motion process.

Councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour) objected fiercely.

“As might have been predicted, the administration has sought to close down debate about this,” he said.

“We’re going to be asked to agree a constitution that we should know is defective.”

Denying that he had proposed a constitutional amendment, Ames said he had merely sought to highlight concerns. “The usual procedural shenanigans that we get here doesn’t surprise me one bit,” he said. “It’s absolutely disgraceful. It’s the typical corruption of this administration.”

Councillor **James Lawrence** (Independent) followed with his own criticism, citing what he said were deficiencies in the complaints process as described across the Council’s constitution, operating framework and website.

He argued that a councillor complaints procedure was either missing or unclear, describing a complaint against him that had remained unresolved for months.

But when Lawrence attempted to continue, the Mayor curtailed him.

“The meeting this evening is for a civic event,” she said, directing him instead toward the processes set out elsewhere in the Council framework.

Lawrence pushed back, asking: “Can you point in the constitution why I can’t speak?”

The exchange carried a certain irony: debate was being restricted on the basis of the meeting’s civic character while the approval of the constitution itself remained a formal agenda item before members.

When the vote finally came, the constitution was approved **15 votes to 9**.

The meeting then moved on to committee appointments and other routine business without further fireworks.

Yet for a council entering its final year of existence, the evening had already revealed much: pride in civic tradition, uncertainty about the future, visible political strains — and a leadership retained by the narrowest of margins in a chamber made short-tempered by heat, history and the approaching end of the borough council era.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Image: Cllr Kim Spickett addresses the Council - Epsom and Ewell Borough Council YouTube

.
. .
.

Don’t Believe Everything You Read Online? EET Stands By ‘Gagging’ Report After Epsom MP’s Westminster Jibe

2 June 2026



A row over media access to newly elected Liberal Democrat councillors has escalated after Epsom & Ewell MP Helen

Maguire publicly challenged an Epsom and Ewell Times report - only for subsequent correspondence to confirm that a restriction on councillors speaking to the media did in fact exist.

The dispute centres on events at the Count for the East Surrey Unitary Council elections at Bourne Hall on 8 May.

In an earlier report, Epsom and Ewell Times' (EET) Lionel Blackman described being in a media interview room speaking with a soon-to-be-elected Liberal Democrat candidate when Helen Maguire's communications officer entered and stated that Lib Dem candidates were not to talk to the press and that journalists should speak only to the MP.

The report described the instruction as neither "liberal" nor "democratic" and criticised what it characterised as a "gag" on successful candidates.

Ten days later, at a reception at the Palace of Westminster hosted by Ms Maguire and attended by a couple of hundred leading figures from Epsom and Ewell's business and voluntary sectors, the MP appeared to reference the controversy directly.

Introducing newly elected councillors present at the event, she said: "There are a number of our new Councillors present today and contrary to what you may have read in the press they are free to speak and if there are any members of the press here you may talk to them. Do not believe everything you read online."

The remark prompted EET to challenge the implication that its reporting had been inaccurate.

In a subsequent email exchange, Helen Maguire's communications officer, Esther Holland, denied that the MP had imposed any "gag" on councillors but acknowledged that a restriction on media engagement had indeed been in place.

Ms Holland wrote: "Helen can confirm that while she knew the East Surrey campaign team had asked for a pause in media engagement during the election week, this was entirely the East Surrey campaign team's decision. Helen played no part in directing this; she did not 'gag' her new councillors."

She later provided a statement attributed to an East Surrey Liberal Democrats spokesperson saying: "The pause in media engagement was a decision made by the central campaign team for the Liberal Democrats in East Surrey — not Helen Maguire MP — based on the advice to make the incoming leadership contest as democratic and fair as possible."

That explanation narrows, but does not extinguish, the dispute.

EET's original report did not merely allege that Helen Maguire personally invented the policy. It reported that the instruction was delivered by her communications officer, directing journalists away from councillors and towards the MP.

Mr Blackman replied that, in the circumstances, it had been entirely reasonable to report the matter as "Helen's gag", noting that the instruction had been communicated by an employee acting under the MP's banner and that the strategy would have been ineffective without at least some degree of cooperation from the MP's operation.

The exchange then moved into more sensitive territory concerning the role of MP's parliamentary staff in party political activity.

Responding to questions raised by EET, Ms Holland stated she had been acting "in my capacity as local party communications, not as an employee of Helen Maguire MP" when communicating the media strategy at the Count, adding that her role was "split between parliamentary and local party work."

That explanation may itself invite wider questions about the sometimes blurred boundary between parliamentary communications roles and local party political operations.

No evidence has been produced that any parliamentary or IPSA (Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority) rules were breached. However, parliamentary staffing arrangements are ordinarily expected to distinguish between parliamentary duties funded through MPs' allowances and party political campaigning or organisation.

The issue here is not merely semantic.

If, as the correspondence confirms, a restriction on councillors speaking freely to journalists existed, then the remaining questions become who owned it, who delivered it, and whether the MP's Westminster remark - "Do not believe everything you read online" - fairly represented EET's reporting or risked leaving a large public audience with the impression that the newspaper had reported something untrue.

EET stands by the factual accuracy of its original report.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Related report:

[Epsom's LibDem MP gags her Party's new councillors in their moment of triumph](#)

Bourne Hall hosts Summer Festival

2 June 2026



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is pleased to announce that Bourne Hall will host a free Summer Festival on Saturday, 20 June 2026, from 12pm until 5pm.

The free event promises fun for all the family, with live music, food, fairground activities, craft stalls and plenty to enjoy throughout the day.

The main stage will showcase a variety of live music performances, featuring talented local artists and bands. Artists supported by iPlay Collective, a local creative organisation that nurtures emerging performers and champions inclusive access to the arts, will perform across the day. Audiences can expect a lively and varied programme celebrating local talent and a wide range of musical styles, with a DJ host keeping the atmosphere buzzing between sets.

Festival-goers can browse a wide selection of market stalls showcasing unique handcrafted items from local makers and artisan sellers. Visitors will find a diverse range of goods including seated acupressure therapy, hand-turned wooden gifts and homeware, jewellery, laser-engraved cheese and serving boards, handmade woodwork and textiles, locally produced Tropic organic skincare and make-up, daily essentials and health supplements, alongside homemade gifts, keyrings, stickers, prints and cross-stitch items. There will also be handmade natural soaps, stone and crystal candles, as well as stalls supporting good causes, including a dog rescue offering gifts and a tombola. The Rainbow Leisure Centre will also be present, promoting healthy lifestyles and community wellbeing.

In addition to the stalls, several local organisations and venues will be hosting activities throughout the day. These include the Home Improvement Agency, Epsom Playhouse, the Dementia Hub, Bourne Hall Museum and Ewell Library, ensuring there is plenty to explore and engage with for all ages.

For those looking for thrills, the fairground will feature trampolines and teacup rides. There will also be merchandise stalls selling balloon animals and bubbles, adding to the festive atmosphere.

A variety of outdoor food options will be available, including burgers, nachos, ice cream and candyfloss, alongside refreshments from the Flying Saucer Café, which will be open from 9am until 5pm serving hot and cold drinks and treats.

Speaking of the upcoming event, Councillor **Clive Woodbridge**, (RA Ewell Village) Chair of the Community & Wellbeing Committee said:

“The Bourne Hall Summer Festival is a wonderful opportunity for our community to come together and enjoy a full day of free, inclusive entertainment. We’re delighted to be showcasing talented local musicians, including artists supported by iPlay Collective, who play such an important role in nurturing emerging performers.

“Alongside the live music, visitors can explore a fantastic selection of artisan and craft stalls, offering unique handmade goods from local makers - the perfect chance to support independent businesses and discover something special. With great food, creative talent and activities for all ages, the festival really highlights the vibrant community spirit of our borough.”

Event timetable is subject to change.

The Bourne Hall Festival is an annual event with a different theme each year. Previous iterations have included Sustainability, The Herald of Spring and New Beginnings. This year’s festival will run from 12pm to 5pm.

Bourne Hall’s address is Spring Street, Ewell, Surrey, KT17 1UF.

www.bournehall.org

Driving Directions:

Bourne Hall is easily accessible from:

Gatwick via M25 - A217 - A240

Heathrow via M25 - A3

London via A3

Please check your directions at www.theaa.com/route-planner/index.jsp

Parking:

Local pay & display car parks:

Bourne Hall, Spring street

24 hours Monday to Sunday

High Street, Ewell

24 hours Monday to Sunday
Dorset House, High street, Ewell
24 hours Monday to Sunday

Train:

The nearest railway station is Ewell West (5 minutes' walk) with regular direct rail routes between Guildford and Waterloo. Please plan your journey at www.nationalrail.co.uk

Bus

Bus number 293, 406, 467, S2 and E16

Live Music: 12:00 - 17:00

Enjoy a diverse range of musical genres that will keep you entertained and dancing all day long with a DJ host.

Market Stalls: 12:00 - 17:00

Explore a vibrant array of market stalls showcasing local crafts, products, and more. It's the perfect opportunity to support local businesses and find unique treasures.

Food Stalls: The Flying Saucer Café 09:00 - 17:00, Food stalls 12:00 - 17:00

A selection of food will be available, offering a range of tasty treats and refreshments.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council



Epsom councillors handed key roles on East Surrey's new Shadow Council

2 June 2026



The newly elected East Surrey Shadow Authority met for the first time on Wednesday 20 May, taking another formal step towards the creation of the new East Surrey Council due to replace existing county, borough and district councils on 1 April 2027.

The meeting marked the transition from the former East Surrey Joint Committee arrangements to the newly elected "shadow authority", following this month's elections to the new unitary council covering Elmbridge, Epsom & Ewell, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge.

With the Liberal Democrats holding a working majority on the 72-member authority after the May elections, councillors confirmed leadership and cabinet appointments that will oversee the transition year.

Councillor Steve Wotton was confirmed as Leader of the East Surrey Shadow Authority, with Councillor Kirsty Hewens appointed Deputy Leader.

Of particular local interest, two councillors representing Epsom & Ewell secured places in the shadow cabinet.

Councillor **David Buxton**, a Liberal Democrat councillor from Epsom & Ewell, was appointed Cabinet Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Health — one of the most substantial service portfolios in local government, covering responsibilities that currently account for major areas of county council expenditure and public concern.

Councillor **Julian Freeman**, LibDem also from Epsom & Ewell, was appointed Cabinet Executive Member for Housing. The appointment places an Epsom representative at the centre of housing policy discussions as the new authority prepares to assume responsibilities from existing councils amid continuing pressures around affordability, development and future planning arrangements across East Surrey.

The full cabinet allocation agreed by the authority included:

- Steve Wotton - Transformation, Digital and People

- Kirsty Hewens - Economy and Regeneration
- Andrew Burton - Finance and Resources
- Ashley Tilling - Children's Services and Education
- David Buxton - Adult Social Care and Health
- Andrew Matthews - Transport, Highways and Infrastructure
- Bradley Nelson - Strategic Planning and Growth
- Julian Freeman - Housing
- Abhiram Magesh - Leisure, Culture and Communities
- Claire Malcomson - Climate, Environment and Waste

The cabinet roles are presently shadow positions linked to the local government reorganisation programme and will operate in that form until the new authority formally assumes full powers in April 2027.

The meeting also approved governance arrangements for the shadow council, endorsed initial transition priorities, and designated interim statutory officers to steer the authority through its establishment phase.

Among the appointments, Adam Chalmers, currently Chief Executive of Elmbridge Borough Council, was designated Interim Head of Paid Service. Nikki O'Connor, Assistant Director of Finance (Corporate) at Surrey County Council, was appointed Interim Chief Finance Officer, while Daniel Bainbridge, Head of Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer) at Elmbridge, became Interim Monitoring Officer.

Speaking after his appointment, Cllr Steve Wotton said: "This is a significant moment as we work to bring services together under a single organisation. Our priority is to ensure residents see the benefits of the new East Surrey Council - one that is responsive, well run and able to deliver high-quality services from April 2027."

He added: "We recognise the scale of the task ahead, but also the opportunity for a fresh start to shape a council that reflects and serves our communities."

The new East Surrey Council forms part of Surrey's wider local government reorganisation, under which the county's existing councils are to be abolished and replaced by two large unitary authorities - East Surrey and West Surrey.

Until April 2027, existing county, borough and district councils will continue running day-to-day services. The shadow authority's role is to prepare the structures, governance and leadership arrangements for the incoming council.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Photo right to left: Julian Freeman and David Buxton

Did Epsom and Ewell councillors approve more Green Belt release?

2 June 2026



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's special Licensing and Planning Policy Committee ("LPPC") meeting on 19 May — convened after a motion by Cllrs **Kieran Persand** (Conservative - Horton), Rob Geleit (Labour - Court) and **Julian Freeman** (LibDem - College) — produced one clear answer to the question troubling many residents: LPPC did not itself vote to approve additional Green Belt land for development.

In summary the effect of the lengthy five-part motion was to ensure Council officers should not be sending revised Local Plan evidence and potentially significant Green Belt-related material to the Inspector without renewed political scrutiny and approval by LPPC / Full Council. All parts of the motion were defeated.

But the two-and-a-half-hour meeting revealed a deeper and increasingly bitter dispute over whether officers have already

steered the Local Plan examination towards further Green Belt release without fresh political approval.

The meeting unfolded against the backdrop of continuing examination of EEBC's Local Plan by the Planning Inspectorate and followed recent publication of officer work identifying additional sites "potentially suitable for allocation", including five Green Belt sites, as part of the Inspector's request for further work.

At the centre of the argument lay a constitutional question: once the Local Plan entered examination, did political control of substantive Green Belt decisions remain with councillors — or had delegated authority lawfully passed practical control to officers working under the Inspector's direction?

The atmosphere in the chamber suggested members were debating much more than planning procedure.

Before debate even began, Cllr **Shanice Goldman** (Conservative Nonsuch) made an unusually direct statement from the public seating area challenging how the council had reached this stage. She said delegated authority granted in November 2024 had been understood to concern "small grammatical errors", but had, in her view, later been exercised more broadly than members intended.

"These are not minor administrative matters," she told the committee. "They are material decisions which properly fall within the remit of elected councillors who are accountable to the public." She added: "This issue is bigger than one site or one submission. It goes to the heart of governance, transparency, constitutional process, and public confidence in decision making."

Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development Ian Mawer then delivered a lengthy procedural update attempting to clarify what officers say has — and has not — happened.

Mawer stressed repeatedly that the Local Plan remains the version submitted in March 2025 and that no modifications have yet been made.

"I wish to emphasize that the Local Plan remains as submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in March 2025 as it stands — no changes have been made to it," he said. "It is the Inspector alone that can make changes known as main modifications to address soundness issues."

He explained that the Inspector had required additional work after October 2025 hearings, including revisiting part of the Green Belt Topic Paper and reassessing urban sites. That work, he said, eventually produced 17 sites considered "potentially suitable for allocation" — 12 urban and five Green Belt — but only as evidence to assist the examination.

He also cautioned against confusion over "Grey Belt", noting EEBC's plan is being examined under a pre-Grey-Belt version of national policy.

The procedural explanation did little to calm critics.

Persand opened by objecting that no legal officer was present, saying he had only been informed late in the day. "I feel that we should push this to another date, and then discuss it with a legal officer present," he said. "This is about the delegation of power that was out of scope by officers in the submission of documents."

His motion to defer was seconded by Freeman but failed.

From there the meeting descended into repeated procedural clashes.

When Persand attempted to play a recording from a previous meeting concerning how delegated authority had been described, Chair **Peter O'Donovan** (RA - Ewell Court) stopped him: "You can't play recording... it's not relevant to the motion." Persand countered that recordings were permissible and argued earlier comments were directly relevant to understanding what members thought they had approved.

Freeman challenged the Chair's ruling: "How is it not relevant? Comments that were made at a previous meeting of this committee... when you said something along the lines of... minor grammatical errors and omissions." O'Donovan replied: "I said there were minor grammatical errors... it is not relevant to the motion in front of us."

The core disagreement, however, concerned substance rather than theatre.

Persand argued that documents identifying additional Green Belt land had gone well beyond anything councillors believed officers were authorised to do.

"Submitting a document that has 40% extra Green Belt sites to be allocated, and you're changing the evidence base, is not minor amendments," he said. "That is major material changes. That is completely out of scope of this delegation of power." He warned: "This will go to JR, this will go to Judicial Review."

Freeman broadly backed that critique while distancing criticism from officers personally.

"With the greatest of respect to Mr Mawer, and I know he's an officer doing his job... this plan is for councillors to review and approve, not for officers," he said. "We are the councillors who have been elected to represent this community... and we should not be putting that on officers. I find that behaviour to be disgraceful and reprehensible."

Mawer firmly rejected the suggestion that officers had independently redirected policy.

"We've prepared the documents... under the advice of the Inspector," he said. "We've done the work that is necessary for the examination to proceed." The documents, he stressed, are now published and subject to consultation. "It will be the Inspector ultimately who decides if any extra sites go into the Local Plan."

Pressed by Persand on whether the Inspector had ever explicitly required more Green Belt allocations, Mawer drew a distinction between the Inspector's concerns about unmet housing need and the work requested in response. The Inspector had asked for reassessment, he said; the resulting correspondence led to officers being asked to identify sites "potentially suitable for allocation".

Vice-Chair **Clive Woodbridge** (RA - Ewell Village) attempted several times to steer discussion toward a pragmatic middle ground.

At one point he suggested the motion had been “overtaken by events” but that the committee might still usefully discuss the submitted material. “I don’t really see why this committee shouldn’t... have the chance to ask questions about the work they’ve done on the Green Belt.”

Later, seeking a compromise on future meetings, Woodbridge proposed softening one motion element so that further LPPC meetings would “update on the Local Plan examination” rather than purport to re-approve already-submitted documents. He acknowledged limits on councillors’ powers once the examination is underway but argued members should not face “a complete gap without the opportunity to ask questions.”

Labour councillor Rob Geleit was unconvinced by the dilution. “Surely that amendment really eviscerates the whole point, does it not?” he asked.

Substitute member **Christine Howell** (Independent Nonsuch) repeatedly returned the discussion to democratic legitimacy and Green Belt trust.

“If there is even the slightest doubt in anyone’s mind about the integrity of this process, it must be reviewed again thoroughly and transparently,” she argued, saying residents had expressed “serious concerns and lack of trust” regarding Green Belt inclusion.

In one of the evening’s more striking exchanges, Howell sought clarity about councillors’ practical role if the Inspector ultimately proposes extra sites.

“So... some [sites] have been identified, and at any set time the Inspector could put them all in... and then we don’t have any ability to question that?” she asked.

O’Donovan’s reply was blunt: “Yeah, basically, but you have ability to question it through the consultation.” He added that members would later be able to vote on the final modified plan. Howell observed that during consultation councillors would effectively be participating “just as a resident, as a neighbour, and not in any position of power or influence.” O’Donovan answered: “That’s right.”

In procedural terms, the committee rejected all five elements of the motion, including proposals to require LPPC review of documents before submission, tighten delegated authority wording, revisit earlier submissions and mandate additional scrutiny meetings.

So did LPPC approve more Green Belt release?

Not directly. The committee did not vote to allocate new Green Belt sites on 19 May. Officers maintained throughout that the Local Plan remains unchanged and that only the Inspector can propose “main modifications”. Critics, however, argue that by submitting revised evidence identifying additional “potentially suitable” Green Belt sites without renewed member approval, the council has already moved materially toward expanded Green Belt release during examination.

The public consultation on the new documents runs until 15 June, with a further Inspector’s hearing scheduled for 2 July.

For residents trying to understand the state of play, one point emerged clearly from an evening of procedural warfare: the argument is no longer simply about how much Green Belt land might be released, but about who, in practice, is making the decisions.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Related reports:

[Persand parses the Local Plan process in Epsom](#)

[Next phase in the journey of the Epsom and Ewell Local Plan announced](#)

[Epsom and Ewell Local Plan tensions surface as committee debate curtailed by chair](#)

[Fresh Local Plan row as councillor questions Green Belt revisions and governance at Epsom and Ewell](#)

[Epsom & Ewell’s Council responds to Local Plan concerns](#)

[and many more search “Local Plan”](#)

Image: Cllrs Freeman, Persand and Geleit at the LPPC meeting - EEBC YouTube channel.

Epsom Council Rainbow Centre secrecy row deepens over “pre-election silence” advice

2 June 2026



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's attempt to justify refusing answers to Epsom and Ewell Times before May's elections has itself become the subject of a fresh transparency dispute.

The Council has now disclosed, following a Freedom of Information request, that the decision to rely on Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986 (prohibition on Council promotion of political parties) involved the Council's Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer, senior corporate and communications officers and Cllr Neil Dallen (RA Town), Chair of Strategy and Resources.

Yet the Council simultaneously claims it holds no legal advice, governance advice, briefing or equivalent guidance explaining why Section 2 supposedly prevented answers being given to press questions about the Rainbow Leisure Centre controversy.

The issue concerns Cllr Neil Dallen's (RA Town Ward) refusal before the election to answer questions relating to the Rainbow Leisure Centre, where a confidential urgent decision warned of dilapidations potentially costing "up to £500k".

He has *post-election* offered a response which is the subject of our report: No end to Epsom's Rainbow Leisure Centre controversy

Guidance relied upon appears to undermine Council's position

The Council disclosed a Surrey local government pre-election guidance document as the material relied upon. However, the guidance appears to say something rather different from the position adopted by Epsom and Ewell Borough Council.

The document emphasises political neutrality, impartiality and avoidance of electioneering by councils during election periods. But it also expressly states that councils may continue normal business and are allowed to "publish factual information to counteract misleading, controversial, or extreme information".

It further stresses even-handed treatment of information requests and continuation of ordinary council business.

Epsom and Ewell Times' questions to Cllr Dallen and others sought factual explanations of decisions already taken — not campaign material, political advocacy or commentary on electoral opponents.

"No advice held" raises further questions

The Council's response identifies senior officers and a senior councillor as participants in the decision to invoke Section 2. However, when asked for legal advice, governance advice or internal briefing supporting the decision, the Council replied: "This information is not held by the Council."

That response raises obvious questions. Was no legal or governance reasoning recorded despite involvement of the Monitoring Officer and senior management? Was advice given informally but not documented? Or has relevant information been withheld under another exemption?

The Council has separately relied on Section 36 of the Freedom of Information Act to refuse disclosure of internal communications concerning the decision-making process.

Neutrality — or protection from scrutiny?

The controversy touches on a sensitive constitutional question.

Pre-election restrictions exist to prevent councils using public resources to influence elections or support political parties. They are designed to preserve political neutrality.

But critics may ask whether refusing factual answers on controversial matters involving the ruling administration risks producing the opposite perception — namely that council machinery is being used to shield politically damaging issues from scrutiny immediately before voters go to the polls. That concern is sharpened by the context.

The Rainbow controversy involved questions about a confidential urgent decision, possible dilapidations of up to half a million pounds, the Council's inspection responsibilities over a major public asset, and the role of the Chair of Strategy and Resources, Cllr Dallen, who was standing for election to the new East Surrey Council.

Whether the officers involved were properly protecting neutrality, or whether the interpretation adopted had the practical effect of protecting the ruling political group from uncomfortable questioning during an election campaign, is likely to remain contested.

Internal review sought

Epsom and Ewell Times has now requested an internal review by an officer independent of those involved in the original decision.

The review request challenges the Council’s use of Freedom of Information exemptions, the apparent absence of recorded legal reasoning, and the interpretation of the very guidance relied upon to justify pre-election silence.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Related reports

No end to Epsom’s Rainbow Leisure Centre controversy

“It’s my meeting”: Cllr Dallen stops questions about his role in alleged Rainbow “cover-up”

Cllr Dallen accused of £1/2 m Epsom & Ewell Council cover-up

Epsom’s Rainbow Leisure Centre Places new operators

Persand parses the Local Plan process in Epsom

2 June 2026



The Epsom and Ewell Times has seen detailed exchanges of correspondence between Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative - Horton) and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council concerning the torturous progress of the Local Plan.

The correspondence from Kieran Persand reveals a serious and highly technical dispute about governance, constitutional compliance and member oversight in the handling of the Epsom and Ewell Borough Council. The exchanges suggest a widening disagreement between some councillors and officers over who was authorised to make and submit significant Local Plan amendments during the examination process, and whether the council’s Licensing and Planning Policy Committee (“LPPC”) has effectively been bypassed.

The background is the troubled examination of EEBC’s draft Local Plan, particularly its Green Belt strategy and housing allocations. During the public examination hearings in October 2025, the Planning Inspector criticised Topic Paper TP02 dealing with Green Belt assessments. In the appendix circulated by Persand, the Inspector is quoted as saying that conclusions within the paper were inconsistent with the evidence, that errors existed in individual site assessments, and that the approach lacked consistency.

Persand’s central concern is that following those criticisms, officers produced revised documents — particularly COUD_020 and COUD_021 — and submitted them to the Inspector in January 2026 without prior scrutiny or approval by LPPC or Full Council. He argues this breached both the committee’s Terms of Reference and the council’s wider obligations as Local Planning Authority under section 20 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

The key constitutional dispute concerns delegated authority known as “P7”, granted in November 2024. Officers rely on this delegation to justify submitting amended Local Plan material directly to the Inspector. Persand argues the wording only permitted officers “to propose changes and corrections” and did not authorise officers actually to make substantive policy changes or submit revised documents independently.

He also says councillors originally understood the delegation to mean officers would propose changes back to LPPC for political scrutiny and approval, not directly to the Inspector. In his later emails he repeatedly presses officers to explain:

- under whose authority the consultation was launched;
- whether any councillor ever reviewed or approved the revised Green Belt conclusions;
- whether the council’s constitutional obligations had effectively been suspended; and
- whether the Inspector had in practice been allowed to influence policy direction indirectly through officer-led document revisions.

A particularly sensitive issue concerns Green Belt sites. Persand points out that the Inspector never explicitly instructed the council to release more Green Belt land. Rather, she criticised weaknesses in the council's evidence base and requested further work. He argues that revised papers subsequently reached different conclusions about some sites — including areas in Horton Ward — without those new judgements ever being debated politically.

Persand therefore contends that:

- officers may effectively have altered strategic planning policy without member authority;
- LPPC's statutory oversight role was bypassed;
- and Full Council approval may also have been required before revised submission documents were sent to the Inspector.

The appendix attached to his email is effectively a constitutional and legal critique of the process. It proposes:

- mandatory LPPC review of all future submission documents;
- clarification and narrowing of delegation P7;
- retrospective review of COUD_020 and COUD_021;
- further LPPC meetings during purdah if necessary; and
- possible revised submissions to the Inspector after member scrutiny.

The response from Ian Mawer, Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development, rejects much of Persand's interpretation. Mawer argues that once the Local Plan was submitted in March 2025, the examination process became led by the Planning Inspectorate. He relies on national examination guidance stating that inspectors may request additional work and that modifications can be consulted upon during examination.

Mawer further states:

- LPPC already fulfilled its constitutional role through Regulation 18 and Regulation 19 stages;
- the additional work requested after October 2025 was carried out under delegated authority granted in November 2024;
- only the Inspector can recommend "main modifications" required for soundness;
- and the council remains formally committed to the submitted Local Plan unless and until the Inspector proposes modifications.

However, Persand's subsequent emails demonstrate that he remains unconvinced by that explanation. He repeatedly distinguishes between:

- the Inspector controlling the examination process; and
- the council still retaining responsibility for the accuracy, content and strategic direction of its own documents.

His concern appears to be not merely procedural, but constitutional: whether councillors have in practice surrendered political control over crucial Green Belt decisions to officers during the examination stage.

The issue does not appear fully resolved in the correspondence provided. Instead:

- officers maintain the process was lawful and properly delegated;
- Persand maintains that substantive constitutional obligations remain unmet;
- and he continued pressing for additional LPPC meetings and wider member scrutiny as recently as 18 May 2026.

The significance of the dispute is broader than procedural technicalities. It touches directly upon:

- democratic oversight of Green Belt decisions;
- transparency in Local Plan governance;
- the balance of power between elected members and officers;
- and whether major planning policy shifts can emerge during examination without fresh political approval.

A further politically sensitive dimension is timing. Persand repeatedly objected that consultation on revised documents commenced before LPPC had debated the issues, and during the post-election transition period leading into the new East Surrey Council arrangements.

There will be a special meeting of the LPPC tomorrow evening at The Town Hall.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Related reports:

Next phase in the journey of the Epsom and Ewell Local Plan announced

Epsom and Ewell Local Plan tensions surface as committee debate curtailed by chair

Fresh Local Plan row as councillor questions Green Belt revisions and governance at Epsom and Ewell

Epsom & Ewell's Council responds to Local Plan concerns

and many more search "Local Plan"

No end to Epsom's Rainbow Leisure Centre controversy

2 June 2026



Rainbow reply from Dallen leaves key questions unanswered.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Chair of Strategy and Resources, Cllr Neil Dallen (RA Town), has finally responded to questions from Epsom and Ewell Times about the Rainbow Leisure Centre dilapidations controversy — nearly two months after first declining to do so while citing “pre-election” restrictions under Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986.

Readers will recall that the controversy arose after disclosure of a confidential “urgent decision” approved in December 2025 which stated: “The costs of the dilapidations are not yet fully known... However, an estimate is that this could cost up to £500k.”

The same document referred to issues affecting fire alarms, ventilation, damp, glazing, lifts and possible roof defects, with some matters said to raise health and safety concerns.

The issue quickly developed into wider questions about governance and transparency after Epsom and Ewell Times established that:

- the former operator, Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), maintained the building had been handed back in satisfactory condition following survey and sign-off;
- the Council possessed contractual inspection rights throughout GLL's 22-year tenure;
- the Council nevertheless stated in Freedom of Information responses that it held no historic inspection reports prior to 2025;
- the Council refused to disclose the handover condition survey while simultaneously asserting legal privilege over it;
- GLL confirmed the same survey had been provided by the Council to all tenderers during the procurement process;
- and the Council relied on Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986 to avoid answering further questions before the May elections.

The original questions sent to Cllr Dallen by Epsom and Ewell Times on 24th March stated:

“Dear Cllr Dallen,

Further to recent reporting and the Council's FOI response (attached) concerning the Rainbow Leisure Centre, I am

seeking your view on the underlying explanation for the position that has now emerged.

As you will be aware, there are a number of possible interpretations arising from the material in the public domain and the Council's response. In short form, these appear to include:

That the former operator (GLL) is correct in its position that the building was handed back in the condition required following survey and sign-off;

That the Council did not, over a prolonged period, exercise its inspection and enforcement rights in a way that would have identified and addressed accumulating dilapidations;

That the incoming operator has identified defects not previously recorded and is now addressing these with the Council accepting a reduced management fee as part of the commercial resolution;

That the survey relied upon at handover is subject to differing interpretations as between the parties;

Or any other explanation you consider to be the correct one.

I would be grateful if you could indicate which of these (or any alternative) you consider most accurately reflects the situation.

I would also welcome any clarification you wish to provide regarding the basis on which the urgent decision was treated as confidential, and whether you consider that a public interest assessment was undertaken.

I will, of course, reflect your response fairly in any further reporting.

With thanks in advance,

Sam Jones - Reporter."

At the time, the Council declined to answer, stating that pre-election restrictions prevented further comment.

Now, following the elections, Epsom and Ewell Times has finally received the following response from the Council, attributed to Cllr Dallen:

"Rainbow Leisure Centre transferred to a new operator, Places Leisure, on 1 October 2025. Since then, we've been pleased to see a number of improvements at the centre. This marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter for the leisure centre, and Places Leisure has ambitious plans, including significant investment to upgrade the gym, studios, swimming changing rooms and more, which are already underway, with a new gym already open.

The confidential negotiations have resulted not only in an improved facility but also an improved financial position for the Council and therefore residents. With any handover, it is normal practice for there to be negotiations around works to be carried out which form part of the contract finalisation. Details relating to terms and financial arrangements are commercially sensitive and therefore not in the public domain.

We look forward to seeing the plans for Rainbow Leisure Centre come to fruition, as it continues to serve communities in Epsom & Ewell and the surrounding areas, offering superb leisure facilities and innovative opportunities for residents of all ages to improve their health and wellbeing."

The response notably does not directly answer any of the central questions posed.

No explanation is offered for how a potential £500,000 dilapidations liability apparently emerged so soon after handover. The response does not address whether the building was or was not handed over in satisfactory condition, whether inspections were carried out during the previous 22 years, why no historic inspection records are held, whether the handover survey identified the defects now being asserted, or why the survey itself remains undisclosed.

The statement instead emphasises future investment and commercial confidentiality while avoiding the underlying issue: how a building apparently considered acceptable at handover could within weeks become associated with extensive defects, some allegedly serious enough to threaten continued operation on health and safety grounds.

That leaves unresolved the same competing possibilities previously identified by Epsom and Ewell Times. Either the former operator's account is substantially correct and the current concerns arise from differing assessments or commercial negotiations; or significant defects accumulated over many years without effective intervention; or the handover survey failed to identify the building's true condition; or the scale of the dilapidations has itself been overstated or differently interpreted.

Whether Cllr Dallen's response genuinely clarifies matters, or simply restates the Council's preference for confidentiality while avoiding difficult questions, readers will judge for themselves.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Related reports:

“It’s my meeting”: Cllr Dallen stops questions about his role in alleged Rainbow “cover-up”

Cllr Dallen accused of £1/2 m Epsom & Ewell Council cover-up

Epsom’s Rainbow Leisure Centre Places new operators

Unitary in name, unitary in nature?

2 June 2026



Dear Editor

Your criticisms of the silencing of the newly elected Liberal Democrats Councillors by our local MP (8th May) is well founded, and will concern residents who may well wonder whose interests those Councillors will represent. However, I wish to raise another issue in relation to the management of the Election Count that I found disappointing and concerning.

Following the announcement of the result for my Division I sought to make the customary speech of thanks to officers, and to the residents who voted for me, but I was told that the Returning Officer in Reigate had determined that there would be no speeches at any Election Count across Surrey. So, hundreds of years of, sometimes, raucous hustings, elections, and speeches of thanks to the election team and voters, all dismissed by officialdom.

It got worse. I sought to have a photograph taken in the room following the announcement of the result, but I was told that was not allowed either, as it might “compromise the secrecy of the vote.” As I watched the news on TV later in the day, with BBC cameras showing footage of a host of candidates in polling stations, and panning out across the counting room, I wondered what was so concerning that required the East Surrey election count to be sanitized and devoid of any of emotion, and the high and lows that come winning and, yes, with defeat.

So, because I could not do this on the day perhaps, through your on-line newspaper, I might be allowed to thank the teams at Epsom and Ewell Borough Council who undertook the work to ensure that on election day, and at the count, all went to plan. To Kerry Blundell, EEBC’s Electoral Services Manager, whose tireless work over many years ensured a smooth and successful election outcome. My thanks also to the Polling Station teams, many up at 5.30am and not home until after 11.00pm. It is a long day, yet they maintained their welcoming and efficient presence through to the end. And to those undertaking the count which, whilst being more complex by voters having two votes, was completed in good time.

Finally, my colleague Cllr Peter O’Donovan and I wish to thank all those residents in Ewell Court, Auriol and Cuddington who voted for us on 7th May. We will work hard to repay your trust in us by following through the promises we made, but also by being accessible and responding swiftly to your enquiries. We will also be working for all the residents in the Ward, and look forward to working with and for them over the next five years

Yours faithfully,

Cllr **Eber Kington** (Surrey County Council and East Surrey Unitary Council)

Related reports:

[Lib Dem Landslide Takes East Surrey](#)

[Epsom’s LibDem MP gags her Party’s new councillors in their moment of triumph](#)

[Lib Dems sweep up in East Surrey Unitary Council election for Epsom and Ewell](#)