

# Call to landlords to help Council help housing need

15 July 2024



**Epsom & Ewell Borough Council** is looking for landlords of three-, four- and five-bedroom houses to sign up to their Private Sector Leasing Scheme.

The Private Sector Leasing Scheme allows the council to assist local families in housing need, while reducing the risks and hassle of renting for landlords.

The council will lease and manage properties for a period of three to five years. Landlords will be guaranteed rent, with six months being paid in advance. During the tenancy, the council will carry out any minor repairs up to the value of £500 per year and ensure the property is returned to landlords in the same condition as when the agreement started.

Landlords who lease their properties to the council will enjoy the following benefits:

- no inventory or inspection costs
- no letting agent or management fees
- no need to register deposits with a *tenancy deposit* scheme
- a single point of contact within the council
- Right to Rent checks carried out by the council
- an option for routine and major repairs to be dealt with on the landlords' behalf for a fee.

Councillor **Clive Woodbridge**, (RA Ewell Village) Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee, said,

“We are all aware of the housing crisis that is affecting cities and towns across the country, and Epsom & Ewell is no different. It is a priority for the Council that we can provide good quality temporary housing for families in the local area.

“If landlords sign up to our Private Sector Leasing Scheme, it enables us to house local families within the community and minimises the disruption to their home life, work and school at what can be an already stressful time.

“The scheme is also good value for landlords and is relatively low risk when compared with letting the property on the open market.”

Landlord **Lee Wiffen** said, “I cannot praise the Epsom & Ewell Private Sector Leasing Scheme enough. In my six years letting my property through the scheme, the professionalism of the team in the housing department is first class.

“The security of having great tenants and regular on-time rent payments, means I would not look any further, as a landlord, when looking to rent a property than the Epsom & Ewell Private Sector Leasing Scheme”

Full details of the scheme can be found in our **PSL landlord information pack** and **PSL landlord application form**.

Image Albert Bridge licence

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## Average house price in Epsom and Ewell over half-million.

15 July 2024



**Epsom and Ewell** saw the largest increase in new build completions in the **South East** between **2021-2023**, new data has revealed.

The study, conducted by architectural visualisation experts at Modunite, investigated ONS data on the number of new build completions from 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, to find which **local authority has seen the biggest increase in new build completions year-on-year**.

**Key findings:**

- **Epsom and Ewell** saw the largest increase in new build homes, at **133%** - compared to the English average of **21%**
- **Tunbridge Wells** ranks second with an increase of **130%** new build completions
- **West Oxfordshire** had the biggest drop in house prices across England (**13.10%**)
- **Milton Keynes** saw the largest volume of new build homes in 2022-23 (**2,480**) in the South East, and the second-highest in England

For the full study, head to: <https://www.modunite.com/a-review-of-englands-new-build-market/>

**The results:**

Local Authority	Average house price 2022	Average house price 2023	% decrease in house prices	2021-2022	2022-2023	% increase 2022-2023
<b>Epsom and Ewell</b>	<b>£543,670</b>	<b>£533,491</b>	<b>1.90%</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>133%</b>
<b>Tunbridge Wells</b>	<b>£454,657</b>	<b>£446,490</b>	<b>1.80%</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>620</b>	<b>130%</b>
<b>Hastings</b>	<b>£271,727</b>	<b>£270,043</b>	<b>0.60%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Arun</b>	<b>£351,693</b>	<b>£350,191</b>	<b>0.40%</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>930</b>	<b>90%</b>
<b>Eastbourne</b>	<b>£298,348</b>	<b>£296,227</b>	<b>0.70%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>75%</b>
<b>Dartford</b>	<b>£355,378</b>	<b>£353,765</b>	<b>0.50%</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>65%</b>
<b>Canterbury</b>	<b>£361,144</b>	<b>£357,128</b>	<b>1.10%</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>62%</b>
Thanet	£315,384	£310,705	1.50%	290	410	41%
Chichester	£470,413	£452,668	3.90%	590	810	37%
Tonbridge and Malling	£438,694	£431,931	1.60%	270	370	37%

Please find the full dataset [here](#).

Modunite can reveal that **Epsom and Ewell** has seen the largest increase in new build completions in the South East, with a **133% increase** from 2021-2022 compared with 2022-2023. Between 2021 and 2022 **90 new builds** were completed, in comparison to **210 in the following year**. House prices in Epsom and Ewell also dropped by 1.90%, down to **£533,491**.

**Hastings ranks third**

**Hastings** ranks third. From 2021-2022, Hastings completed **10** new build homes, increasing by **100%** by the end of 2023 with a total of **20**. This is largely higher than than the average number of new build completions across all the local authorities in England (**21%**). House prices in Hastings have also fallen by **0.60%** between 2022-2023, to an average of **£270,043**.

**Tunbridge Wells** ranks second, with a **130% increase in new build completions** between 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. A total of **270** new builds were completed in 2021 -2022, in comparison to **620** the following year. House prices in Tunbridge Wells have also decreased by **1.80%**, down to **£446,490** on average.

Image: <https://oaktondevelopments.co.uk/henrietta-place-new-build-homes-epsom-surrey/>

# 90% of Surrey road hole damage claims go to pot

15 July 2024



Pothole damage has given rise to 5,619 claims for compensation from Surrey residents to the county council since May 2021.

Since the last local election three years ago, only 581 claims were successful (just over 10 per cent) resulting in £190,000 spent on repayment.

in 2024 so far, up to May, only 12 out of 1,204 claims have been repaid by Surrey County Council (SCC), with £4,435.15 being paid.

As the local highways authority, SCC is only liable to pay for damage to vehicles if it can be proved it has been negligent in the inspection and maintenance of its roads.

“Rather than 90 per cent of the claims being fraudulent, it is more likely that only 10 per cent of people are determined enough to see through a difficult process to the end,” said Cllr George Potter (Lib Dem/Guildford East) at a county council AGM meeting on May 21.

Cllr Potter said the process is “very difficult and time consuming and bureaucratic” which will “discourage many people from going all the way through with their claims.”

Residents can apply for compensation if they suffer personal injury or property damage due to council-owned roads.

For their claim to be successful, they must provide a long list of information such as the details of damage plus two independent estimates for repair, exact location, proof of ownership and current MOT and insurance, travel direction as well as time, date and weather conditions.

Rebutting the accusation, cabinet member for finance and resources, Cllr David Lewis (Conservative/Cobham) said he did not believe the claims were “fraudulent” in any way but that the criteria was not met.

“We have a duty to protect our finances and money raised from residents,” Cllr Lewis said. “[SCC] simply can’t have a process where every claim put in is paid out. The system we currently have is fair.” He added there are no plans to review the criteria or the process of compensating pothole claims.

Fixing approximately 50,000 potholes a year on average, Surrey County Council has budgeted to spend £5m of its annual budget on repairing potholes and other road safety defects.

SCC inspects its major roads (A roads), roads connecting traffic between A roads and smaller roads (B roads) and some smaller roads (often linking a housing estate or a village to the rest of the network) once a month. Rural roads connecting to smaller communities are inspected once every three months, according to guidance on SCC’s website.

As a general rule, the county says, the diameter of the pothole at the surface level should be less than 150mm on carriageways for cars to require it to be repaired within five working days. If it is not possible to permanently correct or repair the defect within the time period, a permanent repair should be carried out within 20 working days.

Related reports:

[Pothole payouts and repairs penalise Councillor projects?](#)

[On the Hunt for pothole repairs](#)

[Don’t blame us for potholes say Surrey’s highway authority.](#)

[Going potty about pot-holes?](#)

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## Give back OBE for SEND failures parents demand

15 July 2024



Parents say “children and families lives are at stake” after the repeated “failings” by **Surrey County Council** (SCC) over special needs provision for children. Local authorities are legally obliged to carry out Education, Health and Care (EHC) assessments for children with special needs, and have a statutory duty to deliver special educational provision.

“It needs to be like the Post Office scandal,” said **Erika** on a rainy morning outside SCC Headquarters Woodhatch Place. Five women gathered outside Woodhatch Place in Reigate to protest against SCC “failing” children with special needs. She said SCC is “flouting the law” and “criminal” for failing to provide EHC plans for many children with special needs.

One parent, **Sharren Bridges** held a placard of her daughter Jen who committed suicide in 2021, aged just 17. It read: “a multi-agency, systemic failure”, referring to the coroner’s conclusion that SCC, amongst other organisations, failed to ensure Jen’s needs were met which contributed to her tragic death.

Diagnosed with Autism and ADHD at age 10, Jen did not have an EHCP plan which reflected her mental health needs. The coroner also found that opportunities were missed to make an EHCP application at an earlier stage, to ensure she was in better educational setting.

Cllr **Clare Curran**, (Conservative Fetcham West) Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning, said in a press statement: “We take the findings from the Coroner extremely seriously and sincerely apologise for any part our services played in Jen Chalkley’s tragic death and the distress of all those who love her. Following the hearing, we are working hard to ensure we learn from the findings and to ensure necessary changes are made as quickly as possible.

“We are resolute in our ambition 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.”

**Susanne Stonewood**, a single mum, has paid more than £12,000 in legal fees fighting for her son’s EHCP. Her son waited 64 weeks (the legal requirement for the process is to be completed within 20 weeks) for an allegedly ‘inappropriate’ EHCP.

She told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) outside the SCC meeting that she was informed “in no uncertain terms” by a SEN professional that her son is “too academically and socially vulnerable to ever set foot in a mainstream secondary school”. Going into Year 6, Ms Stonewood is “fighting” to get the EHCP to meet her son’s needs ready for secondary school.

“SCC are blocking the process at every single stage for [educational] provision for their children.”

Parents protesting outside the council offices were also calling for the council’s Director for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning, Rachael Wardell, to hand back her OBE.

**Mrs Rachael Wardell**, who is also vice president of the Association of Directors of Children’s Services for 2024/25, was awarded an OBE in the King’s Birthday Honours List. She was granted the honour due to her services to children’s social care both inside and out of Surrey.

But parents claim it is under her watch that SCC has dismissed its legal duty to support children with SEND. They argue it would send a devastating message to families and belittle their struggles and legal battles to try and secure the education children are entitled to.

Ms Stonewood said. “We feel it’s inappropriate that Rachael Wardell has been handed an OBE and she should give it back.”

More than 1,900 people signed a petition asking for her OBE award to be blocked. Many parents have commented they feel this has echoes of the Post Office scandal in which Paula Vennells was handed an OBE despite presiding over the Horizon scandal.

Cllr Curran added: “We acknowledge as a council that we have not always got things right for all families and that the service received by some children and young people with additional needs and disabilities has not always been as good as we would like it to have been. We apologise to impacted families for that.

“We are committed to continuing to improve our services and a recent Local Area SEND Inspection found that, although there is more to do, the right actions are being taken and we are starting to see progress.

Councillors **Fiona White** (Lib Dem/Guildford West) and Cllr **Robert Evans** OBE (Labour/Stanwell and Stanwell Moor) praised Mrs Wardell and Leader Tim Oliver in Surrey’s full council meeting on July 9.

Meanwhile, Cllr **Joanne Sexton** (Residents’ Association/Ashford) said parents and carers in her borough were “appalled that Surrey received an honour in the King’s birthday honours list.” She said that residents in her borough have shared their struggles with her, particularly with the fight for children’s education despite clear legislation meant to support them.



Cllr Sexton spoke of parents' and carers' "fight against the council which continues to fail to meet its legal and moral obligations". She added that parents win 97% of legal cases, "highlighting the council's systemic failure to comply within the law". Ending her statement at the council, Cllr Sexton was greeted with a round of applause from other members.

SCC has seen a 64% increase in EHCP needs assessment requests across Surrey since 2020, at a time of a national shortage of educational psychologists, and this has naturally had an impact.

Cllr Curran said they have been prioritising the timeliness of statutory assessments through additional investment and focussed work with families. The service has reduced the number of delayed EHCP requests from 1,658 in October 2023 to 56 by the end of June 2024. SCC said it has also issued over 1,500 new EHCPs this year up to the end of June.

She added: "53% of EHCPs issued in May were done so within the statutory 20 week timescale, returning Surrey rates to above the 2023 national average of 50%. We are striving to improve this further over the next few months and are aiming to reach 70% timeliness during the autumn term."

SCC was invited to comment on campaigners calling for Rachael Wardell to give back her recently-awarded OBE.

Related reports:

King's Gongs for Surrey leaders

Council pays £3,900 to mother of SEND child

Surrey County failed SEND boy

Image: Parents protesting Surrey County Council's special needs provision. (Credit: Emily Dalton/LDRS)

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## Bet your boots on skill camps?

15 July 2024



Hundreds of residents across Surrey can fast track their careers for free thanks to a range of courses in nine exciting and growing sectors.

Surrey County Council is offering anyone aged 19 and over the opportunity to gain new skills and boost their earnings via a range of Skills Bootcamps.

These government-funded courses are flexible and can be completed in up to 16 weeks - meaning individuals can learn new skills easily and quickly at a time that suits them. Businesses can also use them as a low-cost way to upskill their current workforce.

More than 500 courses are available across Surrey over the next nine months, in sectors such as health and social care, gaming, cyber, construction and advanced engineering.

For most courses, no previous knowledge of the subject is required.

All offer a guaranteed interview on completion - meaning they are ideal for those looking to progress in their current role or change careers.

The first courses start this month with several Skills Bootcamps providers at the Camberley Careers Fair on Monday (July 15) at Camberley Theatre from 9.30am to 12.30pm.

Anyone can attend the event and discover more about these career-boosting courses, while also getting advice from local organisations on personal finances, starting a business and how to secure a job.

**Matt Furniss, Surrey County Council's Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth, said:** "Our continuous support of improving skills in Surrey is essential to our local economy. Whether learning a new skill or upskilling existing skills these free courses will help Surrey residents.

*"We are delighted to have been successful in securing £2.7 million from the Department for Education to support residents improve their career prospects through these Surrey Skills Bootcamps.*

*"Ensuring our residents have the right skills to secure good-quality jobs in growing sectors within Surrey is vital to us maintaining our position as one of the UK's largest regional economies. These free flexible courses are a great way to do that.*

*"Supporting local people into great careers is good for our economy and good for our communities - ensuring we can offer a better quality of life for all, ensuring no one is left behind."*

All of the Skills Bootcamps courses have been developed closely with industry to ensure they meet the future needs of local businesses and the wider economy.

Any adult living in Surrey can sign up to a course, providing they have the right to work in the UK and they can commit to completing the course.

Skills Bootcamps can also be used by local businesses to upskill current employees at a discounted rate.

A full list of courses and start dates can be found on **the Surrey County Council website**.

Register your interest at **[www.surreycc.gov.uk/skillsbootcamps](http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/skillsbootcamps)**.

- Skills Bootcamps were first launched in 2021 by the Department for Education (DfE).
- Skills Bootcamps are one of several skills products promoted as part of Skills for Life and DfE's **It all starts with skills** campaign. This aims to get **more people to start their skills journey** by increasing supply of and demand for technical qualifications and skills offers among employers, young people and adults.
- Skills Bootcamps are now being delivered at a regional level by Surrey County Council through training providers, allowing local government to identify the skills needed for economic growth and development.
- Within Surrey, training is available across nine key sectors:
  - Cyber
  - Game development
  - Construction - insulation
  - Construction - retrofit
  - Construction - heat pumps
  - Green electrical - electric vehicles and solar panels
  - Sustainability and carbon management
  - Advanced engineering
  - Health and social care
- More information on Skills Bootcamps, including information on how to apply, can be found on the County Council website.
- You must be over 19 years of age, have the right to work in the UK and be available to study according to the cohort start and end dates (March 2025).

## Mutual easing of access benefits Epsom development

15 July 2024



**Epsom & Ewell Borough Council** has agreed to enter into a mutual deed of **easement** with the developer of the SGN Gas Works site in Hook Road, Epsom. This site is situated next to the council-owned Hook Road car park, and the deed of easement grants reciprocal access rights over each site's roads.

This agreement is an important step in the council's long-standing ambition to promote the redevelopment of this combined site, in order to provide an improved, attractive, better connected and rejuvenated area that would attract new residents and businesses to Epsom Town Centre.

The combined site has previously been included in the November 2023 consultation of the Epsom Town Centre Masterplan, and the Reg 18 March 2023 consultation of the Draft Local Plan.

The deed of easement will enable the Gas Works site developer to design a scheme that could use the council's Rainbow Leisure Centre access road as the main entrance off East Street. In return, the council would have access across the Gas Work developer's estate road infrastructure from the current Hook Road car park entrance. By removing the need for separate, duplicated road infrastructure, the Gas Works site can be designed to maximise open space and connectivity across the wider combined site.

The deed of easement is conditional, which means it will not be completed or take effect until such time that the developer of the Gas Works Site is granted planning permission for development. This will ensure the council can maintain its two separate, independent capacities as landowner and as Local Planning Authority.

Cllr **Hannah Dalton**, (RA Stoneleigh) Vice Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee, said: "Members unanimously voted for the mutual deed of easement at a special Strategy and Resources Committee held on Wednesday 19 June. This is

an excellent example of the council working in partnership with other landowners and we hope that, as a result of this decision, we can deliver wider benefits for the community through appropriate high-quality redevelopment and regeneration of the SGN Gas Works site.”

Image aerial view East Street Epsom - Google.

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## Epsom County Councillor win for childminders

15 July 2024



Surrey County Council (SCC) has announced a significant change in the payment system for childminders, following a successful campaign led by Residents' Association County Councillor **Eber Kington** (Ewell Court, Auriol & Cuddington). The new system, which will see childminders receiving monthly payments, comes as a response to overwhelming feedback from the childminding community.

Currently, childminders in Surrey receive 60% of their term's funding upfront at the start of each term, with the remaining 40% plus any necessary adjustments paid by mid-term. This staggered payment system has been identified as a barrier by nearly half of the respondents in the 2024 Early Years Provider Survey. Additionally, SCC's in-person consultation revealed that 95% of childminders favored a shift to monthly payments.

Councillor Kington highlighted the discrepancy in SCC's public messaging, which he argued favored larger group providers over individual childminders. He was approached by a childminder from his division, expressing the need for a spokesperson to advocate for a payment system that supports their financial stability and professional efficacy.

The childminder stated, "It would be good to finally have a spokesperson who can support us in calling for a change and enabling us to make a choice in how we are paid, so we are able to continue doing our jobs to the best of our ability, without worrying how or when we will be able to pay our mortgages."

Councillor Kington emphasized the importance of this change, especially in light of the upcoming expansion of early years entitlement, which will require more childcare places. He argued that ensuring a reliable payment system is crucial for recruiting and retaining childminders.

After lobbying the Council, Councillor Kington raised the issue at the July Council Meeting. In response, Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children, Families, and Lifelong Learning, confirmed that SCC is transitioning to a new software system for early education payments. This system, set to be implemented in September 2024, will include the option for monthly payments.

Following the meeting, Councillor Kington expressed his satisfaction with the outcome. "This is excellent news, but it is a shame that childminders have had to work hard to get the change despite the clear evidence of need shown in SCC's own consultation results," he said.

The move to monthly payments aligns SCC with other local authorities, such as the London Borough of Sutton, which already offer this option to their childminders. This change is expected to provide greater financial stability and support for childminders, enabling them to focus on delivering high-quality care without the added stress of managing inconsistent payment schedules.

Image from [www.childcare.co.uk](http://www.childcare.co.uk)

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## Surrey Borough fails social housing tenants

15 July 2024



Guildford Borough Council (GBC) has failed to meet new rules on social housing a judgement has rules.

The report published by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) said the social landlord for around 5,200 homes is “failing” on a number of legal health and safety requirements.

Around 1,700 homes have been left without an up-to-date electrical condition report and another 1,000 with unsatisfactory certificates, according to the RSH’s report. GBC told the RSH it does not have evidence of a current electrical condition report for more than 100 communal blocks, and it could not provide evidence it had completed around 1,300 fire safety actions.

Introduced on April 1 this year, the new consumer standards intended to drive landlords to deliver long term improvements for tenants. In the first bunch of regulatory judgements RSH gave Guildford a ‘C3’ grading, which means there are serious failings and it needs to make significant improvements.

Reports by the RSH, published July 9, said: “The information provided by Guildford BC to us during our engagement with it demonstrates that Guildford BC is failing to ensure that it meets a number of legal requirements in relation to health and safety”.

Findings from the report also showed GBC had not collected Tenant Satisfaction Measures from tenants, which all social landlords are required to do. RSH judgement report said: “Guildford BC has been unable to explain the reasons for its failure to collect this data, and as a result, tenants are not supported to effectively scrutinise Guildford BC’s performance in delivering landlord services.”

In December 2023, GBC said it identified some areas of concern within its landlord housing function included potentially unnecessary repairs being carried out to tenants’ homes. Referring itself to the government’s Regulator of Social Housing (RSH), GBC has since identified other concerns relating to its legal landlord health and safety compliance.

Commenting on the Regulator’s report, Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Housing, Cllr Julia McShane responded: “Everyone living in a council property deserves to have a safe and secure home. Since December 2023, we’ve taken urgent action to improve our service. We can evidence progress across all areas of compliance and building safety which includes a real time compliance dashboard, recruitment of expert officers and procurement of building safety contracts.

The leader of the Liberal Democrat-run council said it has reviewed all electrical information data to confirm an accurate position of where it is. GBC has also procured two short term contractors to complete the certification work by July 2025.

McShane said a fire risk validation exercise has confirmed there are no outstanding high-risk actions. She added that a new contractor is now revisiting the low to medium risk properties to validate them, arrange any works required and update the council’s position.

“Our engagement with the Regulator will be ongoing and plays an integral and intensive part of our improvement plan as we work to resolve all of the issues identified and achieve full compliance for our residents,” McShane added.

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## No more German supermarkets in Epsom

15 July 2024



Plans for an Aldi store have been rejected again over fears the increased traffic would have a severe impact on road safety.

[The site is a few hundred yards away from another German owned supermarket Lidl in Upper High Street.]

A proposal to create the budget supermarket on the vacant former Dairy Crest site in Alexandra Road was refused a second time at an Epsom and Ewell council meeting on July 10.

The application was first thrown out in 2015 following concerns about the site’s location, level of car parking and traffic, and the effect on the character of the neighbourhood.

The new application for the £5m development in Epsom includes car parking, some landscaping but plans for residential units have been scrapped.

Councillor Jan Mason (Residents’ Association/Ruxley Ward) said the supermarket giant should “do far better” on the design of the building if it “wants to come to a lovely area such as Epsom”.

Although Aldi said it had “refined” its proposals, carefully designing an “attractive, bespoke Aldi food store” which would “respect the surrounding area”, councillors were still concerned about its location.

Despite Surrey Highways advising the development “would be unlikely to result in a severe impact” on local traffic, councillors remained sceptical. Speaking before the debate, Ward Cllr Julie Morris (Lib Dem/College Ward) said there would be a “huge” impact on local residents who already feel the surrounding residential roads are a “rat run”.

“The one thing you can’t put in a spreadsheet is common sense,” Cllr Chris Watson (Residents Association/ Ewell Court Road) said. He argued that regardless of “clever” data from the county council, “common sense” says it is a busy junction which could result in queuing traffic.

Agreeing with him, other councillors said the “already challenging junction” is “fraught with danger”. It was agreed it was in the interests of residents, motorists, pedestrians and children crossing to go to school that councillors had to reject the application.

However, Cllr Clive Woodridge (Residents’ Association/ Ewell Village Ward) argued it was not viable to refuse the application on traffic and road concerns. He said Surrey Highway experts have judged the development acceptable and this could not be easily defended at appeal.

But Cllr Mason called the development a ticking “time bomb”, which could lead to a fatal collision if plans goes ahead.

Speaking to the committee, local resident Leah said: “The council has had feedback multiple times that local residents don’t want a food store here.” She cited Aldi’s own research from its application that 58-61% of local residents objected to the proposal.

Around 91 letters were sent opposing the scheme, arguing it was an ‘unacceptable location’ for a food store at a busy junction. Concerns were raised that traffic would be exacerbated, a pedestrian crossing would be dangerous and the brownfield site should be saved for affordable housing.

Aldi superstore. (Credit: Marques Thomas/Unsplash)

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## Wet weather kicks into the long grass

15 July 2024



People fed up with long unsightly overgrown grass and verges can use an interactive map to see when their favourite spots are next due to be cut.

The seemingly endless rainfall this year has heavily affected work across the county as the wet weather shuts down the process – Surrey County Council says this is because its machinery will not cut wet grass properly and can, in some cases, even damage the turf.

Urban areas are due to have six cuts a year by the county – unless they have been designated as a blue heart zone. Rural cuts and high speed roads are chopped twice a year.

Blue hearts are part of Surrey’s 3,000 miles of grass verges but have been deliberately left to grow as a way of increasing plant and insect biodiversity.

Reducing the amount of times these areas are cut is intended to allow native plant species to thrive – or even to sow native wildflower seeds.

As well as using the map, the county council has published a table covering each area in Surrey and when it estimates to get on with the job.

The council’s website reads: “We are experiencing some delays with our planned grass cutting programme dates in parts of the county as a result of the weather and operational issues.

“We are working with our contractors to improve the situation and are sorry for any inconvenience. Thank you for your patience.”

The Blue Campaign, founded in 2014 by wildlife filmmaker Fergus Beeley in response to dramatic declining biodiversity in the UK, lets nature take a bit more control, the county council said.

It encourages the rewilding of green spaces in suitable areas and are marked in blue on the map.

Often they can be identified with a blue heart planted in the ground to show residents grass and flowers are deliberately being left to grow – and the council is encouraging residents to identify new sites and gather local support.

Any areas put forward for blue hearts will be reviewed by the county council and, if approved, contractors told to skip the verge unless some safety work is needed.

All verges, including blue hearts are supposed to have a full cut each autumn.

Surrey County Council spokesperson said: “Our new interactive grass cutting map available here shows residents when their area is due to be cut.

“Our grass cutting programme can however be heavily affected by weather. We cannot cut when it is raining heavily or shortly after as the machinery will not cut the wet grass properly and risks damaging the grass itself.

“Weather and ground conditions permitting, urban spaces are cut six times a year and for rural areas, this takes place



twice a year.”

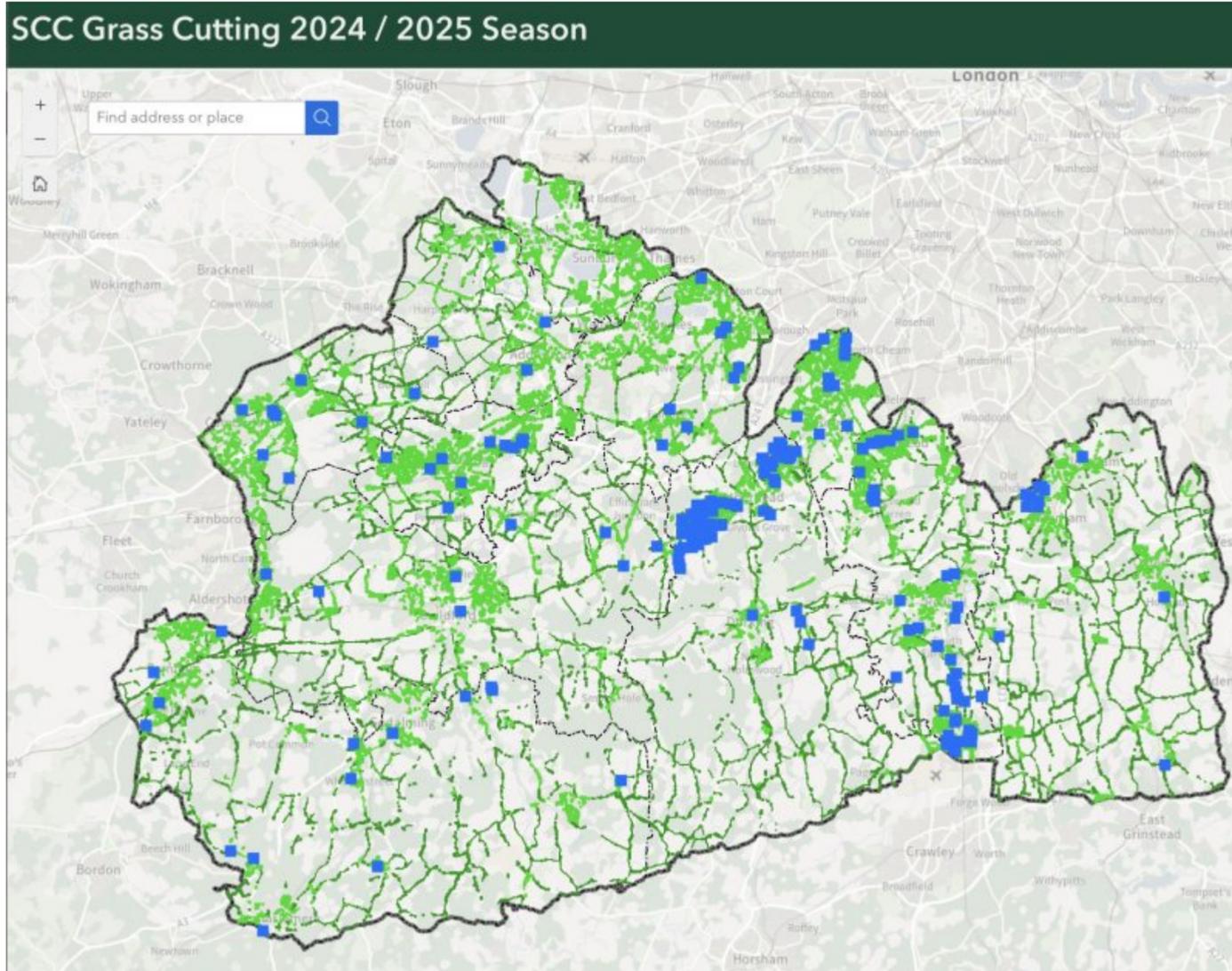


Image: Surrey grass cutting, when your verge is due to be cut. Areas in blue are being left to grow over the summer to encourage biodiversity (image SCC)

**INTERACTIVE MAP**

Blue Heart

Related reports:

A Greener Future in Partial Sight As Verges To Be Left Unmown

Verging on the ridiculous

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

# The cost of sending pupils to school

15 July 2024



Surrey County Council (SCC) has been ordered to pay out £1,500 by the social care ombudsman for a ‘service failure’ in defaulting its legal duty to provide SEND transport to and from school. The local authority is already predicted an overspend of £7.3m on SEND school transport for its 2024-25 annual budget.

A family has received £1,500 after Surrey County Council (SCC) failed to provide a child with complex medical needs school transport adding pressure to the family. The boy missed 27 days of education as well as special needs provision, causing his mother and the wider family “avoidable” distress.

The provider suspended the child’s transport after no longer feeling able to meet the boy’s change in medical needs, on June 15, 2023. The boy waited for his school transport to pick him up the next morning but it did not arrive to collect him. It was not until lunchtime until the travel provider informed the Council that it had suspended its service.

SCC speedily offered the mum a travel allowance while it explored longer term solutions but she felt ‘pressured’ into

taking this as she did not have the time to recruit carers. The travel allowance is a more cost-effective option than managed transport services.

Report documents detail the “avoidable distress, frustration and inconvenience” that the child’s transport withdrawal caused his family. The social ombudsman said “the council did exactly what we would expect in the circumstances it found itself in” and it now has contracts with two ambulance-style providers able to transport children with complex medical needs.

A SCC spokesperson said it would not comment on individual cases and “although the report does recognise that we put appropriate mitigations in place, we accept the findings from the Ombudsman report and sincerely apologise for any distress caused”.

They added: “We know how important it is for children and young people to have access to their education setting, however a lack of suitable providers has meant that some children who require specialist provision for high and/or complex medical needs have had to wait longer for appropriate arrangements than we would like. In these circumstances we always work actively with families to find a solution and offer measures such as personal travel allowances in the interim.”

The ombudsman demanded the council pay his mother £1,000 in recognition of his missed education and SEN provision during the period he had no transport to school, plus £500 for the ‘avoidable distress’ it caused her and her family.

An overspend of £7.3m, all based on home to school transport, is already predicted one month into SCC’s new budget for 2024-25. In 2023, SCC saw an overspend of £12m on SEND transport, with nearly a third of the transport costs being to independent schools outside of Surrey.

Rising demand, more travel days and anticipated increase in the number of children who need transport have contributed to a pressurised budget. SCC said it is reviewing all discretionary travel arrangements, tightening applications and is actively promoting personal travel allowance to manage costs.

A SCC spokesperson added: “We have seen a 64% increase in education, health and care needs assessment requests across Surrey since 2020, which has naturally had a knock on effect with a year on year increase in demand for Home to School Travel Assistance (HTSTA) as many children and young people with an education, health and care plan require HTSTA. This has resulted in a predicted overspend for this service.”

Image: Credit: Arriva436 CC BY-SA 2.0

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## Epsom library to lend an ear on changes

15 July 2024



Epsom Library is being transformed as part of Surrey Libraries modernisation programme and residents are invited to drop in to give their views at the library on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> July from 10am to 4pm.

This is an opportunity to meet library staff, hear more about the improvements and give feedback on the designs for the library.

A separate session especially for children, parents and carers will be held during Story-time from 10:15am to 10.45am. The designs will remain on display in the library for at least 2 weeks following the 9<sup>th</sup> July, to provide an opportunity for further feedback.

The library changes will include a fully flexible layout with space for events and performances; improved furniture and increased study space; new **Super Access technology** enabling out of hours use and multi-use meeting rooms.

To enable initial set up works to be completed, the library will be closed from 5<sup>th</sup> August for one week only. It will then re-open from the 12<sup>th</sup> August within Epsom library’s learning centre, still within the Ebbisham Centre, which will be accessed via the cafe.

Customers will be able to access a range of library items, along with computer workstations, printing and the popular Rhymetime and Story-time events, which will still run at a reduced capacity to suit the space.

Work at the library will continue throughout 2024, until the expected final completion date of February 2025. Any further short closures required will be well publicised before they take place.

More information on Epsom Library changes will be found at the **Epsom Library page**.

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## Epsom and Ewell Parliament candidates interviewed

15 July 2024



On Monday 17th June **James Hains** of the Epsom and Ewell Times conducted interviews with Gina Miller (True and Fair Party), Mhairi Fraser (Conservative), Helen Maguire (Liberal Democrat), Stephen McKenna (Green Party) and Mark Todd (Labour). The interviews were filmed by the Creative and Media Team at **NESCOT** in Ewell. Epsom and Ewell Times extends our immense gratitude to NESCOT for their professionalism and service especially **Charlie McCarthy**.

Mayuran Senthilnathan of the Reform Party was called away at short notice and could not make the schedule.

Here are the interviews:

Epsom and Ewell Times thanks all the candidates who took part.

They are all a credit to our democracy whether you agree with them or not.

Make sure you vote on 4th July and don't forget your photo ID.

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## More opinions of opinion polls

15 July 2024



In the run-up to the 2024 general election, polling data for party support in **Epsom and Ewell** shows a fluctuating political landscape. Epsom and Ewell has returned a Conservative Party since the constituency was first created.

However, recent polling data indicates a potential upheaval.

In the 2019 general election, the Conservatives maintained a significant lead with 53% of the vote. The Liberal Democrats followed with 23%, while the Labour Party took a 17% share. However, recent polls now place the Liberal Democrats at the forefront as potential victors in the upcoming election 4th July.

This data comes emerges from the model of Electoral Calculus, which predicts that the Liberal Democrats have a 72% chance of winning the elections this term, with the Conservatives at 20%. The model suggests a dramatic turnaround favouring the Liberal Democrats, with a swing of 26.09% of support from the Conservatives. In addition, the Electoral Calculus predicts that the Labour party will have a 5% chance of winning.

Even so, alternative polling sources, such as the UK Polling Report, suggest a more closely contesting race. The current support levels are predicted to be 29.76% for the Conservatives, 24.21% for the Liberal Democrats, and 24.03% for Labour. It indicates that there is a significant residual support for the Conservative Party, which challenges the prediction of a Liberal Democrat win, making the race far from a foregone conclusion.

YouGov polls illustrate a more volatile landscape in comparison, with the winners emerging differently on a weekly basis, underscoring the volatility in voters' intentions. According to the latest YouGov prediction, the support in Epsom and Ewell is 35.1% for the Conservatives, 25.9% for the Liberal Democrats, and 19.7% for Labour.

This general election highlights Epsom and Ewell as a key constituency, reflecting upon broader electoral trends across the United Kingdom.

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# Conservative who promises to serve “with integrity”

15 July 2024



Epsom and Ewell Times is publishing the appeals of the Parliamentary Candidates standing in the General Election for the constituency of Epsom and Ewell. This is the appeal of **Mhairi Fraser** the **Conservative Party** candidate.

Epsom has been my family home for almost 20 years. All three of my younger siblings went to school here, at Glyn and Epsom College; my mum worked at Leatherhead Food Research; in university holidays I could be found working behind the bar at the Marquis of Granby, or volunteering at Epsom Hospital Radio; and as a young graduate, I commuted from Epsom into the City. I have a genuine drive to protect everything that makes Epsom, Ewell, Ashted and Leatherhead special, and I also know where they need investment and attention.

I love this country and everything it stands for, and I believe traditional Conservative values – strong education, low taxes for workers and businesses, efficient use of public money, respect for law and order, and the personal freedom to allow you to aspire to great things – is the best way to build a Britain where that is possible for everyone.

I am running to be your MP because I believe it is time to bring integrity back to our politics. Having built a career as an anti-corruption lawyer at one of the top law firms in the world – whether advising the world’s most influential companies and governments on how to fight money laundering, or defending Nobel Peace Prize winners against persecution by foreign governments – integrity is, quite literally, my speciality.

That is why you will have seen me challenge other parties’ policies, which I believe would restrain the potential of us all, and of this country. But you have never heard me on the doorstep, or online, or in a leaflet, attack any of my opponents as individuals. Everyone is fed up with the division that is rife in our politics at the moment; it’s time that the British public was put before self-interest.

Having been lucky enough to call it my home, I know that’s how we do things in Epsom, Ewell, Ashted and Leatherhead too. This is a really special place, with a rare community feel for somewhere so close to London. We put politics aside and work together – whether as neighbours or colleagues, in community groups or for charities – to make things better. I promise to do the same for you, here and in Westminster, starting with my key local priorities.

## **Protecting the Green Belt:**

We are at a critical point, with only a few months left to have the Draft Local Plan amended to remove Green Belt sites. I have been visible at both of this year’s Green Belt protests, but I have also been quietly working behind the scenes, using my legal expertise to assist the Keep Epsom & Ewell Green Belt Group with legal strategy. I am in excellent company with my Conservative councillors Kieran Persand and Bernie Muir, who have consistently fought to remove the Green Belt from the Draft Local Plan.

Home ownership is one of the great aspirations of the younger generations in Surrey, and we all know that there is a need for new homes to be built for those who are currently finding it impossible to get on the housing ladder. But our housing needs can be met by building on brownfield sites, which have previously been developed, rather than forever destroying the Green Belt. If elected, I will continue to fight for a “brownfield first” strategy – including pushing the Council to consider the alternative plan for development at Kiln Lane and Longmead – which will be able to meet our actual housing needs as a borough.

The Green Belt is an essential home to hundreds of native species of flora and fauna. The minute the concrete is poured, the land is forever lost to nature. But there are also human consequences to building hundreds of new homes on inappropriate sites that do not have the infrastructure to support them. Schools and GP services running out of places. Traffic jams polluting our air. An increased risk of homes being flooded.

I am adamant: I will not let Epsom, Ewell, Ashted and Leatherhead turn into carbon copies of Croydon and Woking. Our Green Belt and green spaces must be protected.

## **Tackling crime with a more visible police presence:**

We deserve to feel safe at home, and when we head out. Under the Conservatives there are more police in Surrey than ever before, but I know that levels of vehicle theft, burglary, violent crime, drug dealing and shoplifting remain too high.

I have been relaying residents’ and business owners’ concerns straight to the top, to the Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner – and I will be a consistent voice for a more visible police presence on the streets of Epsom, Ewell, Ashted and Leatherhead, because I firmly believe that more bobbies on the beat is the best deterrent to crime.

### **Improving commuter services:**

Local residents using Ewell West, Stoneleigh and Worcester Park stations have been suffering unacceptable levels of overcrowding, delays and cancellations on South Western Railway trains at peak hours.

The supposed ease of the commute to and from London is one of the major reasons people have chosen to live in this area, and these issues are causing serious levels of disruption and stress. I know what it's like - I've commuted to and from London on the same line on and off over a period of almost twenty years.

I have already spoken with representatives of South Western Railway to discuss train services in the constituency, and am pushing them to provide two extra trains during the morning peak and, in the interim, to reorganise their existing fleet to introduce additional ten-coach services for morning commuters.

### **Regenerating our high streets:**

The high streets of Epsom and Leatherhead have long been in need of regeneration, and the best way to achieve that is to allow local businesses to thrive - by reducing taxes and abolishing unnecessary red tape.

I have kept my promise to you to run a clean campaign; it is the first of many promises to you that I will keep, continuing with my pledges above.

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The other candidates:

Mark my words for Labour candidate

Lib Dems' Helen Maguire - "Getting Things Done"

The Green promises

Reform candidate for Epsom and Ewell

A True and Fair view of the world

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## **Surrey to have a new political colour 4th July?**

15 July 2024



Jeremy Hunt "faces a tight race" to be re-elected according to new polls that show Surrey could have as many as 12 new MPs after the July 4 general election.

Only East Surrey's Conservative MP and Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, Claire Coutinho, are predicted to be safe.

Data published by Ipsos suggests the combination of big beast Conservative resignations and huge swings in voting intentions could drastically alter the political map.

The projections are based on Ipsos' first MRP poll that uses a large-scale online survey of nearly 20,000 participants together with population data at a constituency level, to project which party will win individual seats at the upcoming General Election.

Currently every single seat in the county is held by a Conservative but Ipsos polling has the Liberal Democrats poised to win in Esher and Walton, Dorking and Horley, Guildford, and Epsom and Ewell leaning that way too.

The scale of the swings needed are huge with the Conservatives holding majorities as high as 29 per cent in constituencies predicted to go to the Lib Dems.

Three seats, with what would normally be considered safe Tory strongholds with majorities greater than 30 per cent, are also said to be in play.

Runnymede and Weybridge, Woking, Spelthorne, Windsor, and Godalming and Ash are all toss ups, according to Ipsos.

Even among the seats Ipsos has staying blue, Ipsos says that Surrey Heath, Farnham and Bordon, and Reigate are only "leaning" Conservative with just East Surrey - which was last won by Claire Coutinho in 2019 with a 40 per cent majority "likely" to stay Tory.

Nationally the polls show:

Labour winning 453 - with 'certainty' range of 439 to 462 seats

Conservatives 115 - with a range of 99 to 123 seats

Liberal Democrats 38 - with a range of 35 to 48 seats

SNP 15 - with a range of 13 to 23 seats

Plaid Cymru four - with a range of two to five seats

Reform UK three - with range of three to 10 seats

Green Party three with a range of zero to four seats

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According to Ipsos data the voting intentions in Surrey are:

**Liberal Democrat gains**

**Esher and Walton** (Strong Liberal Democrat) overturning conservative majority of 5 per cent

Con 28%, Lib Dem 50%, Lab 11%, Ref 8%, Green 3%

**Dorking** (Likely Liberal Democrat) overturning Conservative majority of 19 per cent

Con 30%, Lab 17%, Lib Dem 41%, Ref 8%, Green 4%

**Guildford** (Likely Liberal Democrat - overturning Conservative majority of 6 per cent

Con 25%, Lab 16%, Lib Dem 39%, Ref 15%, Green 4%

**Epsom and Ewell** (Lean Liberal Democrat - overturning Conservative majority of 29 per cent

Con 30%, Lab 23%, Lib Dem 35%, Ref 7%, Green 4%

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**Conservative holds:**

**Surrey Heath** (Lean Conservative) majority 30 per cent

Con 36%, Lab 18%, Lib Dem 30%, Ref 12%, Green 4%

**Farnham and Bordon** (Lean Conservative) majority 27%

Con 37%, Lab 17%, Lib Dem 31%, Ref 11%, Green 4%

**Reigate** (Lean Conservative) majority 36%

Con 34%, Lab 29%, Lib Dem 18%, Ref 9%, Green 10%

**East Surrey** (Likely Conservative) majority 40%

Con 38%, Lab 26%, Lib Dem 16%, Ref 15%, Green 5%

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**Toss ups**

**Runnymede and Weybridge** (Toss up) Conservative majority 31 per cent

Con 35%, Lab 31%, Lib Dem 18%, Ref 10%, Green 5%

**Woking** (Toss up) Conservative majority 17 per cent

Con 35%, Lab 30%, Lib Dem 25%, Ref 9%, Green 5%

**Godalming and Ash** (Toss up) Conservative majority 19 per cent

Con 34%, Lab 17%, Lib Dem 33%, Ref 11%, Green 5%

**Spelthorne** (Toss up) Conservative majority 37 per cent

Con 31%, Lab 31%, Lib Dem 17%, Ref 16%, Green 5%

Jeremy Hunt and Paul Follows were contacted for this story.

Related reports:

6 out of 11 Conservative MPs leaving Surrey