

Surrey Borough flushed with pride

8 November 2023



Toilets in Waverley have reclaimed their thrones as some of the country's best bogs after inspectors released their results from unannounced lavatory visits.

Two watering closets in Waverley Borough Council's parks have achieved Loo of the Year status. Broadwater Park, in Farncombe and Frensham Great Pond and Common have been awarded platinum status - honours they held from 2017 and 2019 respectively. The Waverley washrooms were the only in Surrey to have secured nominations.

Councillor Steve Williams, Waverley Borough Council's portfolio holder for environment and sustainability, said: "Clean, well-managed toilets are very important for those visiting our sites and I would like to say a big thank you to our contractors and staff who do such a great job keeping them up to such a high standard."

According to Loo of the Year organisers, the awards encourage the highest possible standards in all 'away from home' washrooms and inspectors make unannounced visits to toilets across the UK and Ireland to judge them.

Acceptable toilets are graded silver, gold, platinum or diamond and are held up against a number of criteria, including décor, cleanliness, hand washing equipment and accessibility.

The awards have run since 1987 and are considered the 'washroom standard' with overall winners across the 61 categories announced on Thursday, January 18.

Related reports:

The Cost of Spending a Penny: a review of Epsom and Ewell's public toilet provision.

Surrey boosts specialist school places

8 November 2023



Surrey County Council is pleased to announce the creation of 230 new specialist school places for September 2023 for Surrey's children with additional needs and disabilities.

The creation of additional school places has been carried out through the successful delivery of 40 construction projects in schools across Surrey. The building projects included the expansion of existing specialist schools and existing Special Educational Needs (SEN) Units in mainstream schools, the construction of new specialist free schools, and the creation of new SEN Units in mainstream schools.

These projects are a part of Surrey County Council's £260m Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Alternative Provision Capital Programme investment to improve the long-term sufficiency of state-maintained specialist educational provision across Surrey, and in turn the experiences of Surrey children. The Council is committed to ensuring that children and young people who have additional needs and disabilities (AND) and require a specialist school placement can have their education needs met closer to home and within state-maintained provision wherever possible. The creation of these new specialist school places will support the Council in delivering this commitment, providing more Surrey young people with additional needs and disabilities with the opportunity to be educated within their own local community.

Surrey County Council's ambitious Capital Programme aims to deliver 2,440 permanent additional specialist school places in Surrey between 2019 - 2026 to create capacity for 5,760 planned places by 2030/31.

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning said: "The location of these new school places means that Surrey families will have high quality specialist school provision close to where they are, which enables children and young people with additional needs and disabilities to achieve healthy, independent, and fulfilling lives.

"These additional places are part of the Council's committed investment to increase Surrey's estate to 5,760 places overall by 2030 to improve the long-term sufficiency of state-maintained specialist educational provision that meets the

needs of communities across the county now and in the future.”

As of the 2023/24 academic year, accommodation for around 917 new specialist school places has been delivered across Surrey at a cost of £41m since the beginning of the programme. As a result of this investment, the planned phasing of places and growth plans agreed with individual schools and Trusts, and where additional places have been commissioned to meet additional local needs, Surrey’s state-maintained specialist education estate has been increased from around 3,320 in 2019 – when the Capital Programme started – to around 4,237 places now.

The programme remains on track to complete the remaining 7 projects planned for 2023/24 in the Spring term.

The next phase of Capital delivery in 2024/25 consists of major and medium new build extensions of existing specialist schools which are already in contract, a new specialist free school for autistic children, and two new secondary age SEN Units in mainstream schools for autistic children. Along with the phasing in of additional places from projects delivered in previous years, the programme will create approximately 240 new specialist school places for September 2024. Additional places from these schemes will become available between 2025-2028 in line with growth plans agreed with individual schools. This is because schools need to build their staffing capacity to support the new places.

[Epsom’s Pound Lane Primary School is one of the Surrey state schools sharing the 85 new Mainstream SEN Unit places available as of September 2023.]

Related reports:

1000 Surrey children wait for special needs plans

Surrey to SEND £40m for special schools

£1.1 million special investment in Epsom school

Epsom care home plans

8 November 2023



Plans for a care home on the site of a former police station could finally be decided next week.

An application for an 86-bed care home for people with dementia in Church Street should have been decided at a cancelled planning meeting in April.

Now Epsom and Ewell’s planning committee is set to make a decision on Thursday, November 9.

Councillors will also decide whether or not to approve an application for another care home, on a site where Lidl failed in their bid to build a new store.

The Church Street plans, with the Church Street Conservation Area wrapping around the south and west ends of the site, have been scaled back from the previously submitted 96-bed application.

An officers’ report shows the building height has been reduced by one storey, after concerns were raised by planners about the impact it could have on the conservation area, designated heritage assets and trees on the site.

The conservation area includes contains 20 listed buildings including the grade II* St Martin’s Church, The Cedars and Ebbisham House.

With 31 car parking spaces in total, the application would not meet Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s parking requirements.

But officers described the site as being in a “highly sustainable location” close to public transport and with the possibility of parking in nearby public car parks.

They have recommended councillors approve the application.

The applicant’s design and access statement said the developments objective, among others, were to: “Create a facility of excellence in the care and support of local people living with residential, nursing, dementia and respite care needs.”

The future of the site of the former Organ and Dragon pub, in London Road, Ewell, will also be debated at the meeting.

The now-empty site has two approved planning applications on it, one for a development of 45 flats and one, approved in October 2022 for a 70-bed care home.

Also recommended for approval, the latest application is for a larger 81-bed care home, with an additional storey having been added to the plans, making it five storeys at its highest.

Plans also include car and cycle parking, an ambulance and deliveries bay, a widened pavement and a new pedestrian crossing at the busy junction of London Road and Ewell Road.

The layout of the site is “virtually the same” as the previously approved applications, according to an officers’ report.

The report said that since the previous scheme was approved, other providers had come forward expressing interest in additional beds which removed previous limitations under plans for a single care home provider.

When the previous application was approved, councillors raised concerns that the applicant did not have experience running care homes, though this is not a requirement when considering a planning application.

Image: Plans for the former Epsom police station and ambulance station site in Church Street, from Design and Access statement. Credit: Hunters

Related Reports:

Two Epsom brownfield developments?

From custody to caring - new plans for Epsom's old nick.

Famous 16th Century Surrey pub saved, for now?

8 November 2023



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Image: The Volunteer Pub (Mark Davison)

Local Plan to move forward after passionate debate

8 November 2023



Epsom and Ewell Borough Councillors voted to “un-pause” work on a new Local Plan for the district at an extraordinary meeting held in the Town Hall chamber on Tuesday 24th October.

Introducing the motion to un-pause **Cllr Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley) said “what is brought before you this evening is a recommendation from Licensing Planning Policy Committee members to unpause the local plan immediately to restart work on the spatial strategy, site selection, and policy development. If this recommendation is supported tonight, workshop sessions will be set up with all members to discuss the results from the call for sites that finished at the end of July. Updates on what sites have come forward and, more importantly, what sites did not come forward will be shared. Discussion and debate based on up-to-date data and evidence with all members, not just those on the LPPC, on which sites would or could be included in our next version of the local plan.”

Cllr **Christine Howells** (RA Nonsuch) proposed a lengthy amendment that opened with the following wording:

“The Council is asked to note the work that has been undertaken in line with the decision by the full Council on the 22nd March 2023 to pause the local plan, to note that while the current version of the national planning policy framework (NPPF) requires the council to start with the standard method housing number, the NPPF also allows for a lower number to be used if that starting point is unachievable in light of local Green Belt, flooding, or other specific constraints.”

To note that the current draft local plan has already set a precedent by using a much lower target. However, this target was only achieved under proposals to build on high-scoring Green Belt land and sites subject to flooding. The available evidence base clearly demonstrates constraint-trying factors and provides strong reasons for excluding these sites from housing development.”

In summary the amendment focused on resuming the local planning process with a set of guiding principles that emphasize sustainable development, housing affordability, and the efficient use of available land resources.

Cllr Howells said “Mr. Mayor, I have brought the motion before you today as I am passionate in my belief of the need to protect and preserve this Borough’s Green Belt land for the benefit and enjoyment of our current population and to secure a heritage for future generations. But most importantly, I believe I’m speaking on behalf of so many of our residents who are equally passionate to preserve our unique Borough and who have made their voices heard in so many ways.”

“Seven months ago, councillors voted with an overwhelming majority to pause the draft local plan following the huge public outcry at the proposed use of green belt land identified for development. Nothing has changed in the interim period to make it any more acceptable now than it was then. However, we can’t afford to wait for the government to change direction. We must unpause and set our own conditions. But it remains vital that we continue to safeguard our green belt.”

Cllr **Bernie Muir** (Conservative Horton) spoke on the amendment “The housing target should be achievable solely through the use of brownfield and previously developed Green Belt land with a determined focus on the art of the possible. Brownfield sites and previously developed sites are the answer, and this includes maximizing council-owned land. I have been calling on this council for years to get advice from large-scale developers as to what can be done to address the alleged barriers put forward by the council to using brownfield sites and, in particular, council-owned land, and as yet, they have resolutely refused to do so. They must do so as a matter of urgency.”

Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) called out the amendment: “ I must put on record this is not a cross-party motion, although it appears to have some merit. Labour councillors cannot support it as it’s so disingenuously drafted as to constitute a NIMBY charter. I’ve attended the same briefings as other councillors, seen the same lobbying from those behind this motion, and I know its main purpose is to minimize the number of homes built in the borough by citing excuse after excuse for not building to tie officers’ hands while purporting not to do so. It’s not a cunning plan; it’s actually very transparent. Labour is in favour of using brownfield sites, not in favor of uncontrolled and unnecessary building on the borough’s Green Belt, but we are strongly in favor of building the homes that residents need. This motion is designed to prevent that.”

“Councillor **Persand** (Con. Horton) is a strong supporter of the motion, writing in the **Epsom and Ewell Times**. He correctly pointed out that what are called housing targets are, in fact, “guidelines which provide a starting point for considering local needs.” He then wrote, “If Worthing Council can gain approval from the government’s planning inspector when they met only 25% of their target, why can’t Epsom and Ewell achieve a similar result?”

“The motion puts forward a list of so-called local constraints, exceptionalism, providing a list of reasons not to build homes for our residents. Then there’s just sloppy language dressed up as wishful thinking..”

“Finally, does anyone think that promising significant levels of proposed housing should be truly affordable to local workers has any meaning? They’re just adjectives that mean different things to different people, which will melt away at the first sign of opposition from developers.”

Cllr **Persand** spoke in favour of the motion: “This amendment is an opportunity, an opportunity for us to finally do the right thing for residents. We, as councillors, need to be strong in supporting this amendment. Point 2.1 of the officer report says officers seek confirmation for members as to what to do next. It is our role to guide policy, so let’s do that. It is important that we don’t go full circle again with this local plan and that we do learn from our mistakes. These guiding principles will ensure that we are back on the right path, delivering for residents and our community. We need a local plan that is aspirational but deliverable. This amendment lets us do that.”

Cllr **Alison Kelly** (LibDem Stamford) said “ It is clear that if we do not unpause a local plan, there are two serious consequences: developers will run with their plans on appeal, and we’ll miss the 2025 deadline and have to start from scratch, wasting money and effort. This would leave us with no control over location, density, nor social housing provision in Epsom. We are spending £1.5 million on temporary housing, and we cannot afford to let this continue. We had good feedback from residents during the consultation, and we must take their views into account, specifically with the use of the brownfield sites and the retention of the green belt.”

Cllr **Robert Leach** (RA Nonsuch) weighed in: “I think I have to start by rebutting what Labour colleagues have said. The reason that we have problems in accommodating people is because of Labour policy, not current policy. No, you may laugh; it was the Rent Act of 1977 under Harold Wilson...All over the country, lodgers were evicted. One of them was one of my uncles;... It was absolutely a dreadful piece of legislation. Perhaps our Labour friends haven’t actually listened to what was said at the Labour conference, which was only about a week or two ago, where Keir Starmer actually said, and I commend him for his honesty, that they don’t intend taking any notice of local authorities.”

Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) “ I think if we adopted this amendment, I cannot see a path that gets us to a sound local plan. What was before us tonight is the decision whether we want to unpause this local plan to allow LPPC and officers to digest the results of the consultation and take the necessary measures from that.”

Cllr **Liz Frost** (RA Woodcote and Langley) also spoke against the amendment: “.. if it were to be approved, we are likely to tie the officers up in knots.”

The amendment was defeated by 14 votes to 12 with 3 abstentions.

The Council then proceeded to debate the main motion to un-pause the work on the Local Plan (as reported in Tuesday’s Epsom and Ewell Times). The motion was approved by 21 votes for the motion and eight abstentions from the motion. There were no votes against the motion.

Related reports:

Local Plan (2022-2040) Un-Pause Recommended

Cllr Persand intervenes ahead of Local Plan debate

Drafting of Epsom and Ewell Local Plan “unpausing”?

Motion to pause Local Plan process

Local Plan (2022-2040) Un-Pause Recommended

8 November 2023



Ahead of tonight’s Extraordinary Council Meeting to be held at The Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom at 7.30pm the Epsom and Ewell Times summarises the Report submitted to Councillors by the Head of the Council’s Development Department.

In an effort to ensure the future development and planning of their locality aligns with contemporary standards and requirements, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council initiated a public consultation on the Draft Local Plan (2022-2040) from

February 1, 2023, to March 19, 2023. This process aimed to gather input from the community, enabling the council to make informed decisions regarding their local development strategy.

Following the conclusion of the consultation, the council convened an extraordinary meeting on March 22, 2023. During this meeting, the council opted to halt the Local Plan temporarily to undertake specific tasks.

Fast forward to September 24, 2023, and the Licencing and Planning Policy Committee has recommended to the Full Council that it is time to revive the Local Plan. The suggestion to un-pause the Local Plan underscores the importance of keeping the plan up to date and conforming to national planning policy.

An officer's report to Epsom and Ewell Borough Council puts forward the following recommendations:

1. Un-pause the Local Plan immediately.
2. Acknowledge the work done since the pause decision in March 2023.

The rationale behind this proposal is multifaceted. The primary reason is a legal obligation to review the Local Plan every five years. The current development plan in Epsom and Ewell includes documents that date back more than five years, such as the Epsom and Ewell Core Strategy (2007) and Plan E (2011). These documents predate significant national policy changes in the form of the National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Practice Guidance. The absence of an updated Local Plan poses risks to the council, including the potential loss of a 5-year housing land supply and implications related to the Housing Delivery Test and sustainable development.

Delays to the Local Plan timetable could also jeopardize the transitional arrangements that may be introduced through a revised National Planning Policy Framework. Furthermore, the government has reiterated the need for Local Plans prepared under the current system to be submitted for examination by June 30, 2025, and adopted by December 31, 2026. The actualization of these dates hinges on the Royal Assent of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, as well as parliamentary approval of related regulations. Thus, it is prudent to continue Local Plan development to meet these timeframes.

The existing Epsom and Ewell Development Plan consists of three documents that were locally produced. Two of these documents were adopted before the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance, which have been subject to revisions since their inception. Local Plans must adhere to national planning policy, necessitating an update to bring them into conformity.

The council initiated a consultation on the Draft Epsom and Ewell Local Plan (2022-2040) between February 1 and March 19, 2023. This Draft Local Plan outlined a growth strategy for the borough, intending to provide a minimum of 5,400 homes over the plan period. The strategy had to balance housing provision with environmental and policy constraints such as land designated for special purposes, nature reserves, and the Green Belt.

During this consultation, the council received feedback from 1,736 individuals and organizations, including residents, statutory consultees, and other stakeholders. It's essential to note that all responses have been made available for public viewing, with any inappropriate comments appropriately redacted.

A Consultation Statement will be released alongside the next version of the Proposed Submission Local Plan (Regulation 19) to summarize the main issues raised and how they've been considered.

The Council Motion, passed on March 22, 2023, mandated the Local Plan's pause for specific tasks, including further work on brownfield sites, consideration of alternatives that exclude green belt sites, analysis of future housing needs based on 2018 data, and a clearer understanding of the government's intentions regarding green belt protections and housing targets.

The selected workstreams under the Council Motion have been completed, including the call for sites process and the publication of responses to the Draft Local Plan. Thirteen new sites were submitted during this process. However, the decision to un-pause the Local Plan is crucial for further progress, such as revising the Local Plan timetable and site selection, taking into account the latest information.

The Council Motion imposed restrictions on what work could be undertaken in preparing the Local Plan, making it necessary to formally un-pause the plan for further progression. Un-pausing the Local Plan will lead to the production of a revised timetable and the advancement of other critical pieces of evidence. Work on site selection will also commence, considering the latest information on land availability.

"It's important to understand that un-pausing the Local Plan doesn't mean the Proposed Submission version of the plan will remain unchanged. Additional sites have been proposed through the call for sites process, and the Proposed Submission Local Plan will undergo public consultation."

However, it has also been reported to Councillors that there are limited actively promoted sites for development within the Longmead and Kiln Lane areas. The existing employment sites are well-occupied and support various businesses, indicating a need for additional land to accommodate more employment space, including uses suitable for an industrial estate. The council has already invested significant resources in exploring opportunities for industrial estate redevelopment.

Further investigation is deemed reasonable only if a substantial portion of land becomes available through the call for sites process. It is suggested that the council be formally approached to consider making its land available for redevelopment. Obtaining a formal response through the call for sites process would provide essential evidence to inform future decisions regarding the location of development in the Local Plan.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill is in progress, and if implemented, it will significantly alter how Local Plans are produced. This shift may lead to more streamlined Local Plans and a focus on spatial aspects over detailed development

management policies. Transitional arrangements will apply, and the government has set a deadline of June 30, 2025, for the submission of Local Plans prepared under the current system.

In conclusion, this report recommends un-pausing the Local Plan to ensure it aligns with national planning policy and complies with legal requirements. Reviving the Local Plan is essential to the future development and planning of Epsom and Ewell Borough.

Drafting of Epsom and Ewell Local Plan “unpausing”?

Motion to pause Local Plan process

Cllr McCormick’s own answers on Local Plan

Public meeting on Local Plan dominated by greenbelters.

Housing need or desire?

Can Epsom and Ewell get more dense?

Cllr Persand intervenes ahead of Local Plan debate

8 November 2023



Opinion from Councillor **Kieran Persand** (Conservative Horton Ward) on the Local Plan business.

Tonight, at 7:30pm, your Epsom & Ewell Borough Councillors will be meeting to decide on whether or not to unpause the Local Plan.

However, this meeting holds greater significance than just the unpausing. It is about the future of our community, and whether we want to protect what makes our borough unique, both for us now and for future generations.

Being born and raised in Epsom and Ewell, I have cherished memories in every corner of the borough. Whether that is playing football at Gibraltar Recreation Ground in Ewell on a cold Sunday morning; walking our dog on a sunny Wednesday afternoon on Hook Road Arena; or my parents buying me an ice cream as a treat on the Downs. Our green spaces and their protection are vital for our community.

And so, it saddens me that since the meeting to pause on 22 nd March, there has been no change, nor even a commitment to change from the Council on the direction of the Local Plan. As it stands, there is still an inclusion of over 50 hectares of greenfield, Greenbelt land.

We are probably in a worse position than we were seven months ago as fewer sites have come forward than anticipated in the call for sites process.

It is clear what residents want and need. You made your voices heard. Over 11,000 of you signed a petition demanding for the removal of Greenbelt land from the Local Plan. It is a shame that you haven’t been properly listened to. Since being elected in May, I’ve been determined to change that and build on the work of Cllr Bernie Muir and Chris Grayling MP.

You may have heard people say that it is because of the Government that the Council must build on Greenbelt land, and that there isn’t a choice. This is untrue. There is no mandatory housing target, there are only guidelines which provide a starting point for considering local needs. It’s clearly stated in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) that it is not a requirement to build on Greenbelt land in order to meet specific housing levels.

It is a misguided and hopefully short-lived choice, that Epsom & Ewell Borough Council have taken to propose building on Greenbelt land. If Worthing Council can gain approval from the government’s Planning Inspector when they met only 25% of their target, why can’t Epsom and Ewell achieve a similar result? We already have ample evidence to support us in planning for a realistic and achievable target of 3,800 homes, including truly affordable homes for those in greatest needs, which can be achieved solely using brownfield land. This is the direction we should take.

The current NPPF guidance gives us the ability to remove Greenbelt land. This is stated in Para. 11. We don’t have to wait for any changes to the Framework, we can be proactive now.

There is a need for housing in Epsom and Ewell but nothing in the current Local Plan addresses that need. What is needed is truly affordable housing for key workers and young people, and the possibility of housing stock for local Housing Associations to provide for those who cannot otherwise reach the first rung of the housing ladder. ‘Affordable homes’ are not £500,000 -£1m properties, as these will never be affordable for the average worker.

We need a plan that maximises our current urban brownfield space, not a plan that wants to build in fields and woodland,

in critical drainage areas, or areas in which there is insufficient infrastructure. We need a plan that is creative and forward-thinking.

At the Full Council meeting on 25th July, I submitted a motion, seconded by Cllr Muir, for the removal of Greenbelt land from the Local Plan and the protection of Greenbelt boundaries. However, this was rejected by the Council, with no adequate reasoning provided, and so didn't go in front of Councillors to debate.

After that, I quickly realised that for real change to happen with the Local Plan, we all needed to work together. And so, myself and a group of like-minded Councillors from across the political spectrum have been working collaboratively together with the intent to set the Local Plan on the right course. It's been incredible and reaffirms what local politics should be about - doing the best for residents.

We have now submitted an amendment for the meeting today, calling for the removal of Greenbelt land; protect the existing Greenbelt boundaries; and for there to be commitments to have truly affordable housing.

I want residents to remember - if Councillors do vote this amendment down. They are effectively voting against the protection of our greenbelt land; they are voting against having truly affordable homes for people who need them; they are voting against protecting the character of our unique area; and they are voting against the people they serve.

If the Local Plan is to be unpaused, there needs to be guiding principles that provide clear direction for the Local Plan over the coming months, we cannot be in a position where nothing has changed. This would be a waste of resources and taxpayer money.

So, I urge all my colleagues in the Council chamber tonight, whether Residents' Association, Liberal Democrats, or Labour, to work proactively and collaboratively together to realign the Local Plan to address the needs and concerns of residents and provide the strong direction you deserve by voting for the proposed amendment.

Play streets coming to Epsom and Ewell

8 November 2023



A closed-street scheme is being launched in Epsom to "get more children away from their ipads and TVs and actually play outside".

A 'play street' for Miles Road was approved by **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council** after residents pushed for temporary closures so their children could play outside.

Councillor **Clive Woodbridge**, chair of the community and wellbeing committee, said: "More than 90 local authorities have introduced the Playing Out scheme in their areas, and I'm really pleased to see this initiative come to Epsom and Ewell. "We believe the scheme will help support the mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing of children and the community by creating a safe and inclusive space for everyone to play in and by fostering a much needed sense of neighbourliness."

The scheme has already been adopted by neighbouring Elmbridge Borough Council.

Playing Out is a not-for-profit organisation set up by parents in 2009 with the aim of getting young people out and about more freely.

The schemes, which have the backing of Play England, allow for streets that are not a main road or bus routes to be closed to through traffic for up to three hours.

Play streets are resident-led and need the agreement of neighbours. They are designed to give children the freedom to play outside and bring communities together.

Volunteers steward the roads and parents are responsible for their own children.

Applications to become a play street are handled by the same council team responsible for street party road closures.

Addressing the October 10 meeting, Cllr Woodbridge said: "We've looked at it and wherever it's been adopted there has been some significant benefits and it's a useful scheme."

He told the committee the decision would be reviewed in a year to determine what, if any, changes were needed. He added: "But it's quite valuable to get it up and running. "One of the most important things is to let our residents know that they can do this. "It would be great to get more children away from their ipads and TVs and actually play outside."

As part of the application process Surrey County Council and the emergency services are notified of any road closures.

Cllr Chris Aimes (Lab, Court Ward) said: "I and my fellow councillors from Court Ward are very much in favour of this."

Satellite comms. pass Surrey Uni test

8 November 2023



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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No reservations to put reserves in "Thames to Downs"

8 November 2023

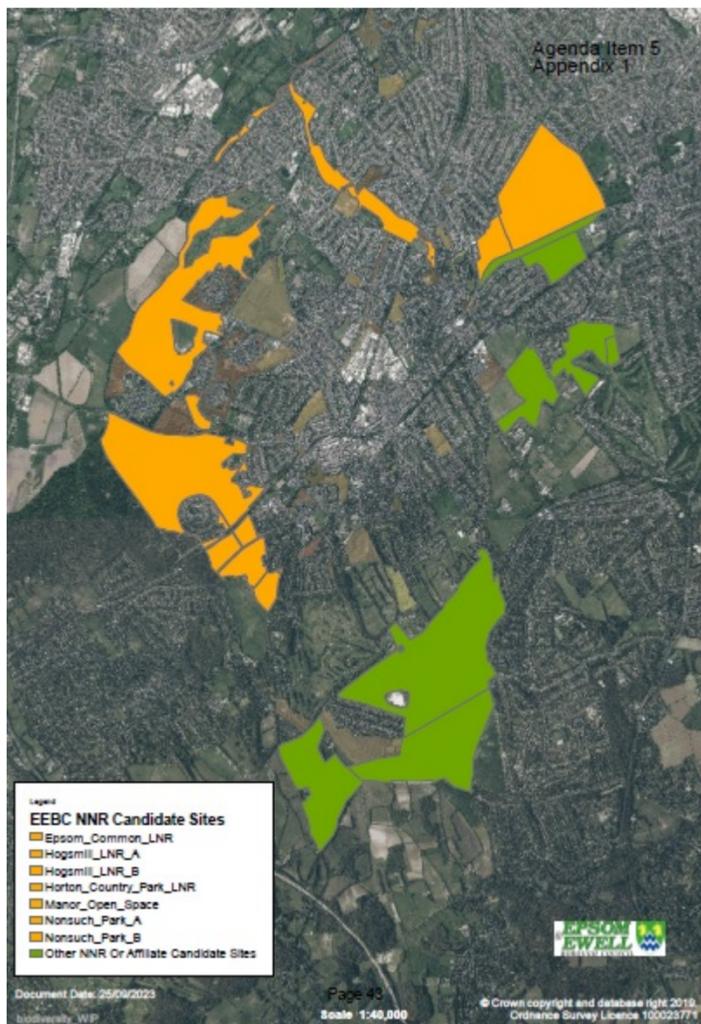


Epsom & Ewell Council Eyes Inclusion of Local Natural reserves in the 'Thames To Downs' National Nature Reserve.

The Council's Environment Committee 17th October debated an ambitious move to preserve its natural heritage and enhance biodiversity. The Council is considering the inclusion of several of its green spaces within the proposed "Thames To Downs National Nature Reserve" (NNR). The council plans to report back to the committee if Natural England deems them suitable for this scheme.

The recommendation comes as a bid to consolidate and expand upon the Council's ongoing efforts in managing biodiversity and public access within its open spaces. The move also carries the potential for national recognition, designating the council as an 'Approved Body' known for maintaining its land to the highest environmental standards on a

permanent basis.



The NNR management criteria align with the council’s strategy of balancing biodiversity conservation with ensuring public access to these natural sanctuaries. Collaborating as part of the NNR partnership with neighboring landowners is anticipated to attract substantial external funding to aid in long-term land preservation and management.

Furthermore, inclusion in the NNR not only fulfills key service priorities but also demonstrates the council’s commitment to its statutory responsibilities. It aligns seamlessly with the ‘Biodiversity Duty’ and other environmental requirements, such as upcoming Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

The NNR status will not only showcase the borough as an exceptional place to live and work but also contribute significantly to preserving and expanding local biodiversity.

Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve (LNR), a site of national importance for nature, gained recognition as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) alongside Ashted Common back in 1955. In the 2005-2015 Epsom Common Management Plan, the council committed to achieving a ‘Favorable’ SSSI condition assessment for Epsom Common. Subsequently, the goal was to apply for National Nature Reserve status, encompassing the entirety of the Epsom & Ashted Commons SSSI as part of a National Nature Reserve.

The endeavor to secure NNR status for Epsom Common LNR is well-documented in the council’s current Epsom Common LNR Management Plan 2016-2116 and the Climate Change Action Plan.

An officer explained to the committee: “We are really keen that Epsom Common joins Ashted Common in being declared a National Nature Reserve. We’ve all been set up for that for over a decade. It’s in the management plan; it’s Council policy to do that. But Natural England has changed its approach to National Nature Reserves in the last two or three years. They have put forward the offer to work with us and other partners to form a much larger, what they would term a super-national Nature Reserve, going from the Thames at Kingston to the North Downs.”

Cllr **Julie Morris** (LibDem College) raised the question what legal status such a NNR would have? Could landowners within them nevertheless develop their land? The officer answered: “Epsom Common, for example, is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and that’s the strongest legal protection that you can afford a site like that. The other sites that are being put forward are in the Green Belt. They are sites of nature conservation importance. They have ancient woodlands. All of those are material considerations for a planning application. Alistair Helwell, who is the lead person at Natural England for National Nature Reserves, does make a point of saying it is a declaration, not a designation. So it doesn’t afford greater protection, but it does afford a greater level of kudos, obviously”

National Nature Reserves (NNRs) are vital for preserving significant habitats, species, and geology while serving as invaluable ‘outdoor laboratories’ for research. These reserves offer opportunities for schools, special interest groups, and the general public to directly experience wildlife and learn more about nature conservation.

Currently, England boasts 221 NNRs covering over 105,000 hectares of land, approximately 0.7% of the country’s surface. The largest among them is The Wash, sprawling over almost 8,800 hectares, while Dorset’s Horn Park Quarry is the smallest at 0.32 hectares. The five proposed sites in Epsom & Ewell together span an impressive 455 hectares, equivalent to 13.4% of the borough’s land.

A 'Favorable' SSSI condition assessment was successfully attained in 2010, prompting the council to commence the NNR application process. Unfortunately, due to funding cuts at Natural England, the application was postponed for nearly a decade. It was only in 2021 that the council was approached once again by Natural England, offering renewed prospects for an NNR application. In 2022, Natural England's approach evolved, emphasizing the creation of more extensive landscape-scale NNRs in line with the government's 'Making Space For Nature' initiative.

The council has been invited to put forward other sites under its ownership/management for possible inclusion in a landscape-scale NNR stretching from the Thames at Kingston to Box Hill on the North Downs.

Five potential sites in Epsom & Ewell, including Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve (LNR), Manor Open Space, Horton Country Park LNR, Hogsmill LNR, and Nonsuch Park, have been identified. Natural England has suggested an affiliate status for sites primarily designated for purposes other than nature conservation, such as Epsom Downs. It's important to note that the inclusion of Nonsuch Park will require separate permission from the Nonsuch Park Joint Management Committee.

A comprehensive partnership with a variety of landowners is envisioned, including local authorities, Surrey Wildlife Trust, National Trust, Woodland Trust, Crown Estates, Merton College (Oxford), and City of London (Ashted Common).

The unanimous decision of the committee to include the named sites within Epsom & Ewell for consideration will be followed by assessments of their suitability and the council's capability as an 'Approved Body' for managing an NNR.

Chalk Pit debate deferred by late abatement

8 November 2023



The Environment Committee of **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council** 17th October was to discuss a motion proposed at a Full Council meeting on July 25, 2023, regarding a noise nuisance issue at the Chalk Pit site in College Road, Epsom. The motion had suggested that the Council should install professional noise measurement equipment at the site for a minimum of three months and respond to any noise regulation breaches with noise abatement orders. Councillor **Bernie Muir** (Conservative Horton) had introduced the motion at Full Council.

However, the Chair of the Committee, Cllr John Beckett (RA Auriol) announced: ""Members, as you are aware, I made the decision to withdraw this item from the agenda this evening in light of the recent enforcement activity last week. This activity resulted in an abatement notice being served to an operator at the Chalk Pit. I am very conscious of the members' and the public's interests in this matter. I am keen to ensure that the proposed motion is debated with full consideration of the circumstances, including the impact of the recently served abatement notice. Therefore, I propose that this item is deferred and considered at the next meeting of this committee in January."

There were no objections and Cllr Beckett added that there will be "No further debate, questions, or statements will take place regarding the Chalk Pit until the meeting on the 9th (January).

The Councillors had received an officer's report written before the abatement notice was served and that report is summarised here:

The report provided background information about the Chalk Pit, explaining its historical use and current industrial activities. It highlighted the various sources of noise on the site, such as equipment, machinery, road vehicle arrivals and departures, and more. The site was in close proximity to residential properties, and complaints about noise had increased since 2021.

Surrey County Council has jurisdiction over waste processing at the site, while other activities are regulated by the Borough Council. A planning application was submitted by Skip It, including changes and enclosure construction to control noise emissions. The Environment Agency and local authorities regulate noise and dust issues, depending on the source.

The report described the council's actions in response to noise complaints, including extensive monitoring and investigation. Despite clear evidence of audible noise, the council's officers believed they lacked sufficient evidence to issue an abatement notice, citing the complexity of the issue and the need for unequivocal evidence.

The report noted that residents had the option to pursue their own civil legal action under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 if they wished to explore this further.

The council had taken some enforcement actions, including Community Protection Warning Notices, but no abatement notices had been issued due to the lack of evidence.

The report presented three options for the committee to consider:

1. Close the investigation with no further action due to insufficient evidence.
2. Keep the issue under review and seek funding for enforcement action if sufficient evidence emerges.
3. Recommend allocating funding to hire external noise consultants to conduct a fresh investigation based on recent complaints and site changes.

Option 3 would require additional funding from sources like reserves and would only be pursued in the event of substantial and substantiated complaints about noise nuisance. Officers asked Councillors “In deciding whether to support renewed investigations on top of those that have already taken place, Members are asked to consider the likelihood of whether renewed investigation would ultimately lead to successful enforcement action and, by extension, whether it would be an effective use of limited Council resources.”

Related reports:

Will the dust ever settle on Chalk Pit conflict?

Noble housing intentions?

8 November 2023



Crest Nicholson and the Vistry Group have partnered for a “sustainable development” initiative near Noble Park in Epsom. They plan to submit a comprehensive planning application to **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council** this Autumn. The proposal aims to construct around 90 new homes, with 40% allocated as affordable housing.

The project includes the creation of communal open spaces and green areas, featuring a community orchard and a children’s play area. Noble Park allotments will remain untouched, highlighting a “commitment to preserving community assets”. Additionally, plans include dedicated private parking facilities for allotment holders.

The developers have invited the local community to participate in shaping this initiative by providing input and ideas. Residents can offer feedback or seek more information through the ‘Feedback and Contact’ tab on the following unattributed website. <http://nobleparkconsultation.com/>

The project is located on 5.67 hectares of land to the east of the existing Noble Park development, at the intersection of West Park Road and Horton Lane, with vehicular access from West Park Road. While specific timelines depend on the planning process, construction may begin in 2025, contributing to family housing and affordable homes in the area. This initiative “aims to address housing shortages and bring positive change to the community”.

Epsom and Ewell Times can confirm that Epsom and Ewell Borough Council will meet at 7.30pm on 24th October, to decide whether to “un-pause” progress on the Local Plan. The Plan that will establish the planning policy framework for where and how many houses may be built in the Borough in the future.

Related reports:

Drafting of Epsom and Ewell Local Plan “unpausing”?

Motion to pause Local Plan process

The cost of Surrey’s failed ULEZ challenge

8 November 2023



Surrey County Council spent £150,000 on a failed court challenge to the ULEZ expansion.

The county council together with the London boroughs of Bexley, Bromley, Harrow and Hillingdon launched a legal challenge to the expansion of the zone, taking it to the High Court.

Objecting to the plans for the zone's expansions, district and borough councils along the border called for a scrappage scheme to be extended to Surrey residents, and for delaying the date of the expansion.

The expansion of the zone, which aims to cut harmful pollution in London, meant it reached down to the borders of Surrey, leading to concerns about residents travelling over the border for work, school or medical appointments.

Entering the zone in a non-compliant car, usually petrol cars registered before 2005 and diesel cars registered before September 2015, costs drivers £12.50 per day. But a ruling in July determined there was no legal impediment to the expansion, which came in to force in August.

Speaking at the time of the High Court's decision, the county council's leader, Councillor Tim Oliver (Conservative, Weybridge), said while the council respected the court decision, it was "incredibly disappointing".

He added: "This has always been about protecting Surrey residents, many of whom will now be significantly socially and financially impacted by the Mayor's decision as they go about essential, everyday journeys, without any mitigation in place to minimise this.

"Our concerns, which have never been addressed by The Mayor despite our continued efforts, forced these legal proceedings to ensure we did all we possibly could to have the voice of our residents heard."

A TfL spokesperson said: "Following the conclusion of the judicial review, the court ordered the claimants to pay our legal costs and to pay £280,000 on account, which has been received. We will be seeking the remainder of our costs in accordance with the order".

A county council spokesperson confirmed a £44,000 payment had been agreed for the further contribution last week rather than the full £56,000 as requested by TfL.

Surrey County Council has confirmed its total costs for the challenge come to £139,528.20. This figure includes a £100,000 contribution to TfL costs and a £39,528.20 contribution to the five councils' total costs.

TfL's costs will be split between the five councils which brought the challenge.

Related reports:

Signs of Surrey resistance to ULEZ continue

London Mayor confirms drive of ULEZ to Epsom border. ULEZ explainer.

High Court gives ULEZ the green light to Epsom's borders

ULEZ court challenge begins

Image: copyright Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd

Council Grapples with Rising Cost of Homelessness

8 November 2023

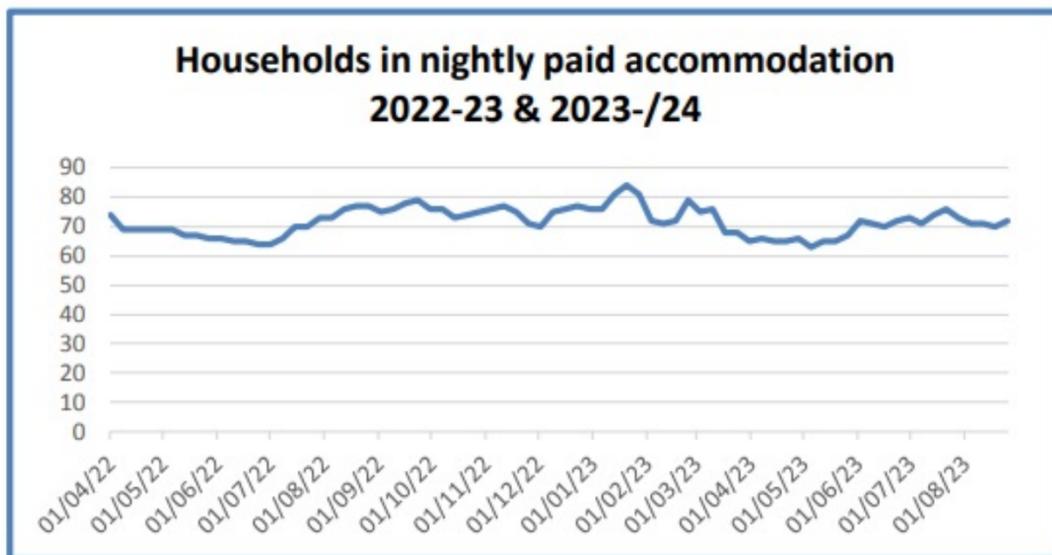


In an ongoing challenge to manage rising homelessness-related costs, **Epsom & Ewell Borough Council** (EEBC) finds itself confronted with an impending financial strain exceeding their 2023/24 budget. This report sheds light on the concerted efforts made to mitigate the budgetary overruns and identifies available funding avenues to cover these increased expenditures.

The Community and Wellbeing Committee 10th October accepted the following recommendations:

1. Acknowledge the measures taken over the past 6-12 months to address homelessness.
2. Approve the utilization of the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) and homelessness grant reserves to meet the projected increase in expenses, thereby ensuring EEBC complies with its obligations under the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
3. Note that a comprehensive update will be presented at the Community & Wellbeing Committee in March 2024.

EEBC is bound by statutory duties outlined in the Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Non-compliance could expose the council to legal challenges.



The Committee were advised of escalating expenditure: EEBC’s budget is stretched thin due to mounting expenses for temporary accommodation in fulfilling their homelessness obligations. Costs for 2023/24 are poised to surpass £1.5 million, primarily owing to an increasing number of homelessness cases, a 15% surge in rental rates from accommodation providers, and a shortage of alternative housing options.

Officers have been operating in an increasingly demanding climate, with the cost-of-living crisis amplifying the complexity of issues presented by households in need of assistance.

The cost-of-living crisis, accompanied by rent hikes, has exacerbated housing supply issues, with heightened competition from other local authorities further straining the available housing stock.

The Homelessness Strategy & Action Plan 2022-27 was adopted in November 2022, outlining key objectives and actions. Progress has been made in early intervention and prevention.

Competition and energy cost increases have pushed up the cost of accommodating households in temporary arrangements, despite the team’s adaptive procurement approach.

Officers occasionally resort to using Travelodge as accommodation due to a lack of alternatives, incurring a substantial cost of around £140 per night. The average net cost of nightly paid accommodation for small families has surged by over 18% compared to 2022/23, reaching approximately £23,500 annually.

EEBC introduced a Private Sector Leasing (PSL) scheme to lease properties from private landlords for temporary accommodation, offering significant cost savings compared to expensive options like Travelodge.

The challenges faced by the housing services teams are likely to persist in the coming year, and high numbers of households in temporary accommodation are expected to persist.

Economic uncertainties and factors such as reduced housing development and the closure of bridging accommodation for refugees will continue to exert pressure on housing services.

Monthly reporting to the Committee Chair and Vice Chair will provide ongoing updates on the situation, with a commitment to implement actions as per the Homelessness Strategy.

Promotion of the PSL scheme to landlords will be pursued, and collaboration with housing associations and partners to boost the supply of affordable housing will remain a priority.

In sum, EEBC is grappling with the burden of homelessness-related expenses, which, despite diligent efforts, continue to rise. The council faces the critical task of managing these costs to fulfill its legal obligations while seeking innovative solutions to address housing supply challenges in the community. The situation will be closely monitored, with continued engagement with stakeholders to identify viable solutions.

The recommendations were agreed by the committee.

Image: Evelyn Simak cc-by-sa/2.0

Housing Allocation Policy Undergoes Updates

8 November 2023



In a bid to modernize the housing allocation process and enhance the efficiency of social housing distribution, the Council adopted a series of amendments to the Housing Allocation Policy and Choice Based Letting Scheme. These changes aim to align the policy with recent legislative updates, reinforce penalties for fraudulent activity, and refine financial thresholds for eligibility.

Cllr **Clive Woodbridge**, Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee (RA Ewell Village) introduced the item at its meeting on 10th October: “It’s over six years since this was last reviewed significantly, and the changes proposed to the policy are intended to introduce considerable more flexibility so that we can widen the range of people that we can assist through the scheme. So, the committee has been asked to review it and say whether they agree with the various changes that are being made”.

During the discussion Cllr Woodbridge asked: “How has the Domestic Abuse Act changed the way we have to implement our policy, and how is that reflected in the document before us tonight?” The Council Officer explained: “Our previous policy was compliant anyway, it just didn’t make a particular reference to The Domestic Abuse Act. We have exceptions within the allocation policy which allow us to look at each case on a case-by-case basis. However, the housing needs register is a waiting list and often it can’t address people who have an urgent need for rehousing, so often the more appropriate route for people who are at immediate risk of domestic abuse is to go through the housing options process. However, the policy is designed so we don’t put barriers up for those that do want to be on our housing needs register, so it doesn’t have a requirement to have lived in our borough and is flexible to take those needs into account.”

Cllr **Alison Kelly** (LibDem Stamford Ward) expressed her concern about the position of “care leavers” (persons who have been in care between the ages of 16 and 25 who lived in care for at least 13 weeks since their 14th birthday) and asked that each such applicant for housing was considered flexibly and treated on a “case by case” basis. The officer responded that “At a practical level we would always treat each case on a “case by case basis””. She added that the care leaver policy was being looked at on a Surrey wide basis.

In December 2014, a joint Social and Strategy and Resources committee approved fundamental changes to the existing Housing Allocation Policy. The policy governs how housing needs are prioritized, Housing Needs Register applications are assessed, and social housing is allocated. Following extensive consultations with key stakeholders, the revised Housing Allocation Policy was formally endorsed and implemented in June 2015.

While the policy has effectively met its intended goals, certain aspects are now due for review to ensure its continued relevance and responsiveness to current challenges. Consequently, several adjustments to qualifying and non-qualifying criteria, along with administrative procedures, have been proposed to keep the policy up-to-date. The key changes include:

1. **Fraud & False Information:**

Revisions to the qualifying criteria and penalties for applicants involved in fraudulent applications or false information. These changes will align with the ongoing efforts of Reigate and Banstead’s Fraud Investigation team.

2. **Legislative Compliance:**

Ensuring the Housing Allocation Policy complies with evolving legislation, statutory guidance, and case law.

3. **Alignment with Surrey-Wide Protocols:**

Adapting the policy to any adjustments in joint protocols implemented across Surrey.

4. **Financial Qualifying Criteria:**

Reviewing the financial criteria for inclusion on the Housing Needs Register. The current thresholds, set in 2015, restrict single people or couples without dependent children with gross annual earnings of £25,000 or more and couples or single parents with dependent children with gross annual earnings of £50,000 or more.

Proposed Changes:

- **Fraud & False Information:** Strengthened criteria and penalties for applicants making fraudulent applications. Disqualification from the Housing Needs Register for two years for fraudulent applicants and five years for those convicted of fraud or deception.
- **Legislative Compliance:** Updates to reflect changes in legislation and statutory guidance affecting the Housing Allocation Policy.
- **Alignment with Surrey-Wide Protocols:** Incorporating changes introduced in the Surrey Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- **Financial Qualifying Criteria:** Adjusting the income thresholds, increasing the current £25,000 gross annual earnings for single people/couples without dependent children to £40,000, and the £50,000 threshold for couples/single parents with dependent children to £65,000.

These adjustments are backed by a recent benchmarking exercise across Surrey, which highlights the need to ensure a balanced mix of households reliant on welfare benefits and those employed, especially for one-bedroom properties. Additionally, the proposed income thresholds align with the income levels at which applicants would no longer qualify for welfare benefits or universal credit.

Furthermore, the changes aim to address the challenges faced by low-income households in private rental accommodation, who are often limited by the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates, causing a substantial shortfall

between LHA rates and median private sector rents.

The proposed adjustments are a comprehensive attempt to modernize the Housing Allocation Policy, making it more equitable, responsive, and reflective of the current housing landscape. The committee unanimously adopted the revised policy.

Improving housing improvements for the vulnerable

8 November 2023



10th October Epsom and Ewell Council's **Community and Wellbeing Committee** agreed a Revised Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy to Expand Support for Vulnerable Residents.

The item was introduced by committee Chair **Cllr. Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village). In response to updated central government guidelines, the local Council is poised to adopt a more flexible and proactive approach to assist a broader range of households through its revised Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy. The move comes as a result of increased funding for the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) program via the Better Care Fund. This additional funding has enabled the Council to harness the powers under the Regulatory Reform Order 2002 (RRO) to introduce a Discretionary Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy, aiming to provide support for vulnerable residents.

The existing policy has proven effective in the past but is now undergoing revision as the Council finds itself with a significant surplus of DFG funds, providing an opportunity to extend its assistance further. Notably, central government's guidance, released in March 2022, has directed the Council to utilize the discretionary powers within the RRO to meet the needs of disabled and vulnerable individuals in the community more comprehensively. This flexibility includes adaptations to means test requirements and grant caps, while also offering discretionary financial aid for purposes such as home safety and hospital discharge support.

The Council's objective is to ensure equitable and accessible financial support reaches a wide array of residents. To achieve this, a revised policy is being proposed to accommodate an increased number of vulnerable residents.

Background:

- The Council's responsibilities concerning financial assistance for repair and adaptations are regulated by the Housing Grants, Construction, and Regeneration Act 1996 and the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO).
- The Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy was first introduced in 2018.
- The Council annually receives ringfenced central government funding for DFGs, totaling £785,282 in the last three years. Local authorities are encouraged to maximize the use of their discretionary powers under the RRO to respond to local needs, necessitating the formulation of a published policy.
- In the fiscal year 2022/23, the Home Improvement Agency collaborated with various organizations to enhance the promotion of their services and grants, leading to the completion of 43 DFGs worth £616,000 for a wide range of adaptations, including level access showers, stairlifts, ramps, and wheelchair accessible extensions. The handyman service completed 241 jobs, addressing needs such as grab rails, minor repairs, and garden clearances.
- The integration of services between Housing, Social & Adult Care, and the National Health Service aims to support vulnerable households in remaining in their homes whenever possible.
- Poor housing can be a significant barrier for vulnerable, elderly, and disabled individuals, contributing to immobility, social exclusion, ill health, and depression. Housing assistance policies can mitigate these challenges by enabling people to live independently in secure, well-maintained, and suitable housing.

Proposed Policy Changes:

The Council's revised policy includes several notable changes to better support residents:

- Broadened eligibility criteria, including the removal of means test requirements for prevention grants and the inclusion of council tax support as a passporting benefit to streamline access.

- A more flexible application process and forms.
- A new exceptions clause for individualized case handling.
- An increased maximum grant level to account for rising construction costs and complex needs.
- Assistance extended to those with terminal illnesses and dementia.
- Introduction of loans from the Parity Trust for cases requiring additional funds or where grant requirements aren't met.
- Accessible housing grants to meet the growing demand in the housing market for disabled individuals who are either homeless or in need of more suitable properties.
- Addition of a prevention grant to enhance health and safety in homes in alignment with the NHS and Social and Adult Care.

The Council's commitment to expanding its support through this revised policy reflects its dedication to fostering safer, more accessible housing options for vulnerable residents.

The revised policy was unanimously agreed by the committee.

Preparing for Winter with true grit

8 November 2023



A total of 38 brand new gritting vehicles are now available to help keep Surrey moving during the colder months.

The new vehicles operate more efficiently, have state-of-the art technology on board and produce less carbon emissions. They will grit Surrey's roads before and during severe weather, using the 10,141 tonnes of salt stored at our four Surrey depots. Winter arrangements typically begin in October and run until the end of March although this period can be extended depending on weather conditions.

Children from Surrey schools are being invited to name the new fleet with winning entries to be announced later this month.

Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth said, *"We're committed to keeping drivers safe here in Surrey and investing in our roads.*

"When temperatures plummet, our highways teams across the county will be ready to work around the clock to keep traffic moving on our primary routes using our new, efficient gritters.

"I'm delighted that our school children are getting involved in naming the new gritters and look forward to seeing their suggestions."

Ed Jennings, Lead Operations Manager for Ringway said, *"We are ready and prepared for winter, with a team of experienced gritter drivers - many of whom have delivered the service for over ten years.*

"Our investment in 38 brand new gritters is a demonstration of our commitment to Surrey and enables us to continue our drive towards a greener future. Our Immediate Response Centre will continue to support communities 24/7 and will work closely with the Met Office throughout the season.

Day travelcards to be scrapped?

8 November 2023



Surrey County Council could call on central government to intervene in “discriminatory” plans to scrap day travelcards in to London.

The travelcards mean Surrey residents can travel in to the capital on a single ticket for use on Transport for London (TfL) services including the underground, bus, tram, Docklands Light Railway and London Overground. However their future is in doubt.

If day travelcards are withdrawn, it will mean Surrey residents would need to buy separate tickets for rail travel and TfL journeys. TfL has given notice that it will withdraw from the funding agreement for travel cards, with a mayoral decision on the matter showing the arrangements meant TfL was “effectively under-funded” at a cost of around £40m a year.

A Surrey County Council meeting on Tuesday (October 10) will debate a motion from the councillor responsible for transport, infrastructure and growth calling for London’s mayor to withdraw the proposals.

Councillor **Matt Furniss** (Conservative, Shalford) called the proposal “discriminatory” and will ask the council’s leader to write to Sadiq Khan outlining the impact on Surrey residents, the negative impact on the economy of London and “the need to abandon plans to remove day travelcards”.

His motion will also ask the council’s leader, Cllr **Tim Oliver** (Conservative, Weybridge) to write to the Secretary of State for Transport “urging him to intervene in this matter”.

A TfL spokesperson said central government demands for the organisation to save money and “generate significant amounts of additional revenue” had led to proposals to stop accepting day travelcards on the TfL network.

They said the Mayor had “reluctantly” instructed TfL to give six month’s notice to withdraw from the travelcard agreement, but that the decision was reversible.

The spokesperson said: “This is the first stage in a process and there are no changes to tickets at this time. This is an operational decision that has been taken now to ensure that TfL meets the requirements of its funding agreement, but TfL continues to look for alternative options.”

A Mayoral decision on the plans said an assessment had found that customers travelling from outside London may see prices go up if day travelcards were withdrawn.

It said: “This is because the current travelcard agreement pays an amount to TfL for these tickets that is well below the price of the same tickets sold within London; TfL is effectively under-funded by the travelcard agreement at a total cost of approximately £40m a year.

“As a result, this proposal is estimated to generate approximately £40m per year for TfL, which will form part of the additional revenue mandated by government for TfL to achieve.”

In his motion, Cllr Furniss said: “The proposals to remove day travelcards constitute an unfair, unacceptable and expensive levy on our residents who wish or need to travel to London. The proposals have deliberately targeted the removal of the day travelcard as a method to generate additional income for TfL. It is anticipated by the Mayor’s own consultation that the withdrawal of day travelcards will result in rail operators ceasing to sell Zone 1-6 travelcards.”

Opposition councillors will call for TfL, along with the Department for Transport (DfT) and train operators, to come together to find a solution, and for zone 6 to be expanded to include some Surrey stations.

Cllr **Catherine Powell** (Farnham Residents, Farnham North), leader of the Surrey residents’ association and independent group on the county council, said key stakeholders needed to work together to find alternative funding in order to keep day travelcards.

She told the LDRS: “We need to encourage the use of public transport as part of moving towards net zero, to remove day travelcards would be a retrospective step.”

The TfL spokesperson said: “While this six-month notice-period is now underway, this decision remains reversible and does not therefore mean that day travelcards will be withdrawn. TfL is keen to work collaboratively with the DfT and Rail Delivery Group to discuss options that would allow day travelcards to continue to be provided, while ensuring TfL can meet the requirements of the funding settlement with government.” They said active discussions were ongoing.

The Labour group leader on the county council, Cllr **Robert Evans** (Stanwell and Stanwell Moor), said TfL was “not being funded properly” and couldn’t do everything it wanted to do.

Also calling for more Surrey stations to be included in zone 6, Cllr Evans added: “You can argue why is transport for London giving subsidies to Surrey? Why would expect them to do so?”

Councillors for the Green Party and Labour will put forward a suggested amendment to the motion, removing the call for the transport secretary to intervene.

Cllr **Jonathan Essex** (Redhill East), the Green group leader, said: “We want this situation to actually be resolved by bringing together in an open and transparent way the people who need to resolve it.

“I hope that by putting the amendment to the motion down, we will try to shift this from a political argument into an acceptance that people need to get round the table and actually resolve this.”

The motion will instead call for the leader to write to **Sadiq Khan** and the transport secretary to request a joint meeting with TfL, DfT and train operating companies.

This meeting would “discuss the impact of the current travelcard proposals in Surrey and other areas neighbouring London” and the need to “agree a fair funding settlement to resolve this matter”.

The amendment will request that the negotiations also look to extend zone 6 to areas of Surrey bordering London “to increase Surrey residents’ direct access to contactless TfL fares and so cheaper train travel”.

The meeting will be held at the council’s Reigate headquarters at 10am on Tuesday, October 10.

Image - Epsom Downs station. TheFrog001 CCO 1.0