

Paving the way to better regulation?



The Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has voted to dispense its current pavement licence policy, rather than it being updated to copy the .GOV guidance. This change comes as part of a broader review conducted during an Environment Committee Meeting held on July 16th. Instead, Officers of the council will continue to determine applications under delegated authority, with the Council’s website linking to the .GOV guidance.

[This post corrects an earlier post that incorrectly inferred that applications would no longer be processed by EEBC.]

The original pavement licence policy, introduced under the Government’s Business and Planning Act of 2020, was a temporary measure designed to assist the hospitality sector amid the economic turmoil caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. It allowed cafes and similar businesses to place removable tables and chairs on adjacent council-owned highways for a capped fee of £100, a significant reduction compared to the more cumbersome procedures under the 1980’s Highways Act.

As part of the 2024 Levelling Up agenda, this temporary policy was transformed into a permanent measure. However, the cost cap was raised, allowing councils to charge up to £500 for new licences and £350 for renewals. This shift aimed to provide local authorities with greater financial flexibility.

The decision has sparked a range of reactions. Some view the licence fee as an additional financial burden on small, independent cafes striving to thrive in a challenging economic environment. However, proponents argue that the policy plays a crucial role in ensuring pedestrian safety and accessibility, preventing removable furniture from obstructing pathways and ensuring compliance with accessibility standards.

During the committee meeting, concerns over the cost of the licence fees were voiced. Councillor Robert Leach criticised the high fees, particularly the notion of paying £555 to process a form and issue a licence, suggesting it seemed “ridiculous” and speculating that the figure was derived using a “different unit of currency.” However, it was clarified that the actual cost of processing a new application exceeded the fees charged, necessitating the higher rate to break even, though this remains capped by the government.

However, doubts were also raised regarding the renewal fee of £350, with some committee members questioning the justification for this amount, given that most of the necessary work is completed during the initial application process

Image: Cafe tables outside Zig Zag Epsom High Street – Google

A lesson in Green Belt development?



A controversial plan to build 446 homes on Green Belt land near Horley, Surrey, has been approved on appeal, overturning the local council’s initial rejection.

The development, proposed by Rydon Homes, will include up to 446 homes – including 201 affordable homes (45 per cent), and four Traveller pitches on land west of Reigate Road in Hookwood. Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) confirmed there is a significant unmet need for this type of specific housing within the local area.

Despite concerns about its impact on the Green Belt, the planning inspector ruled that the “very substantial public benefits” of the housing outweighed the harm to the protected area. This decision comes amid what the inspector called “an acute need for affordable housing” in the district.

MVDC rejected the outline planning application, claiming it could appear “cramped” and “incongruous” with the surrounding area. MVDC’s initial decision report from November 2023 said the development will have a “detrimental transport impact”.

However since then, the authority changed the site from being a ‘protected area’ in the Local Plan to a ‘potential development site’ – so they could not defence their original decision. The developer launched an appeal.

The scheme was allowed after the developer Rydon Homes attended the inquiry with a team of 16 headed by a KC. At the start of the hearing MVDC & Charlwood Parish Council withdrew their objections to the planning application.

The inspector noted the opportunities for transport, employment and other facilities due to its proximity to Hookwood, Horley and Gatwick Airport. He also found transport options were satisfactory and in agreement with Surrey County Council.

Concerns were raised by locals that the increase of around a thousand new residents would put pressure on GPs and schools. Rough plans put forward by the developer suggests it will create new community facilities like early education, but details are not yet apparent.

Although the inspectorate agreed there was a degree of harm to the character and appearance of the neighbourhood, he concluded there was “very special circumstances” to build on the Green Belt.

Image: View of development land west from Hookwood, Horley. (Credit: Google Street View)

Council works with local charities for needy



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is working with three local charities to distribute up to £88,700 from the Household Support Fund to people experiencing financial hardship across the borough. The council will work with The Good Company, Citizens Advice Epsom & Ewell and The Meeting Room to ensure that funds can be accessed by vulnerable residents including families, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and disabled people, before 30 September 2024.

The Household Support Fund was first introduced on 30 September 2021 by Central Government to offer cost of living support over the winter months. This is the fifth time the scheme has been extended.

Councillor **Neil Dallen**, (RA Town Ward) Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee, said “We know that the last few years have been difficult for many of our residents. By working with The Good Company, Citizens Advice Epsom & Ewell and The Meeting Room, we aim to ensure that the financial support offered by the Household Support Fund can be accessed by the people in Epsom & Ewell who need it most.

“These trusted partners connect with vulnerable residents across the borough through their fantastic services which include, but are not limited to:

- The Epsom and Ewell Food Banks and Epsom Pantry, in South Street Epsom, run by the Good Company
- The Financial Wellbeing Support Service, run by Citizen’s Advice
- Drop-ins and activities for residents at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness, run by The Meeting Room.

In addition, they have the expertise and administrative experience to ensure that allocations are distributed across the borough both promptly and efficiently.”

Residents who require financial aid can contact one of the three organisations mentioned above.

Find out more about the Household Support Fund, including how to apply for funding in Epsom & Ewell: <https://epsom-ewell.gov.uk/residents/cost-living-support/household-support-fund>

Applications for Household Support Funds can be made through Citizen’s Advice Epsom and Ewell: www.caee.org.uk/household-support-fund

For advice about cost of living support, residents can also visit:

- The Advice Café in Epsom, for advice and support through a wide variety of services, on Friday mornings between 10am-12noon at St. Barnabus’ Church, Epsom: Community Hub — St Barnabas (stbarnabas-epsom.org.uk)
- The Cost of Living pages on Epsom & Ewell Borough Council’s website to view a range of information and support: Cost of living support | Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (epsom-ewell.gov.uk)

The Household Support Fund

The Household Support Fund is for anyone who’s vulnerable or cannot pay for essentials. Residents do not have to be getting benefits to get help. If a resident does receive benefits, they will not be affected if a payment from a Household Support Fund scheme is awarded.

Good Company

Good Company is a charity working to prevent and alleviate poverty in East Surrey.

Their mission is: “To lead our community towards a poverty-free future, while supporting those who need our help. We demonstrate our values by being compassionate, kind, trusting, engaged, non-judgemental and resourcing.”

Good Company Trust incorporates: Epsom & Ewell Foodbank, Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network, Poverty Truth Commission, Epsom Pantry (Part of Your Local Pantry network) and more. goodcompany.org.uk.

Citizens Advice Epsom & Ewell Citizens Advice provide free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone regardless of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age or nationality.

Citizens Advice Epsom & Ewell was one of the first Citizens Advice Bureaux to be created in 1939 and is the member of the national Citizens Advice network serving people who live or work in the borough of Epsom and Ewell. Citizens Advice Epsom & Ewell – Home (caee.org.uk).

The Meeting Room

The Meeting Room is a registered charity operating in the Mole Valley and Epsom areas. The charity was founded in 2014 by Graham Peddie MBE, who was a leading advocate for assisting the most vulnerable people in our community. Their clients are of all backgrounds and ages and their focus is to provide meaningful support to those with a wide variety of issues including homelessness, poverty, physical or mental health difficulties, breakdown of relationships, social exclusion and loneliness and issues with alcohol or drugs. Home | The Meeting Room – Helping Vulnerable People.

Mixed responses in Surrey to 20mph zones



Plans for new speed limits in Surrey could go ahead despite lack of confidence it would improve road safety.

Locals said they considered road conditions and potholes to have a greater impact on safe driving and cycling.

Reviewing speed limits is part of Surrey County Council’s (SCC) road safety strategy called ‘Vision Zero’ in partnership with Surrey Police (including the Police and Crime Commissioner), Surrey Fire and Rescue and National Highway colleagues. It aims to halve the number of collisions where someone is killed or seriously injured on the roads by 2035, with the ambition to get to ‘zero’ by 2050.

In the early 2000s Surrey had 60-70 deaths on the road every year and in the last few years it has reduced 30 or under, a Surrey County Council committee heard July 18. Cllr Matt Furniss (Conservative Cabinet Member for Transport and Infrastructure) said the number of collisions has “plateaued” around the 30 mark.

Highlights of the strategy include: introducing more 20mph limits around schools, town centres and residential areas, investing in sophisticated speed cameras to

tackle the worst speeding and casualty routes; review 60 mph rural speed limits and replace them with lower limits.

Over 3,600 people responded to the consultation between January and March this year, both Surrey drivers and local residents.

Concerns were raised that 70 per cent of respondents were not confident or neutral that the strategy would improve road safety in Surrey, causing councillors to question whether it should rethink the proposal.

Respondents said they felt road maintenance had a greater impact on road safety and therefore the money would be better spent on fixing potholes and improving roads. “I would much prefer to see the roads we already have maintained better rather than new interventions,” one respondent said.

Officers admitted road maintenance is “crucial”, but said it was not the purpose of the multi-partner strategy. They added that “significant work” was already taking place to address the road defects.

Despite not having data to hand to show if improved road maintenance would lead to less road collisions, officers said police reports would let SCC know if this was the case.

The committee heard that potholes and road defects were occasionally mentioned in police reports but the speed limits and road maintenance “goes hand in hand” and “needs to work together” to improve safety.

Half of the responses (1,832) disagreed with the proposal for new 20mph speed limits, with 10 per cent (around 366) feeling neutral. The report stated the public had a “mixed view” on the subject.

Sceptical of this, Cllr Mark Sugden (Conservative) said: “Is the issue a lack of understanding and communication, or is there a fundamental disagreement to the proposed strategy?”

Officers claimed not everyone understood the policy. They highlighted 135 (4 per cent) of the respondents who had disagreed with implementing 20mph speed limits, had in fact aligned with the proposals. These included comments that did not support a blanket approach but only supported 20 mph limits in town centres, residential areas or near schools but not on main roads.

Negative comments by the public said 20mph limits do not improve safety (170 responses) and increase congestion and air pollution (132 responses). Officers accepted some people may be against the proposals but argued their reasoning went against national research shown in their report.

Officers repeatedly stressed that enforcing 20mph speed limits would not be a “blanket approach” and would, if approved by the cabinet, be subject to local consultation. They added the council needed to communicate its road safety message more effectively with residents.

With only 46 per cent of respondents being happy or very happy with the approach, officers said they had “hoped for more support” for the proposals. A further 20 per cent were neutral to the safe roads approach.

The committee resolved that SCC needed to address the public’s perception that fixing potholes would improve road safety and the concern whether the strategy will succeed.

Image: Neighbouring London Borough of Kingston's Bridge Road approach to Epsom and Ewell 20 mph zone.

Making Box Hill more accessible on foot



Access has been vastly improved up to iconic landmark, Box Hill in the Surrey Hills National Landscape thanks to the refurbishment of 300 steps.

Originally installed by volunteers back in the 1980s, the steps had become eroded and difficult to navigate with visitors often detouring off the steps onto slippery and dangerous terrain. The steps, which traverse the steep hillside linking the Stepping Stones path to the summit have been excavated and rebuilt to protect the biodiversity of the site and encourage residents and visitors to access the popular beauty spot in a more sustainable way.

Thanks to funding from the North Downs Way National Trail, through the Interreg Experience Fund, Natural England and Surrey County Council, over £53,000 was allocated to the project. Surrey County Council’s Countryside Access Team commissioned, and project managed the extensive works which also included improving additional paths between the river and the steps.

Landscape construction specialists Maydencroft, undertook the work over a 3-month period with the challenging location of the steps meaning much of the construction had to be done by hand rather than machinery with materials carried to the site each day by a team of workers. A floating pontoon was even installed across the River Mole to help get materials to the site.

The new steps have been constructed using around 15 tons of recycled plastic which has been manufactured from a total of 7,731,360 milk bottle tops. This hardwearing material was chosen due to its longevity, helping to reduce future maintenance costs, prevent plastic from going into landfill and the felling of trees for materials. If oak boards had been used instead of recycled plastic a total of five oak trees would have needed to be felled.

Marisa Heath, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for the Environment comments: “This iconic site is much loved by residents and visitors. The refurbishment of these steps encourages everyone to access the site in a more sustainable way, offering the visitor a choice to travel via public transport and safely climb up to the famous viewpoint without the need to bring a car and without disturbing wildlife by coming over the created path. It is also very encouraging to see the use of recycled materials out in Surrey’s countryside, helping to not only to reduce the long-term maintenance burden on Surrey County Council but also tackling climate change by the reduction of emissions.”

Peter Morris, North Downs Way National Trail Manager comments: “It is wonderful to see how successful partnership working has enabled this engineering feat to be completed quickly and efficiently for the benefit of all users. Box Hill, in the Surrey Hills National Landscape is one of the highlights on the North Downs Way National Trail. It is important that everyone has an opportunity to enjoy and experience this 153 mile long-distance trail, so making it accessible is vital. Thanks to all partners including Surrey County Council, the National Trust, Maydencroft and the European Regional Development Fund for supporting the project and helping to secure the future resilience of our natural and cultural assets.”

Stephanie Fudge, National Trust General Manager Surrey Hills comments: “Since the steps were re-opened to the public, we have had some great feedback about the ease of access along this trail. It is one of the most popular routes at Box Hill and it has improved the experience of walkers. There are a couple of rest points with views that many visitors take advantage of. It has been wonderful working with Surrey County Council and the National Trail on this initiative and we are grateful for the support.”

Community urged to help restore nature in Surrey



Surrey County Council is seeking support from residents, businesses and community groups to help shape a new ‘Local Nature Recovery Strategy’ (LNRS).

Developed with partners, the strategy will set out a roadmap for the restoration and enhancement of Surrey’s natural environment, ensuring that it is sustainable now and for future generations.

Marisa Heath, Cabinet Member for Environment at Surrey County Council said, “*We are at a crucial, formative stage of a plan that we hope will create an environment where wildlife can truly thrive in Surrey.*

“To ensure that everyone embraces the LNRS and to maintain momentum in taking action to help nature, we want to make sure that as many people as possible are involved right from the start. That’s why we encourage and welcome insight and opinion on what people want from their natural environment. Whether it’s more flower rich grasslands buzzing with life, or a new woodland on your doorstep that will provide future generations with dappled shade and homes for our precious wildlife.

“A healthy natural environment provides us with so many undervalued benefits from clean breathable air to protection from the worst effects of climate change such as flooding or drought. Please do get involved and help us shape this vital plan.”

Residents are encouraged to have their say by completing the **online survey** or by attending the in-person ‘Surrey Nature Day’ event on 28 September 2024. Held at West Horsley Place, the free, family celebration of nature in Surrey will feature performances of an original play, *Wild Walks* – produced, directed and performed by Guildford Shakespeare Company. More information and booking can be found on the **online survey page**. Other events will also be advertised here.

Surrey is one of 48 local authorities nationwide given responsibility for this work by DEFRA, addressing the current nature crisis in England, funded by UK Government.

For more information, see **Have Your Say Today - Local Nature Recovery Strategy - Commonplace**.

Image - The Great Pond, Epsom Common in Autumn. Copyright Epsom and Ewell Times.

Anyone for tennis?



Continuing the enthusiasm for tennis following Wimbledon, **Epsom & Ewell Borough Council** will be offering bookable free tennis sessions from Tuesday 23 July to Monday 26 August, between 8am and 12pm.

Courts can be booked by visiting Epsom & Ewell Parks Tennis / Home (lta.org.uk).

The free summer sessions follow the council’s move earlier this year to introduce a new ‘pay as you play’ scheme across all tennis courts. The scheme seeks to make the borough’s tennis courts more self-sufficient, with all income raised being reinvested into the courts.

The council has also implemented free coaching opportunities at Court Recreation Ground and free booking slots on Saturdays to enable those of all ages, experience, and socio-economic background to participate.

Councillor **Liz Frost**, (RA Woodcote and Langley) Chair of the Environment Committee, said: “The decision to extend free, bookable morning sessions at our tennis courts during the summer holidays gives residents, particularly our younger ones, a greater opportunity to keep active and have fun during the break.”

“We hope that this this will encourage those who have otherwise not considered playing tennis the incentive to give it a go and if they enjoy it, join as members in the future.”

- Maintenance work will be carried out at Gibraltar Recreation Ground and Poole Road courts on Friday 26 July to redraw the line markings. The courts will be closed at these locations on that day.
- Players who have already signed up for annual membership under the scheme will receive one month’s extension to their membership.
- The council currently offers two free, bookable sessions between 9-10am and 10-11am on Saturday mornings on all our tennis courts, except Court Rec.
- In Court Rec – the council currently offers one free session on a Saturday between 10-11am and we will soon be offering a further free Coach Activated group session at this location.
- Outside of the free, bookable slots, the pricing is as follows:

Ad-hoc Cost Per Hour All Courts	£6.00
Additional Cost Per Hour for Floodlights	£6.00
Annual Household Subscription	£40.00
Annual Household Subscription for those in receipt of low-income benefits	£20.00

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Safety set back for a Council’s car park revenue



Safety work to repair crumbled concrete and rusted steel reinforcements at the **Swan Car Park** in **Leatherhead** could cost a council more than £200,000.

Mole Valley District Council is set to approve the repair work after its emergency budget passed through its extraordinary scrutiny committee.

The car park is fully owned and operated by the council with all revenue going straight into its coffers. The flip side is that it is also responsible for 100 per cent of the maintenance costs.

The work will be carried out over a three-year period, which the council hopes will prevent anything more significant from developing.

It has set aside £116,496 for the first year, £49,745 in year two and £50,910 for the final year of the project for a total of £217,151.

The meeting heard from cabinet member Councillor Keira Vyvyan-Robinson, who said that in 2022 the council carried out a five-year maintenance report that warned of the need to “monitor concrete and rebar (reinforced steel) ” within the car park – and remedy any failings.

For financial reasons the council decided not to go ahead with any work but the situation earlier this year “had deteriorated.”

She said: “It’s not a health and safety issue at the moment however it is important that the works are remedied in order that they don’t deteriorate any further.”

The majority of the project’s budget is expected to be used “primarily in relation to the concrete frame and repairs to concrete which has crumbled.” Cllr Vyvyan-Robinson added.

A final decision on whether to proceed will be made by the council’s cabinet committee on July 17 2024.

Officers told the meeting how surveyors had been monitoring the car park “visually” and that its condition has since stabilised.

The repairs, the council hopes, would eliminate the need for regular observations.

Asked if there was a risk of concrete falling off the walls, and onto people or their cars, officers replied that there wasn’t an “immediate risk but the longer they leave it the greater that risk becomes”.

Work will be scheduled to avoid the busiest times of the year and be done piecemeal to limit impact on people parking and minimise any revenue losses for the council.

Image: Swan shopping centre car park in Leatherhead (Google)

Surrey’s cyber sleuth students at work



Cyber-curious students from Ash Manor School have been inspired to consider future careers in the sector after taking part in a special one-day workshop.

The event was hosted by Surrey County Council in collaboration with the **Surrey Cyber Security Cluster** (SCSC) and **SATRO Education Charity** as part of the **Inspire Surrey** pilot programme, and was held at the Hogs Back Hotel in Farnham.

The ‘Digital Detective Challenge’ was developed to harness the imagination of the students and encourage them to consider a future career in this exciting and fast-growing industry.

At the end of the day, almost all of the year 8 students taking part (28 out of 31) said they would now consider taking up a career in cyber – a resounding success for the day.

Matt Furniss, Surrey County Council’s Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth, said: “*Cyber security is a growing, highly innovative sector of huge importance to our regional economy. Events like this are fantastic to really capture the interest of enquiring young minds – the vital future leaders of this sector – and ensure cyber security’s continued growth and success in Surrey. I’m delighted the event was such a triumph for all participants.*”

Surrey is a world-leader in cyber security, as home to a large and growing number of security firms and consultancy agencies including BAE Systems, CGI and F5.

Two of the UK’s five Gold Standard Cyber Security Universities (Royal Holloway and University of Surrey) are also based in the county, helping to drive innovation in the sector.

Surrey County Council is further nurturing the sector and supporting growth through its involvement in the Surrey Cyber Security Cluster.

Mr S Coomber, Head of Computer Science at Ash Manor School, said: “*Events like this enable students to explore what it’s like to work in cyber security. By showcasing the breadth of opportunities available, we hope to empower students to make an informed decision about considering a career in the cyber sector.*”

Jane Sheridan from SATRO Education Charity, said: “*Today’s event was not just about solving puzzles; it was about igniting passion and curiosity for cyber careers among young minds. We wanted to provide students with a glimpse into the exciting world of cyber security while emphasizing the importance of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.*”

Hani Momeninia, Director of the SCSC, highlighted the significance of nurturing future talent in the cyber field. He said: “*As the cyber landscape continues to evolve, there is a growing demand for skilled professionals capable of defending us against emerging threats. Initiatives like this play a crucial role in inspiring and nurturing the next generation of cyber leaders. It’s been great to work with the Surrey Cyber Security Cluster and SATRO Education Charity to design and host an engaging event for our budding cyber professionals.*”

The event was one of a number of initiatives intended to inspire a range of audiences to consider a career in cyber by the Council’s Economy & Growth Team, in collaboration with the Surrey Cyber Security Cluster. Other events included a workshop for mums returning to work and a cyber careers fair at Brooklands Museum for secondary school students across the county.

Business Surrey, the Council’s new business initiative, is committed to supporting sectors, such as cyber security, with support to grow. Discover more at **www.businesssurrey.co.uk**.

Those businesses looking for support and advice with workforce needs can contact the team for free support at **www.businesssurrey.co.uk/advice-and-support/business-support-form**.

The Surrey Careers Hub also works to connect employers with schools and colleges to support young people to take their next best step. Find out how you can get involved at **<https://www.businesssurrey.co.uk/workforce/careers-hub/>**.

Call to landlords to help Council help housing need



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