

Oxshott Uproar as 800 Object to Green Belt Housing Plan

23 March 2026



More than 800 objections later, a controversial plan for 250 new homes on green belt land in Oxshott is set to be decided by a planning committee, and the recommendation is for approval.

Amidst traffic concerns, infrastructure worries and wanting to protect the green belt, councillors must decide if this huge village expansion in Oxshott is to go ahead.

Elmbridge Borough Council's planning committee will consider the outline application for Clouds Hill Farm on Wednesday, March 25.

The proposal would see existing buildings on the 23-hectare site demolished to make way for a new housing estate, along with roads, parking, public open space and a "suitable alternative natural greenspace" (SANG).

At this stage, only the access points from Leatherhead Road and Woodlands Lane are being decided, with details like layout, design and landscaping to come later if permission is granted. The homes are expected to be two to three storeys high.

Planning officers have recommended approval, arguing that, on balance, the benefits outweigh the harm.

They say the scheme would help deliver new housing, including affordable homes, and could meet national planning rules for building on so-called "grey belt" land. Surrey County Council highways officers have also raised no objection, subject to improvements.

But the application has sparked a major backlash locally. More than 800 letters of objection from over 600 households have been submitted, citing worries about traffic, safety and pressure on local services.

Residents say the area's roads are already congested and fear an extra 250 homes would make things worse, particularly along the busy Leatherhead Road.

Others argue that the village lacks the infrastructure of schools, GP surgeries and public transport to support a development of this size.

Environmental concerns have also been raised heavily. Objectors warn the plans would mean the loss of Green Belt land, wildlife habitats and trees, and question whether the development can genuinely deliver the required biodiversity net gain. Some have also flagged flood risk and drainage issues.

Campaign groups and residents' associations have gone further, claiming the site is not in a sustainable location and that the project could permanently change the character of the area.

People claim there is not much public transport in the area so there will be a heavy reliance on cars, making the quiet Surrey village busier.

Support for the scheme has been far more limited, with a small number of submissions pointing to the need for more housing and potential improvements to walking and cycling routes.

If councillors agree with officers, outline permission will be granted, but only if the developer signs a legal agreement to secure key contributions, including affordable housing, environmental mitigation and transport measures.

If that deal is not finalised within six months, the application could still be refused.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Photo: Stables and outbuildings at Clouds Hill Farm, Oxshott. (Credit: Fairmile Group Ltd./Elmbridge Borough Council planning documents).

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Epsom on road to twin with world-famous Ukraine town of Bucha

23 March 2026



BBC reports: Epsom and Ewell has taken the first step towards twinning with a Ukrainian town.

Epsom & Ewell councillors have backed plans to explore a twinning link with the Ukrainian town of Bucha. At a strategy and resources committee meeting on March 17, councillors voted to set up a small working group to look into the proposal before any final decision is made.

The idea, introduced earlier by the council, would see Epsom & Ewell formally linked with Bucha. The town became known around the world after atrocities against civilians in 2022, but which is now seen as a symbol of resilience and rebuilding.

Opening the discussion, public speaker **Lionel Blackman** (Director of Surrey Stands With Ukraine) told the committee the borough had already shown “extraordinary generosity and compassion” towards Ukraine. He pointed to millions of pounds in aid raised locally, support for refugee families, and community events celebrating Ukrainian culture.

“Bucha is a community that mirrors Epsom in many ways,” Blackman said. “It is similar in size and character and like Epsom it sits close to its nation’s capital around 25km from Kyiv. Much as Epsom lies within easy reach of London.”

He said twinning would be a natural next step, stressing it would not be about sending aid, but about building long-term links. “This is about friendship: cultural, educational and civic connections,” he said, adding that much of the work would be handled by a volunteer-led Bucha-Epsom Association rather than the council itself.

What was actually agreed?

A three-member working group will now be formed to look at the practicalities, including costs, risks and how the partnership would work in reality. They are expected to report back in the summer before any final decision is taken.

Despite the differing views on the process, there was broad agreement on one thing: support for Ukraine and the idea behind the twinning itself.

Some concerns raised

But not everyone was convinced the process needed to slow down. Some councillors questioned why a working group was needed at all, arguing it could delay a relatively simple decision. Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative Horton) warned the extra layer of process risked the opportunity “drifting”, while Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) said previous working groups had a habit of dragging on “forever”.

Cllr **Lucie McIntyre** (RA West Ewell), however, said taking time to get the details right was essential and a working group would be the best means of doing so. Cllr **James Lawrence** (LibDem now Independent - College) agreed, and said the councils should know what it is endorsing.

Councillors raised concerns about how much officer time the project might take up, especially with major local government changes on the horizon. and said the council needed a clearer picture of the organisation it was being asked to back.

In the end, the committee agreed to press ahead cautiously. If it eventually goes ahead, the link would make Bucha Epsom & Ewell’s first new twin town in decades.

Emily Dalton BBC LDRS

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Woking bankruptcy sell off

23 March 2026



Woking Borough Council is selling off its flagship regeneration projects - including the town's new Hilton Hotel and shopping centres to private investors to claw back public money - branded a "sad" and "sobering" reality of the bankruptcy. The small council gained infamy when it went bust in 2023 as the most heavily indebted borough in the country. It has dragged itself through huge job cuts and service reductions to address its £2.6 billion black hole and now come some of its costliest investments.

It's leadership has agreed to market Victoria Square, Wolsey Place, Alexander House and energy company Thamesway Milton Keynes Ltd, in an effort to claw back some of the public money torpedoed into its doomed ventures between 2016 and 2019. Speaking at the Wednesday, March 18 executive committee was the portfolio holder for finance, Councillor Dale Roberts. He said: "The work of understanding and unravelling the council's commercial structures has weighed heavily at times and that is in large part because of the scale of what we inherited. Hundreds of millions of pounds of public money invested through complex commercial structures. At times it has felt like we've been asked to work on the world's most expensive jigsaw puzzle. Being able to bring these matters forward openly, with proper governance and transparency is therefore both a relief and a sign of the progress the council has made. It quickly became clear the first task was not to make immediate decisions about assets and companies but to ensure we had the right governance, reporting, controls in place to understand what we owned and how those companies and those assets were performing."

Victoria Square Woking, including the Hilton Hotel where the council paid for its cutlery, will be sold off - although the car parks will be split off and retained by the council. Wolsey Place Shopping Centre, together with Wolsey Walk residential units, Alexander House and Export House, and units owned by Victoria Square will be combined into another single entity to maximise value. The council's energy company - which supplies exclusive power to Victoria Square - will also be sold, with officers confident a specialist company could successfully fold the firm into an existing operation. A key element in the Thamesway sale is a debt for equity swap that will convert the council's existing loans into shares but banks a historic loss of about £42m associated with the investment.

Cllr Steve Greentree (Liberal Democrats: Knaphill) said: "It's sad to see the £42m loss in a venture that should never have been put at risk by a local borough council in a geography that is no way related to Woking." Cllr Ian Johnson, portfolio holder for housing said: "My overwhelming feeling is that of disappointment. Finally we will rid ourselves of something that has been a drain on our resources." He added: "It's fairly sobering isn't it but it's the right thing to do."

The sales had long been expected as part of the Government's effective bailout programme where it has already pledged about £500m to the borough. Further help has been held back until the Government knows what the council banks in asset sales. Borough leader, Cllr Ann-Marie Barker said: "It's been a very long-term ambition of this administration to sell Thamesway. It's costing us money, it's not contributing to our role as a council to deliver services for local people." Final approval of any deals will need the approval of full council.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Image: Hilton in Woking (Google)

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Guildford goes a different way to Epsom with Parish Council on a narrow margin

23 March 2026



Guildford Borough Council has approved plans for a new town council despite warnings from its own leader that the move could hit the borough's most financially disadvantaged residents hardest.

Council leader Cllr Julia McShane said the consultation results showed a pattern, with people in poorer areas more likely to oppose the plan with fears of extra costs.

She told councillors: "I have a deeply held conviction that we must work with our communities and not do to our communities." She added the decision "disregards the outcome of the consultation" and the financial pressures facing residents.

Despite this, councillors voted to press ahead with proposals to ask the new West Surrey authority to create a parish-style council for Guildford from April 2027, with £300,000 set aside for set-up costs.

The new council would be funded through a precept, an extra charge on council tax, starting at around £69 a year for a Band D property, with the potential to rise.

The decision follows a public consultation involving more than 3,000 residents, which revealed a near even split: 46.5 per cent in favour and 47.1 per cent against. Turnout was just over 6 per cent, although this was higher than similar consultations elsewhere in Surrey.

"We stand at a critical juncture," Cllr Vanessa King said. "This [...] is about protecting the residents' voices and deciding how the unique character of this ancient town will be preserved for the future [...] How does Guildford keep its own voice in a much larger authority?" She stressed the result "is not a referendum", meaning councillors were not obliged to follow it but debate the reasons.

But critics said pushing ahead lacked a clear mandate. Cllr Bob Hughes said: "Six per cent turnout is not a ringing endorsement... we can't just keep going until we get the answer we want," warning residents would "pay through the nose" due to the uncapped nature of the precept.

Cllr Joss Bigmore echoed concerns about fairness, calling it "effectively lumping a regressive tax on those who can afford it the least". However, he acknowledged the future West Surrey council is likely to face major financial pressures of its own, which could limit its ability to maintain local services.

Supporters argued the town council could help fill that gap. Cllr George Potter said opposition was largely driven by confusion and concern over cost, rather than outright rejection, and warned that not creating a parish could disadvantage vulnerable residents in the long term.

Cllr Richard Lucas added that the financial modelling was based on "very conservative assumptions" and said more could be done to explore other funding sources.

The plans come amid wider local government reorganisation, meaning Guildford Borough Council can no longer create the parish itself. The final decision will now rest with the incoming West Surrey authority, which will decide whether the town council goes ahead.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Guildford high street buildings, town centre. (Credit: Emily Dalton/LDRS)

Sun sets on Residents' Associations' cherished Parishes for Epsom and Ewell

Epsom and Ewell to ditch Parish Councils plan

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Rare moth rediscovery secures conservation status for Epsom's Manor Open Space

23 March 2026



Manor Open Space in Epsom has been designated a Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI), recognising its ecological value and role in supporting wildlife across the borough.

The designation, made by the Surrey Local Sites Partnership, highlights several important features of the site, including veteran oak trees and the presence of the extremely rare moth *Coleophora conspicuella* (Knapweed Case-bearer). The species had not been recorded in Surrey for around 100 years before its rediscovery at the site in 2024.

The open space also plays a key role as a wildlife corridor, linking Epsom Common and Horton Country Park local nature reserves. This connection enables the movement of species between habitats and strengthens the borough's wider ecological network.

SNCIs, also known as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation or Local Wildlife Sites, are non-statutory designations that identify areas of high biodiversity value. While not legally protected in themselves, they are recognised in planning and conservation decisions and help safeguard important habitats and species at a local level.

Cllr **Liz Frost** (RA Woodcote and Langley), Chair of the Environment Committee, said the designation reflected both the ecological importance of the site and the work of those maintaining it.

"We are proud that Manor Open Space has been recognised for the important role it plays in supporting resilient ecosystems across the borough," she said. "Through our Biodiversity Action Plan, we can protect our natural heritage, and the presence of veteran oak trees along with the discovery of extremely rare moth species reflects the dedication of everyone involved in caring for our habitats.

"This SNCI designation is a testament to the hard work, diligence and passion of our Countryside team, partners and much valued volunteers who continually strive to improve our green spaces for the benefit of our community. Their commitment ensures that these habitats will be enjoyed for many years to come."

The Surrey Local Sites Partnership, which oversees the selection of SNCIs, brings together Surrey County Council, Surrey Wildlife Trust, district and borough councils and independent ecological experts under the Surrey Nature Partnership. The group identifies and manages both nature conservation sites and Regionally Important Geological Sites across the county.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Biodiversity Action Plan aims to protect, maintain and enhance biodiversity locally, taking into account priorities at regional, national and international levels. This work sits alongside the council's Climate Change Action Plan 2025-2029, which sets out measures to reduce emissions and promote environmental sustainability across the borough.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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Photo: Manor-Open-Space-springtime-Cuckoo-Flower-in-the-foreground

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Ewell school goes safe streets ahead

23 March 2026



Danetree Primary School in Ewell is set to benefit from a School Street from May 2026, aimed at reducing air pollution and improving road safety during the busiest times of the day.

Danetree Road, Danetree Close, Oakhurst Road and a portion of Chessington Road will be open to pedestrians, cyclists and wheelers only between 8:00am and 9:00am and 2.30pm to 3.45pm, Monday to Friday during school term time. Exemptions will apply for residents, carers, school transport and blue badge holders accessing the school.

The move follows the successful rollout of the county's first School Street at Farnham Heath End School in April 2025, where there has already been a 62 per cent reduction in cars entering and exiting the road. In the week before the scheme was introduced, 1,227 vehicles were recorded turning in or out of Bullers Road at school drop-off and pick-up times, compared to 470 once the scheme was in place.

Potters Gate Church of England Primary School in Farnham was the second school to benefit from the School Streets programme.

Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth, said: "By restricting motor vehicle access during peak times of the day, we can create safer, healthier and more pleasant environments for everyone walking, cycling and scooting to school. I'm delighted with the positive results we have already seen in Farnham and am pleased we are able to roll the scheme out further. School Streets are a key part of our overall programme to improve road safety, promote more sustainable school travel and reduce air pollution around schools. We're investing £3m to improve road safety and encourage more walking, cycling and wheeling. We're also continuing to deliver Feet First walking training and Bikeability cycling training to provide lifelong road safety skills for Surrey's school children."

For more information about School Streets in Surrey, visit the county council's website.

Surrey County Council



Photo: Danetree Road. Danetree Road, West Ewell, just outside of Danetree Junior School Tony Grant. Licence details

Epsom's Cllr McCormick gives Middlesex revival the irregular iambic treatment

23 March 2026



Historic nostalgia could be upheld in naming a new Surrey council next year. Surrey County Council has backed a symbolic call to recognise Middlesex in the name of a future unitary authority. But councillors were all too aware the proposal had no legal power in officially changing the name.

This move comes amid plans to abolish all 12 of Surrey's existing borough, district and county councils and create two mega authorities to replace them, East Surrey and West Surrey. Middlesex was effectively abolished in 1965 and outside the living memory for many residents.

A majority of councillors supported a motion asking the government to name one of the new authorities "West Surrey and South Middlesex" as part of local government reorganisation due in 2027. Members voted 32 in favour, eight against with 24 abstentions at a full Surrey County council meeting on March 17.

The proposal, put forward by Robert Evans OBE (Stanwell and Stanwell Moor), centred on Spelthorne’s long-standing ties to historic Middlesex. The borough is the only part of the old county that ended up in Surrey after boundary changes in the 1960s, and remains the only Surrey district north of the River Thames.

Cllr Evans told the chamber the Middlesex name still carries weight for many residents and “cannot be erased”, arguing the change would recognise more than 1,000 years of shared history.

Cllr Harry Boparai, who put forward the same motion to Spelthorne Borough Council in January but was blocked, said he was “pleased” the issue was finally being heard. He explained how the name ‘Middlesex’, which may seem like a simple thing to some, “created a sense of connection to the place where I lived” and recognises the “heritage and identity” of the community.

But councillors explained that under current legislation, the final decision on any new council name will rest with the authority created after reorganisation not existing councils.

Even so, several members said the debate was about sending a message rather than making a binding decision. Cllr Sinead Mooney said “names really do matter”, adding that the motion reflects a genuine sense of identity among Spelthorne residents. Another described it as a chance to show the new authority that heritage should not be overlooked.

Others were more cautious. Cllr Joanne Sexton, leader of Spelthorne Borough Council argued that now is not the right time to focus on naming, with major structural changes ahead. She said the priority should be “working together and maintaining unity” during the transition, suggesting the issue be decided later with public consultation.

Cllr **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley EEBC and Surrey County Councillor) delivered a tongue-in-cheek poem suggesting the name had effectively already been decided. He said: “So toast to the history of Spelthorne’s old soul, while West Surrey wagons begin their first to roll.” Cllr Edward Hawkins joked confusion over boundaries left them unsure “which way to go” on the vote.

Despite mixed views, several councillors said they would support the motion simply to acknowledge the strength of feeling locally. Given it was the council’s last full meeting before the local election campaign gets underway, it is not surprising members did not want to rock the Middlesex boat, or vote.

Others opted to abstain, saying the decision ultimately lies elsewhere. In the end, the motion passed with cross-party backing.

While the result will not change the formal process, supporters hope it sends a clear signal: that for many in Spelthorne, Middlesex is more than just a historic footnote and it is still part of who they are.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Photo: David Howard Licence details

Surrey leaders promise smooth transition to unitaries

23 March 2026



On Friday 13 March, the East and West Surrey Joint Committees met to continue preparations for the transition to new unitary councils ahead of “vesting day” on 1 April 2027.

The committees, made up of councillors from existing Surrey authorities, are meeting monthly to lay the groundwork for the creation of East Surrey Council and West Surrey Council. This interim phase will continue until Shadow Authorities are formally established following elections in May 2026. The focus is on ensuring stability and effective planning during a period of significant local government change.

Financial pressures and planning challenges highlighted

Members reviewed progress from the Implementation Team (Programme Board), which is overseeing the transition. A draft illustrative financial baseline was presented, offering an early indication of the financial position the new councils are likely to inherit.

The report highlighted that both East and West Surrey are expected to face ongoing financial pressures, including rising demand for services and constrained resources—challenges that would exist irrespective of reorganisation.

Particular concern was noted in parts of West Surrey, where historic debt issues—especially those linked to Woking—will require careful management. The importance of robust governance, financial oversight and continued engagement with government on potential debt support was emphasised.

A recent ministerial letter from Alison McGovern MP confirmed that the government would “continue to explore what further debt support is required at a later point”.

Scrutiny and governance arrangements

Looking ahead to the Shadow Authority phase, councillors discussed how implementation plans will be reviewed. Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committees will be established to provide independent challenge to decision-making, helping ensure plans are realistic, legally sound and properly risk-assessed.

A draft timetable for meetings during the Shadow period was also considered, with initial meetings expected to begin from 20 May 2026.

Devolution discussions continue

Surrey councils are continuing discussions with government on a potential countywide Strategic Authority, which could bring greater local control over areas such as economic growth.

Councils will consider whether to submit an expression of interest for a “Foundational Strategic Authority” — a non-mayoral model that could act as a stepping stone towards a future mayoral arrangement.

Leaders emphasise stability and strong foundations

Terence Herbert, Chief Executive of Surrey County Council and Senior Responsible Officer for the programme, said the work was about “planning ahead, being honest about the challenges, and making sure the new councils start on a strong footing.”

Cllr Bridget Kendrick, Chair of the East Surrey Joint Committee and Leader of Mole Valley District Council, said the focus was on “clear programme governance” and “strengthening scrutiny and oversight” to ensure a smooth transition.

Cllr Ann-Marie Barker, Chair of the West Surrey Joint Committee and Leader of Woking Borough Council, added that the priority was to establish “two stable and resilient councils... providing confidence, continuity and stability through the transition.”

What happens next

The next meetings of the Joint Committees are due to take place in April, with dates and venues to be confirmed. Meetings will continue to be webcast.

Background: what the changes mean

From April 2027, Surrey’s current two-tier system of county, district and borough councils will be replaced by two unitary authorities—East Surrey Council and West Surrey Council—each responsible for delivering all local services.

Elections for the new councils will take place on 7 May 2026, after which elected members will act as Shadow Authorities to oversee the transition.

Until then, residents will continue to access services through existing councils in the usual way.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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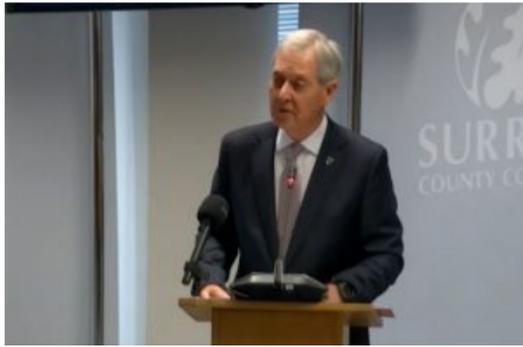
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Surrey County Council death throes debate

23 March 2026



Tensions boiled over in the council chamber as outgoing Surrey County Council leader Conservative Cllr Tim Oliver defended his administration and staff against accusations from local MPs and opposition councillors. He accused them of “cheap political mudslinging” against “the very people dedicating their working lives to helping others”.

Speaking at the final full council meeting before the May elections, Cllr Oliver said a “small number of recently elected MPs have crossed the line multiple times” despite repeated attempts to engage with them on sensitive issues and the complex services the council provides.

Liberal Democrat MPs said after the meeting they make “no apologies for sticking up for residents”.

“They continually undermine the work of dedicated expert staff, largely from a position of naivety and ignorance, all to try and score political points,” Cllr Oliver said. “Cheap political mudslinging impacts the very people dedicating their working lives to helping others.”

Cllr Oliver read aloud the words of a staff member from the Children, Families and Lifelong Learning Directorate, describing how political attacks felt like a “personal blow”. He read: “Most people will never see the hours spent untangling difficult cases, the compassion behind tough decisions, or the sheer persistence required to get things right [...] Words have consequences beyond political point scoring.”

The criticism comes after a damning BBC report revealed the county council had been formally sanctioned by the SEND tribunal in 38 cases over a five-month period. The council said barring notices were issued during an “exceptionally high period of activity”, according to the report. An ITV report claimed Surrey adults with learning disabilities face “dangerous” cuts to care; meanwhile the council insists it is increasing investment in the service and encouraging people to speak up if they feel the assessment does not meet their needs.

Cllr Oliver has urged MPs to engage constructively with staff and warned that the workforce would not easily forget years of political attacks. “While you may claim that your words are not directed at officers, I’m afraid there is no avoiding the impacts of cheap politicisation of serious and complex work,” he said.

A statement later issued after the meeting read: “Liberal Democrat MPs make no apologies for sticking up for their constituents’ interests and raising the failures of Surrey County Council, whether it is SEND provision, safeguarding, adult social care or potholes.

“No Surrey MP mentioned SEND in Parliament before 2024. They were all Conservative. As soon Liberal Democrats were elected in 2024 we relentlessly focused on making people’s lives easier in Surrey - as we were elected to do. We hope the Leader of Surrey will work with us in trying to achieve that instead of his blatant electioneering.”

Opposition councillors also pushed back. Cllr Paul Follows said he was “bored of the ‘let’s not be political’ speeches followed by a version of ‘everything is fine and nothing is broken’.” He acknowledged Cllr Oliver’s desire for a professional approach to the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) but said implying scrutiny from MPs or councillors was “unwelcome” and “simply a waste of everybody’s time.”

Clashes continue

The debate quickly turned into a wider clash over finances and priorities. Liberal Democrat councillors questioned whether the council’s debt levels and budget planning were as secure as Cllr Oliver claimed, while Cllr George Potter described the leader as “thin-skinned” and accused him of dodging accountability by apparently “cancelling elections”.

Despite the tension, Cllr Oliver called for a focus on collaboration across party lines. “Residents don’t want to get caught in the crossfire of politics,” he said. “They want their elected representatives to improve their lives, not score points.”

As Surrey approaches its first Unitary Council elections in May, the row highlights the delicate balance between navigating political rivalries and council staff reputation, all while preparing for a major shake-up of local government. By the time Surrey’s County Council meets again, the political map will look very different.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Local LibDem leader slams Helen Maguire MP in shock resignation

23 March 2026



In a shock development in the politics of Epsom and Ewell Liberal Democrat Council Group Leader Cllr **James Lawrence** (College Ward) has resigned from his Party and joined the growing Independent Group on Epsom and Ewell Borough Council.

The Independent Group, led by former Residents Association Councillor **Alex Coley** (Ruxley), has been joined by ex-LibDem and long serving Councillor **Julie Morris** (College) and former Residents Association Councillor for Nonsuch Ward, **Christine Howells**.

The Liberal Democrats once formed the largest opposition group on the Council. Now the group is the smallest. The Independent Group has four councillors, Labour four and the Liberal Democrats just two.

The first version of this report overlooked the little known fact that Cllr **Chris Watson** (Ewell Court) defected from the RA to Labour on 10th February this year.

The Residents Association remain predominant with the remainder of the total 35 seats in the Chamber.

In Cllr James Lawrence's resignation letter he takes wounding Parthian shots at both Epsom and Ewell's first woman and first Liberal Democrat MP **Helen Maguire**, who was elected in the July 2024 General Election and her Party's leader. He pulls no punches in his critique of Sir **Ed Davey**, MP for Kingston-Upon-Thames.

Resignation letter of Cllr James Lawrence

Dear Resident

I joined the Liberal Democrats in 2018 because I believed that the Party had both the strong intellectual foundations Britain needs and the pragmatism to achieve them. A principled commitment to liberalism, socially responsible markets, and devolved power differentiated the Liberal Democrats from other parties. Moreover, the Party's understanding that it existed to influence politics from the outside by winning public support for important issues was tried and tested.

In 2023, I decided to play an active role in this mission and stood for election. I was fortunate enough to win and become a councillor representing College Ward. Serving the community where I grew up has been a great privilege. I'm proud to have co-led a cross-party coalition working for better outcomes at the Chalk Pit site, increased Council lease scrutiny, and passed a motion requiring all urgent council decisions to be published. Navigating an overly complex housing payments system to keep a roof over the head of a vulnerable resident is an experience that will stay with me.

While I have been doing all I can to serve our community, I have unfortunately been undermined by both the national and local Liberal Democrats Party. Under Ed Davey's leadership, the Party has become rudderless. What do the Liberal Democrats stand for? I wish I could tell you. Davey's Mr. Tumble-style stunts cover up a lack of direction, policy, and commitment to seriously engage with the challenges this country faces, particularly the economy. As the two-party system collapses, the Liberal Democrats should stand to benefit. But Davey's Party is incapable of taking advantage, and given its purposelessness, that's probably a good thing.

Locally, I have been disappointed with our Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament who seems more interested in leafleting and electioneering than engaging in meaningful policy change at the national level. Having worked with the MP closely on local matters, I am also concerned by her ability to alienate volunteers who freely give up their time. While I was pleased to support the successful campaign to displace the Conservatives in Epsom and Ewell, I now feel a sense of guilt at having played a role in enabling her to be elected.

For these reasons, I am resigning from the Liberal Democrat Party with immediate effect. I sincerely hope that the Party returns to the seriousness of its past, but I unfortunately no longer have faith it will. I will continue to serve the people of College Ward and the Borough to the best of my ability as an Independent councillor.

James Lawrence

In response Helen Maguire has issued the following statement:

I understand that Cllr James Lawrence has decided to step away from the Epsom and Ewell Liberal Democrats and will finish his term as an independent.

While I wish him well in his future endeavours, I am saddened to see his portrayal of my values and priorities as a

Member of Parliament working for local matters at a national level.

The feedback I receive from local residents is consistently positive. I frequently receive correspondence from constituents who value the regular literature they are sent informing them of the important work I am conducting in Parliament. It is equally vital to me that constituents know how accessible and visible I am as their MP, engaging with them on their doorsteps each week. It is because I am an MP who strives to be a truly present voice within Epsom and Ewell that I am able to understand these concerns and raise them at a national level.

I recently met a constituent during one of my canvassing sessions, who told me that they were having difficulties accessing a breast cancer drug. I raised this issue directly with the responsible Minister, who then intervened with our local NHS organisation, and consequently the constituent received their medication. I do not need to debate the merits of consistent canvassing when the importance of it is so clear in cases such as this.

I am proud to be a very visible and active Member of Parliament within the Epsom and Ewell community, and will continue to fight for every single one of my constituents at both a local and national level.

Helen Maguire MP

Sam Jones - Reporter



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