

# Going potty about pot-holes?

24 January 2023



Who knew that 15th January was **National Pothole Day**? Earlier this month I drove around a bend in Woodcote Green Road in **Epsom** at night to be faced with a traffic cone placed a few feet into the road. Was that dangerous or was I lucky? The cone was placed in a large pothole and if the car had hit the pothole it might have been damaged. The Autocar website recently reported that a single pothole in Surrey had caused wheel and tyre damage to at least twelve cars on the evening of the 17th January. Whilst both the pothole that caused the damage to the 12 cars and the pothole in Woodcote Green Road were repaired by Surrey County Council, the surface on Woodcote Green Road leaves a lot to be desired and has done so for a number of years.

This incident reminded me of a report made to the Council via their pothole reporting web page in October of last year. It reported potholes and commented on the general poor state of the road surface of Woodcote Green Road that runs behind Epsom Hospital and is a route used by many cyclists. A reply was received. "We have visited the site and on closer inspection the problem does not need immediate work. We will continue to monitor and consider it when planning future works."



Cable exposed by pothole

Although Surrey County Council sends teams out to repair potholes they consider dangerous, the general surface of the road continues to deteriorate. On a stretch of Woodcote Green Road between Sunnybank and Pine Hill, about 450 metres long, more than 60 defects in the road surface are apparent. Some of these are no more than 2 cm wide and 10 cm long. One varied in width from a few centimetres to about 15cms, was 17 meters long and entirely in a cycle lane. Another was about a square meter in area and had cable exposed arising from and disappearing back into the road surface. Reporting a pothole shallower than 3cms or other road surface issues results in the message: "This issue is likely to be assessed as a low priority when inspected. We will probably wait to repair it as part of future improvement works."

Walking along the road it's noticeable that a number of defects are immediately adjacent to previous repairs, others are repairs that are beginning to break up and some are surfaces that have been reinstated after work by utilities and are sinking. Are the quality of repairs or reinstatements monitored and who is responsible for any substandard work?

It is also noticeable that when a team is sent out to repair a pothole, that is exactly what they do. There may be defects very close to the pothole being repaired but these are ignored. In wet and cold weather, even small holes in the road surface will fill with water, the water freezes and expands and the hole gets bigger. Would it not make sense, and maybe save money if once a team was on site they fixed not only the hole they were sent to fix but also other defects nearby?

The link to a map of planned improvements mentioned above indicates that no resurfacing work is planned for Woodcote Green Road. The map indicates that very little road resurfacing is planned for Epsom with only a little more in Ewell and Stoneleigh.

The wait goes on for better quality road surfaces in Epsom.

An Epsom and Ewell Times Special Correspondent.

Is your road potted with potholes? Are you going potty about these potholes? Send us photos of your potted street. Epsom and Ewell Times [admin@epsomandewelltimes.com](mailto:admin@epsomandewelltimes.com)

## Interim Council CEO's permanency tipped.

24 January 2023



**Jackie King** is set to become the new Chief Executive of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, subject to ratification by Full Council on Tuesday 14 February. Jackie has been recommended for the position following a robust and competitive recruitment process.

Jackie joined Epsom & Ewell Council (EEBC) in September 2021 as Director of Corporate Resources and has been in the position of interim Chief Executive since July 2022. Jackie has had an extensive career across the public and private sector and prior to joining EEBC was Acting Chief Executive at Tandridge District Council. She also spent eight years at Surrey Police in various People, Change and Transformation roles as well as roles relating to performance and risk in global financial institutions.

Cllr **Hannah Dalton**, Chair of the Residents' Association Majority Group, said: "We are very pleased to be recommending the appointment of Jackie King as the new Chief Executive of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council. Through the rigorous recruitment process undertaken, Jackie demonstrated that she is a strong and effective leader with the drive and vision to take EEBC forward. Jackie has the support of Councillors, staff and partners in leading the delivery of our agreed priorities and in helping our communities to face the significant challenges that lie ahead in these tough times."

"Jackie has been with the Council as our Director of Corporate Services for 18 months and I have every confidence that, with her at the helm as our Chief Executive, we will make strong progress in the years ahead and deliver the change that Councillors are looking for and that our residents expect."

**Jackie King** said: "I am delighted to be recommended for this position as EEBC's next Chief Executive. As a long-term resident of the borough I am so proud of what we have to offer here, and am looking forward to working with colleagues, Councillors, partners and residents to support the borough to grow and thrive. The last few years have been challenging for us all in many ways and from my time here at the Council I know how committed and ambitious everyone is to really make a difference and deliver the best services we can for our communities, businesses, and visitors."

Press release EEBC.

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## Want to join the Surrey Fire Service?

24 January 2023



Surrey Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) welcomed 37 new firefighters to the service this month. The group of wholetime firefighters took part in three different 15-week training courses, starting in April, July and August.

This is the latest group of recruits to join the service, and they will be posted to fire stations across Surrey of which there are a total of 25.

SFRS's Chief Fire Officer, **Dan Quin**, said: "It is such a pleasure to be able to welcome our 37 new firefighters into the service. They have all worked so hard to get to this point. The training they have undertaken is not easy, it takes hard work, determination and teamwork and that is what every single one of these new firefighters have shown. Welcome to Team Surrey, I look forward to working with you.

"Having trained as a firefighter myself and attended a pass out parade, I know what a special occasion these events are

for our new colleagues and their families. I look forward to seeing our new firefighters out at fire stations soon.”

The firefighters will be posted to locations across Surrey including Camberley, Dorking, Egham, Esher, Farnham, Guildford, Haslemere, Painshill, Walton and Woking Fire Stations.

Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety, which includes SFRS, **Denise Turner Stewart**, (Conservative, Staines South and Ashford West) said: “A huge congratulations to the new firefighters joining the service today. I have had the pleasure of attending a number of Pass Out Ceremonies in recent years, and it is always such a wonderful occasion to meet the new members of the service who have committed to keeping the communities of Surrey safe.

“Today is also an opportunity for us to celebrate with their family and friends, who will be by their side every step of the way in their new career. We hope it is a special day for them too.

“I’d also like to take this opportunity to thank our superb training team for their knowledge and expertise, and everyone else behind the scenes who has helped towards enabling this course. The service offers exceptional career aspects, so I look forward to seeing the future achievements and development from our new firefighters.”

SFRS currently has opportunities for firefighters on on-call contracts, these are skilled people from all walks of life who offer daytime, evening and/or weekend cover at on-call fire stations in addition to their normal, day-to-day commitments. Just like their wholetime counterparts. SFRS are recruiting for on-call firefighters at all of their on-call stations. If you, or someone you know is interested on being on-call please take a look at the website.

Surrey County Council news service

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## Green-belters seeing red on Local Plan?

24 January 2023



A determined group of Epsom & Ewell residents, representing over 1,700 petitioners, took to the podium at last night’s meeting of the Council’s Licensing, Planning and Policy Committee (January 19th). They asked Councillors eleven questions about the threat of Green Belt sites being included as “Preferred Options” in the imminent Draft Local Plan.

[Official Council record: The Chair (Cllr **Steven McCormick** - RA Woodcote Ward) provided an oral response to each question. Eight supplementary oral questions were asked. The Chair, the Interim Director of Environment, Housing and Regeneration, and the Planning Policy Manager provided oral responses to seven of the supplementary questions. The Chair confirmed a written reply would be provided for one of the supplementary questions.]

Otherwise the business of the meeting was confined to approving increases between 6 and 10 % for 2023/2024 on a range of Council charges relating to Planning matters, private hire vehicle licensing, animals and scrap metal.

Given every indication that the Government no longer thinks Green Belt reviews are necessary with housing targets advisory only, and fresh from Mole Valley District Council’s unanimous vote to remove Green Belt sites from its Local Plan, residents challenged the councillors and planners to seize the opportunity to save the Green Belt now and focus on brownfield sites for new affordable homes.

In answer to one question about whether planners had consulted HM Inspectors about Green Belt removal, council officers confirmed that, as EEBC was at an initial stage of decision taking, they had no need to consult the Inspectorate at this time, unlike Mole Valley are now required to do.

Given this difference, residents believe that it will now be entirely the responsibility of Councillors - the majority of whom are Residents Association, if Green Belt land ends up being developed. According to the Council for the Protection of Rural England, over 99% of sites earmarked for development by local authorities eventually get built upon, so the campaigners say it is both crucial and necessary to ensure no Green Belt sites are included at the outset.

The group intend to return to make more representations at the final decision-taking meeting on January 30 before the EEBC Draft Plan is published on February 1.

Further details of this residents’ campaign petition can be seen on [epsomgreenbelt.org](http://epsomgreenbelt.org)

**Chris Grayling** MP for Epsom and Ewell has written to constituents: “There have been two new developments on the Local Plans which shape the future of housing development in our area - in Epsom and Ewell and Mole Valley.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is due to publish its draft plan in the next few days (sic), and this will show the degree to which it has decided to push for development on local green belt land. I very much hope they have chosen to focus on brown field sites and particularly on the potential for the Kiln Lane and Longmead areas.

Meanwhile in Mole Valley, the Council has asked the Planning Inspector to delay consideration of their plans, following the Government's revision of its national planning policies. It is too early to know if this may affect the plans for Ashted, but I will keep you posted."

Related reports:

Lessons for Epsom in Mole Valley's "shouty" Local Plan struggle?

Crucial month for local Local Plans?

Gove gives pause for thought on Local Plans?

Local Plan Battle: early skirmishes on Downs Farm

MP's housing solution for Epsom and Ewell

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## Surrey County Council Stands Against Scams

24 January 2023



**Surrey County Council** has been officially accredited as a "Friends Against Scams" (FAS) organisation. FAS is an initiative run by the **National Trading Standards** (NTS) Scams Team that aims to protect and prevent people from becoming victims of scams by empowering people to 'Take a Stand Against Scams'.

The accreditation follows on from some impressive work by Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards, which has seen them:

- Train 22,269 Friends Against Scams
- Train 161 SCAMchampions
- Train 152 Scam Marshals
- Instal 562 call blockers
- Instal 38 doorbell cameras

The impact of this work can be seen in the financial impact of their interventions which between April 2019 and December 2022 generated savings of £66million.

In addition to the accreditation, Surrey County Council Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety **Denise Turner-Stewart** officially joined the initiative as a "SCAMBassador".

SCAMBassador's protect the public from scams and the damage they cause by working with members of both their community and at national level to educate and support those who may be vulnerable to scams.

Scams affect millions of people across the UK and cost consumers an estimated £5-10 billion of detriment of each year. The people who are targeted are often in the most vulnerable circumstances and the impact on their lives is devastating - from large financial losses to severe emotional damage which leaves victims feeling intimidated, scared and afraid to be in their home.

Denise Turner-Stewart, Surrey County Council Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety said: *"I'm delighted to become an official SCAMBassador and to help Friends Against Scams continue their vital work in protecting the public against exploitative and deceitful fraudsters.*

*"Anyone can become a victim of scams but they often target the most vulnerable in society and these criminals and fraudulent practices must be stopped.*

*"I would urge residents and business alike to attend one of the online FAS training webinars delivered monthly by Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Service and if you are plagued by nuisance and scam telephone calls email [trading.standards@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:trading.standards@surreycc.gov.uk) to see if you are eligible for a free call blocker.*

*"Scams damage lives, affecting people both financially and emotionally, but together with the Friends Against Scams Team, the Chartered Trading Standards Institute and our very own Trading Standards Team, we will do all we can to keep residents safe."*

**Louise Baxter**, Head of the National Trading Standards Scams Team said: *"The tactics used by criminals leave victims socially isolated and ashamed of telling their friends and families what's really going on behind closed doors. "It is*

*fantastic to have such an influential figure in the community to help us tackle this problem on a local, regional and national level and I would encourage all those that are interested in showing their support to join the campaign and be part of our growing SCAMBassador network."*

Surrey County Council News Service

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## Private Public Parking Penalisers

24 January 2023



**Surrey County Council** have agreed a new seven year parking and traffic enforcement contract with **Marston Holdings Ltd**. The contract will mean that parking and traffic enforcement will be operated in partnership between the council and Marston, helping to achieve the council's transport objectives.

Cabinet Member for Highways and Community Resilience, **Kevin Deanus** (Conservative member, Waverley Eastern Villages) said: "The new contract will mean that Surrey County Council can more directly and consistently manage on street parking enforcement across the county, helping to tackle inconsiderate parking and make parking restrictions more effective. In addition the contract will allow the installation of traffic enforcement cameras on Surrey's roads that can be used to help reduce congestion and improve road safety.

"Through the procurement process, Marstons demonstrated an excellent understanding of our requirements and what is needed to operate a successful and cost effective enforcement service to benefit Surrey residents."

Marstons made a £19.8 million profit on a turnover of £255 million in year end 31st May 2021. Next accounts due to be filed 23rd February. It lists its principal activities as: Consulting and technology; Back office processing; DVLA services; Civil parking services; Road traffic debt recovery; Smart meter installations; and Motor vehicle recoveries. It also provides other debt recovery and enforcement services, including: Criminal fine enforcement; council tax recovery; Civil enforcement; and Utility sector debt recovery.

**Epsom and Ewell Times** has obtained the following responses from local politicians:

**Mark Todd** Chair of Epsom and Ewell Labour Party commented: ""This is just more outsourcing likely to lead to poorer services with poorly paid staff exploited by private contractors on behalf of Conservative Surrey County Council. Surrey's long term outsourcing of road maintenance has been a disaster with its roads regularly rated as the worst, most potholed in the UK. Every time we speak to Epsom & Ewell residents, the sorry state of the roads is their top concern. Labour is committed to investing in public services so taxpayers get good value for money from a well-trained, fairly-paid council workforce - we are strongly opposed to Council Tax being siphoned off to profits for private contractors who consistently fail to deliver."

**Gina Miller** of the True and Fair Party said: "The finer details of this contract need to be carefully examined. What we must avoid is a private sector company being incentivised to issue tickets, inflating their profits at the expense of honest drivers. There must also be a fair appeals process and no adoption of unsavoury debt collection processes. Without doubt we need to see proper oversight of the contract to make sure no one is penalised unfairly."

**Helen Maguire** PPC for the Liberal Democrats said "The moves by SCC to privatise and centralise parking enforcement is just another example of the SCC's Tory party's attempt to concentrate power at the centre and away from working with local communities. The moves to put revenues into private companies, divorced from the communities that the like of EEBC serve are an affront to local democracy. Last year, the same centralising tendencies within SCC broke up the working groups that the County Council had with its local community councils - such as Epsom & Ewell and Mole Valley - preferring instead to silence the voice of local residents, so enabling them to get on with running the County as they see fit - that is, with less opposition or scrutiny. Currently, Epsom & Ewell BC successfully manage parking issues through their Contact Centre directly with the Parking Manager and his team of wardens. This self funded, not-for-profit-regime has worked well for many years because it is operated by local people who know the area intimately and have kept our residents and other road users safe. Now we see emerging a centralised enforcement regime, put out to private contractors, who in our view, will put more emphasis on enforcement to increase revenues to pay shareholders, rather than a strong but fair local system, that works directly for local interests."

Do you have a view? **Write to Epsom and Ewell Times.**

# Lessons for Epsom in Mole Valley's "shouty" Local Plan struggle?

24 January 2023



Mole Valley councillors have been warned developers could have "a field day" if government inspectors reject plans to release green belt sites from the authority's plan for homes.

*[Ed: Epsom and Ewell Times is following this story as there maybe some parallels for the progress of our Local Plan expected to be published shortly for Council consideration. (For "release" read "remove").]*

At a specially-called meeting of the district council on Monday (January 16), members unanimously voted to write to the government inspector looking at the local plan to get an opinion on the proposals. The updates to the local plan, which outlines the authority's plan for new homes in the district up to 2037, are being proposed because of changes to planning at central government level.

The changes include a consultation running until March on updating the National Planning Policy Framework. Changes at central government level could mean lower housing targets for councils as they look at their local plans, meaning councils may not need to release green belt sites for homes. But the move would also mean a loss in the number of affordable homes built across the district, with officers saying around 625 affordable homes could be lost over the duration of the plan.

A warning was also issued in the meeting of what might happen if the inspector said no to the proposed changes to the plan, which went through an examination in public from January to October last year. Cllr David Hawksworth (Independent, Ashted Common) said in principle he welcomed the "brave move" but raised concerns on what might happen if the inspector did not accept any changes as a "major modification" and the plan needed to be started again. He said: "[There could be] a long period in which there would be a field day for developers that would be coming in and trying to get some of the green belt sites because they'd be operating under our existing local plan."

The green belt sites which could be released from the plan, and therefore protected from future development unless there are very special circumstances, including land behind the Six Bells pub in Newdigate, Sondes Place Farm in Dorking and the former sewage works in Brockham. But the sites at Tanners Meadow in Bookham and Headley Court would remain part of the local plan because they already have planning permission granted on all or part of them.

The prospect of reopening the entire local plan again was rejected by the cabinet member for planning, Cllr Margaret Cooksey (Lib Dem, Dorking South), who described it as a "dangerous proposition". She rejected a call from one Conservative councillor to resign from her post, towards the end of a meeting that was heavy with party politics but nonetheless in which there was agreement on the final outcome.

Councillors also raised concerns about their own areas and the impact developments could have in different parts of Mole Valley. Charlwood Councillor Lisa Scott (Green) claimed a lot of people had already moved away from the area because of changes that were coming in the local plan, with villages such as Hookwood destined to see four green belt sites developed under the current draft plan.

Conservative Councillor Joanna Slater (Leatherhead South) said taking the green belt sites out of the local plan would mean half of all development would take place in the town, compared to 30 per cent under the plan currently under consideration. She added that the impact would be "huge" and affect school places, traffic and healthcare. She added: "You might as well rename the local plan 'building tower blocks in Leatherhead and other projects'.

Despite a meeting in which the chair said he would have to adjourn if members did not stop "all this shouting out", writing to the inspector was unanimously voted through by members, who will now await her reply.

Related reports:

[Crucial month for local Local Plans?](#)

[Gove gives pause for thought on Local Plans?](#)

[Local Plan Battle: early skirmishes on Downs Farm](#)

[Epsom and Ewell last in Local Planning](#)

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## No laughing matter for Council

24 January 2023



**Epsom and Ewell Borough Council** has brought in a **Public Space Protection Order** following a consultation with residents about psychoactive substance abuse in the Borough's open spaces.

Image Philafrenzy CC

The Order covers psychoactive substances not otherwise fully controlled by national legislation. The most significant example of this is currently nitrous oxide, **known as laughing gas**, which is typically used in the catering industry and supplied in small metallic canisters or larger pressurised tanks.

A Public Space Protection Order makes it an offence to use or be in possession of these types of substances on public land. It will be in place two years initially and signs are being placed in hotspots around the Borough, including all parks, over the coming month.

Any person who fails to comply with this order without a reasonable excuse will have their material confiscated and risk a Fixed Penalty Notice of £100 or a fine in court of £1,000. This will be enforced by both the police and the Council's enforcement teams.

Councillor **John Beckett**, Chair of the Environment and Safe Communities Committee, said, "We have seen a considerable increase in the use of nitrous oxide canisters in the Borough. There are real concerns from residents about the risks of this drug and the gateway effect to other dangerous substances. We want to alleviate the impacts of this drug by highlighting the adverse effects and provide a safe community for all residents in Epsom & Ewell. This public space protection order will provide powers to the police and our enforcement teams to issue fixed penalty notices in the event of a breach. We know our residents feel strongly about this issue and we thank them for their responses to our consultation."

If residents are concerned about the presence of psychoactive substances in the Borough, they may report them via [https://epsom-ewell.gov.uk/residents/online-forms?field\\_form\\_category\\_value=Report](https://epsom-ewell.gov.uk/residents/online-forms?field_form_category_value=Report).

This Public Space Protection Order has been made under 59 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014.

The Council has already located and seized substances from persons present in the stairwell of one of its carparks and carried out follow up work with them and their parents.

## Crucial month for local Local Plans?

24 January 2023



**Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's** Licensing, Policy and Planning Committee meets Friday 19th January but the **Local Plan** does not feature on its agenda. Local **Liberal Democrats** are asking for the Local Plan timetable to be delayed following central Government indications of a relaxation of new build housing targets.

Liberal Democrat councillors are asking Epsom & Ewell Borough Council to delay the publication of the "regulation 18" part of its Local Plan from the current date of early February, so as to incorporate potential changes to the housing

targets set by national government. It is expected that **Michael Gove**, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, will make changes to how local councils need to interpret housing targets, and the treatment of Green Belt land, and the implications of those changes are currently unclear. It is hoped to hear more from central government in the next few weeks.

“The original timetable for the draft Local Plan to go out to public consultation from early in February could well stand if there’s an announcement quickly” says Cllr **Julie Morris**, [LibDem College Ward] member of the borough council’s Licensing & Planning Policy Committee.

Liberal Democrats have previously been critical of Epsom & Ewell council’s slow progress towards the production of a Local Plan. They now say that circumstances in which the Conservative Government, primed by a statement from PM **Rishi Sunak**, could change the rules around housing targets and Green Belt development could warrant a short delay so as to make the draft Local Plan more robust.

“We have often been critical of the delays in bringing this draft Local Plan forward for consultation but going ‘live’ in early February could rule out being able to swiftly incorporate government changes to housing targets or implement new guidance on Green Belt development. We hope a delay won’t be necessary but pausing for a few weeks could potentially save months and months of extra work in 2023 and a much longer delay in achieving the objective, which is to have local policies in place to guide development and protect our borough “ says Cllr Morris.

A special meeting of Epsom and Ewell’s Licensing, Policy and Planning Committee will be held on 30th January. The agenda has not yet been published. One authoritative inside source has told the **Epsom and Ewell Times** that the Local Plan will proceed along the existing timetable and be published in February.

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Our partner at the BBC reports below on the latest position from neighbouring Mole Valley.

Changes to **Mole Valley**’s plan for development in the district could lead to the loss of hundreds of affordable homes. The district council has paused its local plan, which sets out where 6,000 homes will be built up to 2037, while the government consults on possible changes to planning policy.

A specially-called meeting of **Mole Valley District Council** on Monday (January 16) will discuss asking the government inspector overseeing the plan about the removal of green belt sites included in the plan. The sites include land behind the Six Bells pub in Newdigate, Tapwood Workshops in Buckland, land at Chalkpit Lane in Bookham, Sondes Place Farm, Dorking and the former sewage works in Brockham and sites in Hookwood and Capel among others.

The removal of the green belt sites, if it goes ahead, would be as a result of a lower housing targets from central government, meaning the district council could aim to build fewer homes over the period of the local plan. But this also means a reduction in the number of affordable homes that would be built, with the council’s policy at 40 per cent of new developments being affordable homes. Documents for the meeting said officers estimated the changes would mean the non-delivery of approximately 625 new affordable homes.

They went on to say the affordable housing policy itself would not be affected. Council documents show that one of the priority outcomes for the local plan is to: “Encourage the creation of affordable housing to meet local needs and explore innovative methods of delivery.”

**Surrey Community Action** works with local communities to increase the amount of affordable housing in rural villages and small towns in the county. In Mole Valley the organisation has supported **The Poland Trust** on the development of 12 affordable homes to rent at social rent levels and five affordable self-build homes for people living in Brockham and Betchworth.

A Surrey Community Action spokesperson said: “Affordable housing continues to be a critical issue in Surrey. In rural areas of Surrey, the shortage of housing is particularly acute and this has been exacerbated by the increase in the number of people seeking properties with more outdoor space following the pandemic, causing house prices and rents to reach their highest levels of unaffordability for people on average salaries.”

Related reports:

Gove gives pause for thought on Local Plans?

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Cllr Gulland: Insulate & Generate - two key aspects to include in the Local Plan for Epsom & Ewell

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## How Green is My Mole Valley?

24 January 2023



All green belt sites could be removed from Mole Valley's plan for homes following proposed changes to planning at central government level. A specially-called meeting of the district council will be held this month to discuss asking the government inspector looking at the authority's local plan her opinion on removing the sites.

The council's local plan, which sets out where and when 6,000 homes will be built in the district up to 2037, was put on hold in December when **Michael Gove** announced changes to housing targets at central government level.

A consultation is now running on plans to update the National Planning Policy Framework, closing on March 2.

The council's leader Councillor **Stephen Cooksey** (Lib Dem, Dorking South) said along with four other members of the council's cabinet, he had called for an extraordinary meeting of the council on January 16.

The council will be asked to consider seeking the inspector's view on removing all green belt sites from the draft local plan. While many of the new homes were planned for towns like Dorking and Leatherhead, green belt sites had been released to ensure the authority could reach its housing targets set by central government.

Residents and councillors had raised concerns about developments in rural areas as well, and the impacts they could have on communities, roads and infrastructure.

The council's cabinet member for planning, Cllr **Margaret Cooksey** (Lib Dem, Dorking South) said changes to planning policy removed the "central direction" of housing numbers and the need to develop the green belt in order to meet them. She added: "If the inspector agrees with our proposed process, as we hope she will, this can be achieved by introducing a major modification, which would allow the plan to proceed to the next stage of consultation on all the proposed modifications."

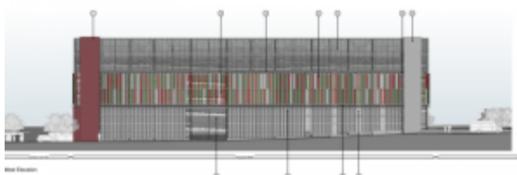
BBC Local Democracy Reporting Service

[Ed: Epsom and Ewell Times hope to bring you an update on the position with Epsom and Ewell's Local Plan next week as we await news from the Borough Council.]

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## Epsom Hospital multi-storey car park rises

24 January 2023



A Planning Inspector has allowed **Epsom and St Helier Trust** to go ahead with a 6 level car park at **Epsom General Hospital**. Despite the plans rejection by local councillors and over 100 local objectors resisting. In a key section of the published decision (6th December) the Inspector stated:

"Overall, the institutional character of the hospital site strongly contrasts with the character of neighbouring residential areas. Accordingly, the wider hospital site, including the appeal site is appropriately recognised in the 2008 Environment Character Study 2008 as having its own unique character (Area 35E). This area is described as having a low sensitivity to change and relatively low ratings in terms of townscape quality and value. The proposed multi-storey car park would be notably taller than the immediately adjacent elements of the hospital building and would form a new, sizeable and somewhat bold structure at the edge of the wider hospital site. In many respects the proposed design is honest, reflecting that it would be a structure which results from its function. The design and scale, however, would be compatible with the wider utilitarian character of the hospital site within which it would be principally read. It would readily relate to the scale and height of the taller buildings on the hospital site including the consented backdrop of the Guild Living scheme. Accordingly, the multi-storey car park would appear as a logical and coherent consolidation of the built form in the unique host character area."

In short, the implication is that as the hospital site is as a whole rather ugly, more ugliness is not objectionable. The Inspector goes on to observe:

"Despite the proposed height and massing there are relatively few public perspectives in which the proposed structure would be readily experienced. The principal ones would be from the site frontage to the hospital complex on Dorking Road and across the open sports ground from Woodcote Road. The proposed structure would also be highly visible from the public footpath connecting Dorking Road to Woodcote Road where it passes adjacent to the appeal site. However, in all of these places the multi-storey car parking building would be primarily experienced in the context of the adjacent modern, large hospital buildings described above. In those main views from Dorking Road and Woodcote Road it would be seen at

some distance, dissipating any visual effects arising from its bulk and height at the edge of the hospital site. For users of the footpath adjacent to the site there is scope to install hedging along the boundary as part of the landscaping for the appeal site, as found elsewhere on the path, mitigating to some degree the visual effects from the proximity of the height and scale of the structure.”

While acknowledging that there would be harm to neighbouring conservation areas he stated: “The scale of harm, however, would be significantly moderated by the existing impact of the hospital buildings on the setting of these conservation areas. The existing hospital complex would form the principal context and backdrop in which the car park structure would be experienced in the limited public views identified from within the Conservation Areas”.

On the question of encouraging commuting by car there appears to be a paradox. The Inspector stated “Overall, the modest uplift in total parking provision would not be excessive or unduly encourage significant or unnecessary additional car-based trips to the hospital.” [Emphasis supplied.] He goes on: “In the round the appeal proposal would generate environmental benefits over existing conditions in terms of reducing queue lengths and associated emissions and through the significant provision of vehicle charging points as part of the necessary transition to a lower carbon future.”

To read the full appeal decision [Click HERE](#)

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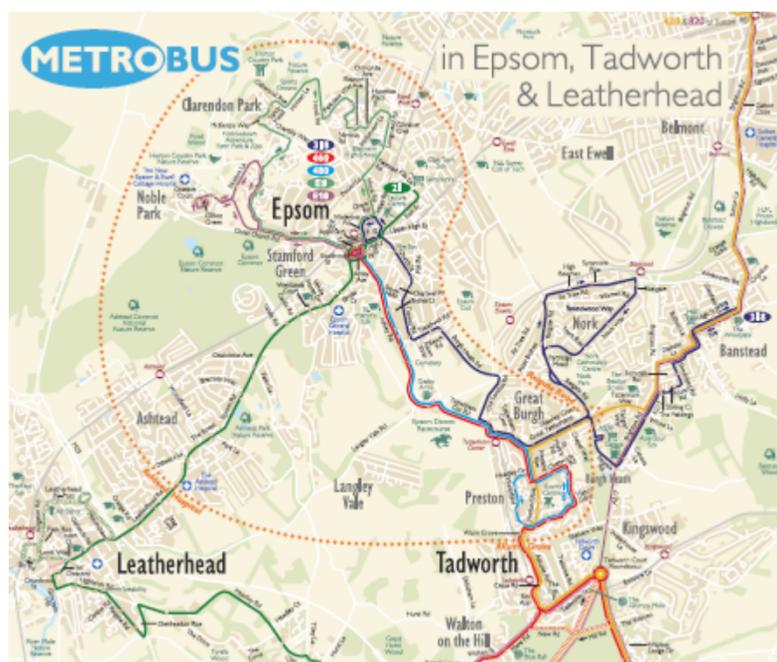
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## Epsom bus fares being capped at £2

24 January 2023



Epsom’s main bus operator Metrobus joins nine other bus operators across the county in signing up to the Department for Transport’s £2 bus fare cap scheme announced 19 December 2022. The Epsom buses include numbers 318, 460, 480 and the E9 and 10.



From 1 January to 31 March 2023, a single bus journey will cost no more than £2 on selected routes across Surrey, helping people to save money and use their car less. With an average single local bus ticket costing £2.80, passengers are expected to save almost a third of the ticket price per journey.

Operators taking part so far are:

- Compass operating in Cranleigh, Dorking, Godalming, Guildford, Redhill and Reigate
- Stagecoach operating in Camberley, Farnham, Guildford, Haslemere, Hindhead, Woking
- Metrobus operating in Banstead, Caterham, Epsom, Horley, Leatherhead, Lingfield, Redhill and Reigate
- Falcon operating in Addlestone, Byfleet, Chertsey, Cobham, Epsom, Esher, Leatherhead, Molesey, Sheerwater, Staines, Walton, Weybridge and Woking
- Waverley Hoppa operating in Godalming and Guildford

- Thames Valley Bus operating in Camberley
- Surrey Connect (Mole Valley DDRT) operating in Leatherhead and Dorking
- East Surrey Rural Transport Partnership operating in Tandridge
- First operating in Staines and Egham
- Southdown operating in Caterham, Horley, Lingfield Oxted, Redhill and Reigate

**Matthew Furniss, Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Growth said:** “We welcome this scheme which will help our residents to take the bus at a significantly reduced price, at a time when many are facing pressures from the rising cost of living.

“The bus industry is also facing a challenging time, resulting from the drop in passenger numbers and rising costs following the COVID-19 pandemic, so we hope that this scheme will also encourage new and old passengers to get back on the bus.

“We are currently investing £50m to improve bus services and grow patronage. This will see more zero emission buses, more real time passenger information and more measures to help buses run to time. When this £2 flat fare scheme ends, we will introduce a half fare scheme for young people aged 20 and under to further encourage bus usage.

“With transport accounting for 41% of carbon emissions in Surrey, it is hoped that cheaper bus travel will also lessen the need to travel by car for some journeys.”

POSTED BY SCC · DECEMBER 20, 2022

## All change in Surrey’s County Town?

24 January 2023



**Guildford** town centre is going through some huge changes, with developments taking place on the sites of some former big names and plans to open up the riverside. The LDRS\* has broken down the areas which will see new homes built, and how the town centre will be changing over the coming years.

Guildford’s town centre masterplan sets out the future vision for the town, including developing the town’s underused sites around North Street and hundreds of new homes. New homes in the town have been put forward as the more sustainable option, with shops, facilities and public transport all within walking distance and a need in the area for lower-priced homes. But the amount of affordable housing has been an issue on some developments, with developers citing rising construction costs and lengthy planning processes meaning schemes are no longer able to offer high numbers of affordable homes, if any.

We round up some of the biggest developments below and how they will change the face of Surrey’s county town.

### Debenhams

A planning application for nearly 200 homes on the former Debenhams site was narrowly approved by councillors on November 22. The development will see the old store knocked down and two new buildings replacing it alongside shops, a riverside walkway and possibly a boutique cinema. Councillors approved the controversial plans by six votes to five, debating the limited amount of affordable housing and the flood risk, with the Environment agency ultimately satisfied with measures put in place to reduce the risk of flooding. This site will be a key part of the town centre redevelopment and opening up the riverside for the public.

### Train station

In February 2018, planning permission was granted on appeal for developer Solum’s £150million regeneration of the land around Guildford Station. The borough council had refused the application because of concerns about the development’s impact on the Grade II\* listed St Nicolas Church, among other things. The Station Quarter when complete will include a new station building, more than 400 homes, as well as shops and office space. The developer’s website highlights £25million of station improvements including a multi-storey car park and new plaza with shops and cafes.

### Old Orleans restaurant

The former restaurant next door to the Odeon cinema is currently empty and the council, as the owner of the site, has no current plans to lease it out. Councillor Tim Anderson (Residents for Guildford and Villages, Clandon and Horsley), the authority’s lead councillor for assets and property, said it would not be cost-effective to lease it in the short-term while there were plans to develop the building. He added: “The full plan for the Bedford Wharf area, including this site, forms part of the emerging town centre masterplan, Shaping Guildford’s Future. Proposals are that the land will support a wide mix of uses. It will support the town centre with new homes, jobs, community and service spaces.”

### North Street

The area around North Street has been called the “poor relation” to the town’s picturesque high street – just don’t call them cobbles. The redevelopment of land around the bus station, including the refurbishment of the bus station itself, could bring nearly 500 new homes and part-pedestrianise North Street. Plans originally put forward in December 2020 included 700 homes, this has steadily been reduced after public consultations, as has the height of the buildings in the scheme. The tallest building has been reduced from 14 to 13 storeys and the second tallest from 10 to nine storeys. A video on the developer’s website shows public squares, restaurants, and new shops and cafes as part of the plans, which should be considered by the council’s planning committee in January 2023.

### Wisley airfield

While it’s not within Guildford town centre, the proposed new town which may be built on the former Wisley Airfield could still have an impact. Campaigners have raised concerns about how local village roads will cope with traffic from the residents of the proposed 1,700 homes. The new town would be around a 20 minute drive down the A3 from Guildford, and a similar distance from Woking. The site is also just over a mile from the A3’s junction 10 with the M25, where junction upgrade works have started.

It may be just another reason to look again at Guildford MP **Angela Richardson’s** calls for the A3 to tunnel under Guildford to help with traffic and pollution, as she called for in Parliament in December.

An outline application for the plans will come to the council’s planning committee in 2023.

North street “fly through” video by developers: <https://www.northstreetregeneration.co.uk/virtual-flythrough.html>

Solum webpage on station development: <https://www.solum.co.uk/development/guildford/>

\*Epsom and Ewell Times BBC partner – Local Democracy Reporting Service.

Related reports:

Tunnel vision for Surrey’s A3?

Housing plan flying in the face of opposition

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## Giraffes adapt from Serengeti to Surrey vegetation

24 January 2023



Surrey County Council has partnered with Chessington World of Adventures Resort to help provide additional food for the Giraffes over the winter months. Surrey’s countryside estates team regularly coppice the council’s woodlands as part of essential habitat management on Surrey’s countryside sites. Chessington have been working with them to coppice hazel, chestnut and other local tree species within Norbury Park near Dorking to feed their herd of Giraffes.

During the autumn and early winter, the hoofstock team at Chessington made regular visits to Norbury Park where they cut back browse (leaves, shoots and branches). The team transport the browse back to the Zoo where they chop into smaller pieces and store in airtight containers which are then placed in freezer storage. This enables an ongoing stock of fresh food to feed the giraffes throughout the winter months.

The 1,340-acre Norbury Park is part of a European Special Area of Conservation (SAC) within the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and forms part of Surrey County Council’s countryside estate which comprises over 10,000 acres open for public access.

**Marisa Heath, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for the Environment comments:** “We are delighted to partner with Chessington to benefit not only the endangered Giraffes, but also the wildlife in Surrey. Coppicing areas of land on Norbury Park helps to improve the health and biodiversity of the woodland by opening it up to the sunlight, which allows a wider range of plants to flourish. We hope to extend this partnership with Chessington to benefit other parts of Surrey’s countryside estate.”

**Rebecca Apperley-Gawn, Senior Hoofstock Keeper comments:** “It’s been great to partner up with the countryside estates team at Surrey County Council. Norbury Park is closely located to our Zoo so it’s great to keep food miles down and the browse fresh for our herd. The Giraffe spend up to 75% of their day eating and it is vital for their diet that we include fresh food particularly during the long winter months. We look forward to continuing with this partnership over the coming years”.

As well as providing feed for the Giraffes, the Chessington team also took back to the Zoo the stems of coppiced material to make additions to animal enclosures and entertain the Rhinos who love to push them around their enclosures!

For information on Surrey County Council’s countryside sites, visit the website.

## Let's not forget Surrey successes!

24 January 2023



Teams and individuals who do outstanding work on behalf of the people of Surrey have been celebrated at the first Stars in Surrey award ceremony. In part sponsored by Epsom based firm **Atkins**

The event - funded through sponsorship - saw standing ovations, laughter and some tears last week.

Winners included County Council staff who look after young people in care, help elderly people live at home for longer, keep Surrey's libraries thriving and encourage more people to access the countryside.

There was also special recognition for people doing extraordinary things at partner organisations like Ukraine UK Unity Woking.

Founder of Ukraine UK Unity and winner of 'The Make It Happen Community Hero Award (Empowering Communities)', Irina Garmash Creeger, said: "It was an emotional and very inspirational night. It felt like I was sharing a room with superheroes & each nominee had special superpower.

"I was pleasantly surprised, overwhelmed & honoured to receive the Award. Although the award was given to me as an individual, I wanted to share it with the incredible multicultural strong team of volunteers at Ukraine UK Unity.

"Our efforts have been stellar, our commitment is unquestionable, and our goals for the future will always involve spreading kindness, compassion and hope, and sharing in all that we have and know with people in need."

Leader of the Council Tim Oliver, who presented an award, said: "Stars in Surrey really was a wonderful way to pay tribute to some incredible people and teams who work in many different ways to benefit Surrey.

"Everything we do as a council is driven by our ambition that no one is left behind here, and the stories from the Stars in Surrey Awards are all a great reflection of that work.

"I'd like to say a big thanks to the sponsors of the event too that made it possible, and for everyone who nominated their Surrey heroes."

The final award presented on the night was the People's Choice Award, that received 1,200 votes, and was won by Christy Niven, a Specialist Speech & Language Therapist in the Children, Families and Lifelong Learning directorate.

The event was sponsored by Atkins, Pick Everard, Concerto, Vail Williams, Tile Hill and Impower.

Here is the full list of winners:

- Award for Outstanding Customer Service - **Claire Hodgson**, Trading Standards Specialist, Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards
- Team Award for Innovative Working - **South-West Asylum Care Leavers' Team**, Children, Families and Lifelong Learning
- Championing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Award - **Funke Adelekun**, Principal Project Manager, IMP Major Projects
- Greener Future Champion Award (Enabling a Greener Future) - **Sharon Newton**, Resource Manager, Children, Families and Lifelong Learning
- Young employee of the Year Award - **Durante Cartwright**, Weekend Library Assistant at Camberley Library, Customer and Communities
- Frontline Worker of the Year Award (No One Left Behind) - **Jo Ellis**, Occupational Therapist Assistant, Elmbridge Locality Team, Adult Social Care and Integrated Commissioning

*Nominated by Amy Watts: "Jo is the hardest working person that I know and her dedication to her role and supporting vulnerable adults and children is something to be admired... One (urgent welfare visit) that sticks into my mind where the gentleman was really, really vulnerable, due to Jo's willingness to go the extra ten miles they managed to keep him home and safe... I couldn't think of anyone better to receive Frontline Worker of the Year."*

- Entrepreneurial Person or Team of the Year Award (creating a sustainable economy) - **Caroline Price**,

and **Helen Delatouche**, Countryside Team, Environment, Transport and Infrastructure

- The Make It Happen Community Hero Award (Empowering Communities) - **Irina Garmash-Creeger**, Ukraine UK Unity Woking

*Nominated by David Meller: "On the fourteenth of March this year the UK opened its borders to Ukrainian refugees through the Homes for UK scheme... Irina stepped in to really make it happen for our community. She matched hosts with refugees, she set up the hub where refugees could get support on administration matters when they arrived... I think she is really one of Surrey's brightest stars."*

- The Jacqueline Foglietta unsung hero Award - **Andy Baldwin**, Support Worker, Leaving Care Teams, Children, Families and Lifelong Learning
- People's Choice Award - **Christy Niven**, Specialist Speech & Language Therapist, Children, Families and Lifelong Learning

Surrey County News.

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## School transport failings lead to foodbanks...

24 January 2023



Families were pushed to using food banks and suffered an impact on their mental health when Surrey County Council-funded school transport was not provided for their children.

Surrey County Council carried out a review into the school transport "failure" after nearly 150 families, many with children with additional needs, were left without a way to get their children to school at the start of term.

Alongside the authority's internal review, Family Voice Surrey carried out its own, including a survey which heard from 290 families about the impacts of children not being provided with transport to and from school.

The survey showed that 71 per cent of those who responded had experienced challenges with home to school transport during the autumn term and that 19 per cent of children and young people were unable to attend school or college on the first day.

Leanne Henderson, the organisation's participation manager, said they heard from "desperate" families every year about issues with school transport, often right at the end of August, when transport had not been confirmed for the start of the school term.

She also raised concerns about the communication that came from the authority, with many families waiting a long time for contact from the council.

The approach of the council had been "very inconsistent" she told a meeting of the authority's children, families, lifelong learning and culture select committee on Thursday (December 15).

Ms Henderson said: "We had some families that told us they had to use food banks because they were so financially disadvantaged due to not being able to transport their child to school, and that was really quite worrying."

She also told the meeting that the organisation was "shocked" that 86 per cent of respondents said the situation had adverse effects on their mental health and well being, and increased anxiety.

More than a third of respondents reported financial issues.

She said: "They were the two elements that really hit home and made us wonder: 'Why has this happened? What is going on?'"

The meeting heard that at least six factors had led to a backlog of cases at the start of the school year, including an increase in applications, a policy change earlier in the year and a lack of resources.

Ms Henderson said she could see council staff were "totally overwhelmed", saying she could see from both sides in talking to the families affected and those working at the council.

She said: "I could see the team and I really felt for them.

"They were doing the absolute best that they could do under really difficult circumstances."

The council's report listed 50 recommendations to ensure the issues would not be repeated next year, and there were recommendations in the Family Voice Surrey report.

Councillor Clare Curran (Conservative, Bookham and Fetcham West), the authority's cabinet member for education and learning said she had also been "swamped" by emails on the matter.

She said the review that had been carried out was a "substantial piece of work" and not a "five-minute fix".

The council spends more than £50m a year on helping children and families get to school, which Cllr Curran told the meeting is a fifth of the entire net budget for children and families.

Cllr Curran added: "I don't underestimate the task at hand, I don't underestimate the work that needs to be done.

"But I'm confident that we are going to get it done and next September families, children and young people won't suffer the failure that there was in September this year."

ENDS

# Gove gives pause for thought on Local Plans?

24 January 2023



A **Surrey council** has paused its plan for 6,000 homes after central government changes which could mean lower housing targets. Mole Valley District Council has paused its local plan saying it would be “unwise” to carry on with the process in the face of potential changes at a national level.

The authority released some green belt sites in the district for new homes, in a plan that was examined by government inspectors between January and October.

Image: Councillors-and-residents-concerned-about-Mole-Valley-Local-Plan. Emily Coady-Stemp

A local plan sets out a council’s policies and sites for homes and infrastructure, with Mole Valley’s setting out plans until 2037. Changes from central government are expected to be announced before Christmas, with Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities and Surrey Heath **Michael Gove** outlining in a letter earlier this month (December 5) that more control should be given to councils and local communities.

Councillor **Margaret Cooksey**, cabinet member for planning on the district council, said the council would pause its local plan process until it had a better understanding of what government was saying. Cllr Cooksey (Lib Dem, Dorking South) said in a statement the decision had not been taken lightly and given the progress made during an “exhaustive” examination of the plan, that pausing the plan is not what the council wanted to do. She added: “However, it would be unwise to carry on when we are not sure what the wider national planning policy situation is so we have committed to wait until such time that the Inspector can advise us on what should be done next. We had been due to consult with stakeholders on the modifications proposed by us and the Inspector in January. We remain hopeful that clarity will be provided and we will take the best course of action for our residents.”

Mole Valley’s only Green councillor, **Lisa Scott** (Charlwood) said she wanted clarification on what “pause” actually meant, calling for the plan to be “fully reviewed” when national policy had been revised. She said: “We wholeheartedly welcome the change in housing numbers required by government, which was leading to huge green areas being sacrificed to questionable house building targets and are very pleased to see that the local plan has been paused.” But she raised concerns about areas of green belt still being included in the submitted plan, claiming some had been “significantly expanded” from the public consultation stage, so residents could not have their comments considered by the council.

She said possible changes also meant more brown field sites could be included and the types of homes could be reassessed, with terraces and town houses being more efficient to heat and cool than detached homes.

A letter from Michael Gove sent on December 5 said the changes would mean communities would “have a much more powerful incentive to get involved in drawing up local plans”. While he said planning would always start with a number of homes required in an area, though it should be an “advisory starting point” and not a mandatory figure. He added: “It will be up to local authorities, working with their communities, to determine how many homes can actually be built, taking into account what should be protected in each area – be that our precious green belt or national parks, the character or an area, or heritage assets.”

The majority of homes in the local plan as it stands would be built in Leatherhead and Dorking but there was also concern about communities in rural areas being “ruined” in areas such as Hookwood where more than 550 homes were planned over four sites.

At the February meeting of the council where members voted to submit the plan, the administration promoted its maintaining of 99.3 per cent of the district’s green belt in the local plan.

Related reports:

[Epsom and Ewell last in Local Planning](#)

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[Local Plan Battle: early skirmishes on Downs Farm](#)

# 1000 Surrey children wait for special needs plans

24 January 2023



A senior Surrey councillor admits it is “not good enough” that nearly 1,000 children with special educational needs in Surrey are waiting for an education plan. Nearly a third of those have been waiting more than the statutory 20-week limit for a Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), with a shortage in educational psychologists among the reasons the council put forward for the backlog.

Surrey County Council’s cabinet member for education and learning said nationally for 60 per cent of children being assessed for an EHCP it was being done within the 20-week period. **Clare Curran** (Conservative, Bookham and Fetcham West) added: “Clearly it is not only a situation that prevails here in Surrey. Notwithstanding the national situation, I admit that it’s not good enough and not one that we would expect or want for our young people.”

An EHCP is put together by a council for children to outline what help they may need at school to support them with their special education needs and disabilities. There are 988 active EHCP requests at the council, of which 284 were known to be over the 20-week period, according to meeting documents.

Cllr Curran explained to a meeting of Surrey’s council on Tuesday (December 13) that a shortage of educational psychologists meant a mandatory part of the EHCPs could not be completed, which was contributing to delays. She said recruiting and training up caseworkers had been a focus, and the workforce was now around 80 per cent staffed across the county.

Her answers came in response to a question put forward by **Lance Spencer** (Liberal Democrat, Goldsworth East and Horsell Village) who said families were being “left behind” by the council and asked what was being done to reduce the “excessive delays”. Cllr Curran said that the council’s ambition was to achieve “better timeliness” by the end of the year in completing EHCP plans. She added: “I know the situation is not good. I know we are not achieving the level of service that we would want to for our children and young people. We are doing our very best to address that and make sure that things improve.”

In a written response, the council denied that parents threatening legal action sped up the time scales for getting an EHCP in place. Cllr Spencer’s written question read: “It would appear that where the parents threaten legal action that the EHCP timescales are reduced” and asked for the number of parents who had written threatening legal proceedings.

A written response said data was not collected at the council in that way, adding: “This process is not influenced by the threat of legal proceedings.”

The meeting heard that the issues impacting the outstanding EHCPs were also a factor in nearly a fifth of annual reviews not being carried out within six months of their due date.

A question put forward by **Catherine Baart** (Green, Earlswood and Reigate South) asked for an update on annual EHCP reviews at the authority. The response in meeting documents showed that at the start of term, 59 per cent of plans had an up-to-date annual review in place or were due within the next month, being 6,445 of the 10,963 plans in place. There were also 4,517 plans that were overdue a review, of which 1,849 were more than six months overdue.

Documents said the availability of staff over the summer had played a part in fewer annual reviews being completed on time, and that an improvement should be seen by the end of the autumn term. Cllr Curran said she did not know if there was a target within the department for completing reviews on time, but that the service was prioritising reviews for children who were vulnerable, including those looked after by the county council or on child protection plans.

Councillors also raised the issue of home to school transport in Surrey, described as “the biggest concern of many of our residents” by the Green Party Group leader on the council.

The council’s leader, Cllr **Tim Oliver** (Conservative, Weybridge) apologised in October for a backlog in sorting school transport for some of the county’s most vulnerable children, when more than 150 families were left in limbo at the start of term.

**Jonathan Essex** (Redhill East) called on the council to look in its review at the views put forward Family Voice Surrey which had spoken to 290 families as part of its own review.

Cllr **Nick Darby** (Dittons and Weston Green Residents, The Dittons) told the meeting the internal review listed more than 50 recommendations for the council, which he described as “a terrible indictment of the situation”. He said the school transport was “best described as a shambles” and questioned the creation of a new board to oversee progress being made up of officers and cabinet members, many of them previously involved in the process.

On Thursday (December 15) a meeting of the council’s children, families, lifelong learning and culture select committee will consider the council’s review of what happened at the start of the school year.