

Senior local Councillor slams Surrey’s budget consultation



Cllr Eber Kington, long serving **Residents Association** Borough Councillor and former Epsom and Ewell Mayor has served as a County Councillor since 2009. He has long campaigned against waste on staffing and councillor expenses. For example when standing in 2017 he stated he had “..called for a review of the County Council’s senior management structure to reduce the then £42 million salary bill [that] was voted down by the Conservatives. He opposed the Conservatives’ 2015 decision to increase their council allowances by over 60%. He has argued for the need to cut the use and cost of agency staff, which [then] stood at over £13 million.”

Today he has focussed on **Surrey County Council**’s public consultation on the 2023/2024 draft budget. He describes “as biased and meaningless”. He goes on to claim “The questions are deliberately designed to lead residents towards those responses that support the draft budget. Negative responses are discouraged by additional and unsupported commentary warning of the consequences of choosing the response.

In addition, the final question invites residents to give details of “any benefits” they can see if the budget was implemented. Quite clearly SCC is not interested to learn of residents’ views on any disbenefits of the budget, as that question is not even asked.

A truly impartial survey would have also encouraged residents to state what they felt was unnecessary expenditure, perhaps on high level salaries, or what for them is a higher priority, for example night-time safer streets.”

In addition, Councillor Kington was critical of information gathering on the respondents’ personal circumstances.

“There are 24 questions, but only the last three are on the draft budget. The first 21 questions are on the status, background, salary, and other personal details of the respondent. You have to ask why any Council requires its residents to provide so much personal detail before they can even start to give an opinion. Maybe one cost saving would be for SCC to reduce its spend on such biased and meaningless surveys”.

It is believed that a similar survey in 2022 produced about 100 responses out of a Surrey population of 1.2 million.

Epsom and Ewell Times has verified Cllr Kington’s claim. The consultation questionnaire indeed has just 4 questions directed at the issue with the first 21 directed at profiling respondents.

Surrey County Council state: “The council is setting its budget for 2023/24 and has set out plans for £1,095.6m (just over £1bn) of spending. The council faces a budget gap of £83m for next year, largely due to inflation pushing up the cost of delivering services, but also due to increasing demand for services, policy changes from government, workforce shortages and continuing impact from the Coronavirus pandemic. Having worked to identify £68.6m of efficiencies within the budget, the draft budget is currently facing a £14.4m overspend.”

You can find more information and a link to the survey [HERE](#)



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2030 vision for the elderly in Surrey



Surrey County Council sets out its vision for the care and living of the older generation by 2030. In 2021/2022 Adult Social Care in Surrey spent £506 million to support older people. This money helped over 5,600 older people and their unpaid carers. Money was also spent with voluntary organisations that support people in their community too. Adult Social Care also ensures services for information, advice and guidance are available to help people understand their care options and to make good care-related decisions.

The county of Surrey has a population which is getting older with people living longer than in other parts of the country. These changes mean that many more people are likely to be living alone, without support from their family. By 2030, the number of people aged 75+ predicted to be living alone will have increased by 27%. National reporting states that the number of unpaid carers 65 years old and over will increase by 17% from 2016 to 2025.

Dementia is most common amongst older people and in Surrey it is estimated that between 2020 and 2030 the overall number of people with dementia could increase by 28%, from 17,700 to 22,672.

In building the 2030 strategy SCC stated “We spoke to over 750 people living in Surrey. We worked with many diverse groups of Surrey residents of all ages including unpaid carers, care providers, partners, and colleagues. This took seven months and included workshops and surveys. We wanted to know what works well, what does not work well, what could be improved and what is important to our residents.”

The plan sets out all the ways SCC, working with its partners in the NHS, care sector and districts and boroughs, will support people to live and age well in Surrey over the next decade. At the heart of the plan is a commitment to improving opportunities and care choices in local communities so that older people can be as active and independent as they wish.

The council engaged with residents and their families, as well as staff and partners, to draw up the strategy – and is now seeking input to help shape how it’s put into practice.

The plan is centred around three priorities. They are:

- Prevention – supporting people to lead healthy and independent lives in their local communities for as long as possible
- Living independently – enabling people to live in their own homes with care and support tailored to their strengths, including through planned new extra care housing
- Care homes – making sure that Surrey can offer the right mix of high quality care homes for those who need them

Further details can be found in the summary version of the plan at surreycc.gov.uk/livingwellinlaterlife.

Working with partners, including the NHS in Surrey Heartlands and Frimley, as well as care providers and voluntary organisations across the county, the council has already achieved some key milestones in its plan.

These include:

- signing a new contract for home care services so that people receive even better care in their own homes
- enhancing its reablement service for people needing short-term care, such as after a hospital stay, through linking with specialist care workers
- carrying out in-depth planning to help SCC and its partners meet the growing need for care home places catering for complex and challenging needs

The council’s keen to continue to gather residents’ and partners’ input as it works towards meeting the commitments in the plan. There will be opportunities to take part in workshops and surveys.

Anyone who has an interest in shaping services for older people can sign up via the web page or by calling 0300 200 1005, SMS (for the deaf or hard of hearing) 07527 182 861, text relay 18001 0300 200 1005 or BSL video relay.

Mark Nuti, Surrey County Council’s Cabinet Member for Adults and Health, said: “Our ambition here in Surrey is that no one is left behind – we’re committed to helping those who need us most, and improving quality of life for everyone. We want older people to be able to lead independent and active lives for as long as possible in their own homes and communities and, if they need extra support, to receive tailored and dedicated care. Our Living Well in Later Life plan sets out how we will continue to modernise our services and work with our partners over the rest of the decade to enhance the lives of older people in Surrey. If you have an interest in shaping services for older people, please come forward and help us put our plan into practice.”

Additional reporting from Surrey County Council news service.

Council help for cost of living



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) is raising awareness of the range of support available to residents struggling with the cost of living crisis. The Council have created a dedicated page on the EEBC website, which pulls together information on what the Council and other local and national organisations can do to help in one place at www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/cost-of-living.



Residents will find advice in a wide range of areas, including energy and housing payments, health costs, food, applying for benefits, employment support and local places to go to keep warm. There are also specific areas for families with children and older residents.

The Council will also be sharing information and money-saving tips through social media and other material out in the Borough to reach as many people as possible with the help available.



Councillor **Alex Coley**, (Residents Association- Ruxley Ward) Chair of the **Community and Wellbeing Committee**, “We are aware of the significant effects rising costs in all areas are having on people’s everyday lives in the Borough. We want to ensure that those who need help are aware of what support is available and are

able to access it.”

“This campaign is an opportunity for the residents, charities, the Council and Councillors to work together to help each other through the current crisis. If you are affected by the cost of living crisis, please visit the Council’s webpage, look out for and engage with the advice on its social media and across the Borough or contact your ward Councillor to share your concerns. We’re all here to help.”

Ward councillors’ details can be found here – <https://democracy.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx>

The webpage covers the following:

- What we’re doing in Epsom & Ewell
- Applying for benefits and paying your council tax
- Difficulty paying your rent or mortgage
- Employments, skills and training support
- Help for families with children
- Help with food
- Help with health costs
- Help for older residents
- Help with your broadband and phone packages
- Independent advice
- Paying for your gas, electricity and water
- Warm Hubs

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council Communications.

Local Plan Battle: early skirmishes on Downs Farm



As **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council** is expected to publish a draft **Local Plan** in February 2023 **Epsom and Ewell Times** carries below an opinion piece authored by the **Keep Epsom & Ewell Green Belt Group**. We cannot confirm these campaigners’ contentions but we are happy to stimulate public discussion and interest through our pages. The Local Plan will shape for several years to come the decisions on new housing development locations in the Borough.

Opinion Piece:

Alarmed by well-sourced leaks, residents have decided to come out fighting early against joint landowner and developer discussions with Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) to build hundreds of homes on the 110-acre Downs Farm, destroying forever one of the closest Green Belt sites to London.

Other Green Belt sites near Epsom’s Hook Arena and Horton Farm are also believed to be earmarked housing in the Local Plan process, and it is even feared that other areas within Epsom’s 42% of Green Belt land could also have been offered up and included.

Residents in Surrey’s already highest populated borough are so concerned that they are not waiting for what they say could be a flawed consultation process, expected in February.

Under Government pressure to deliver nearly 700 homes for each of the next 20 years, planning officers and councillors should instead be prioritising developer partnerships for an imaginative alternative “brownfield” core scheme, claims the residents’ campaign group.

However, following much-publicized Government climbdown guidelines announced this week by Secretary of State, Michael Gove, that top-down housing targets were to be “advisory only” and could be challenged by local authorities if the character of their area would be irrevocably changed, EEBC should be in no doubt, say residents, that Green Belt sites should be now removed from its Draft Local Plan.

By redeveloping the Kiln Lane/Longmead area closer to town centre facilities, “more starter and lower cost young family homes could be built – and bring much needed rejuvenation and job opportunity benefits. Yet there is little sign that the planners are engaging with developers on this opportunity, preferring the easier, but devastating, option of

building higher end housing on Green Belt fields.”

The borough-wide residents’ campaign, “*Keep Epsom and Ewell Green Belt*” involves social media, mass leaflet drops, a new petition (<https://www.change.org/EpsomGreenBelt>) and its own website(<https://epsomgreenbelt.org/>). Some residents may well stand as independent Green Belt candidates in the May elections.

‘Our advice is that once a site has been publicly designated as suitable by the Council in the Local Plan, public consultations rarely change what are perceived as “done deals” – and we are not simply prepared to stand by and let that happen. In 2019, EEBC listed Downs Farm as a Green Belt site not suitable for development, yet it now appears to conveniently ignore this just because the site has been offered up to them’ said Yufan Si, campaigner of Keep Epsom and Ewell Green Belt.

Downs Farm is a rare chalk grassland habitat for protected species such as skylarks and bats, with regular sightings of deer, redkite and pheasant.

“Destroying forever high quality Green Belt sites will result in mainly luxury houses. We are deeply disappointed that the Residents Association controlled EEBC appear set to prefer Green Belt desecration over redeveloping a core brownfield scheme in central Epsom. Properly phased, this could be promoted as a creative industries hub, focussed on the town’s University of Creative Arts centre for excellence. As well as a much better mix of around 5,000 affordable starter and rented homes for young families, this would provide job opportunities in a much-needed Epsom rejuvenation.”

The campaign group also points out keeping Green Belt spaces also helps sustainability and the UK commitment to net zero by 2030.

The Elmbridge Council Local Plan is cited as an example where the council and residents challenged unrealistic top-down government housing targets. It proposes redeveloped brownfield sites without any Green Belt destruction – despite having a greater proportion of Green Belt land (57%) than Epsom.

The residents’ campaign urges EEBC planners to quickly engage with brownfield developers using a £75,000 grant recently announced by the Government. Given its overriding remit to only prefer Green Belt development in “exceptional circumstances”, *and the recent Government policy rethink on housing*, this should be done before the draft Epsom Local Plan is issued in February, say residents.

“Keep Epsom and Ewell Green Belt” Campaign Group – for further information contact epsomgreenbelt@gmail.com

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Council elastic on plastic?



In March 2019 Epsom and Ewell Council agreed to phase out its use of single-use plastics. How is it getting along? Judge for yourself from the reply of Councillor **John Beckett** (Residents Association - Auriol Ward) to a progress report demanded by Councillor **Julie Morris** (Liberal Democrat - College Ward) at the Council meeting 6th December.

The Chairman of the Environment and Safe Communities Committee reported:

"Since adopting the Single use Plastics Policy as part of the Climate Change Action Plan, the Council has been working to support the reduction in the use of single use plastics within its own operations and across the Borough. We have utilised our communications channels and public events to improve awareness and to support wider behaviour change of our residents and businesses. We installed refillable water stations in 6 of our parks and opens spaces and in our Market place, to encourage use of reusable water bottles,. We have also supported all non-food stall and dry food greengrocers at Epsom Market to stop using single use plastic carrier bags, run a reusable Tote bag giveaway event, and committed to making the Market place Single use Plastic free by April 2024.

We have also reviewed the Council's own operations to understand where we can reduce single use plastics. We have removed all plastic cups from our operational buildings, encouraging staff to use reusable bottles and cups. We replaced the depot's old container-based water cooler with a plumbed-in version. We have also introduced segregated office recycling bins to enable improved recycling of plastics in our buildings.

We have stopped buying plastic-based refreshment supplies where possible but where it hasn't been possible to find a viable alternative, we are unfortunately having to continue to use that option. This does not mean that we will just accept the products but will continue to look at alternative options now and in the future.

As the Climate Change Action Plan is a living document and with changes to industry constantly evolving, we will continue to review our operations for further opportunities to reduce the need for Single use Plastics. This work will also involve partnership working with Surrey County Council, through the Surrey Environment Partnership, to support the delivery of the Single-use Plastics Strategy for the whole of Surrey.

Regarding the small milk pots which are currently used at the hot drink's machines in the members room, council chamber and committee rooms, alternative options are being looked at with the intention for these to be discussed at the January Climate Change Working Group meeting. After an initial conversation with the councils recycling officer, it is believed that the material used in the pods might be the same as yogurt pots and the solution might be as simple as removing the foil lid and having a separate container for these to be recycled at these locations.

Whilst we acknowledge it wasn't called an audit a review has taken place of Single use Plastic use and subsequent action taken as highlighted in this reply. Since then, the issue of SuP and the 5 pledges have been incorporated into the climate change action plan and will continue to be picked up through delivery of the plan. These actions are also now robustly supported by incorporating SuP consideration into all our procurement processes. The climate change action plan has member oversight and officer resource attributed to secure its delivery and continuous review."

Labour Councillor moves on housing



An affordable housing commitment was put off at yesterday’s meeting of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council. A motion proposed by Labour’s Court Ward Councillor Kate Chinn read: “We as the Labour Group move that in the Local Plan Epsom and Ewell Borough Council will specify a minimum requirement of 40% of affordable housing in each new housing development of 10 or more units (Use Class C3) of which at least 25% will be reserved for social rent and comply with the vacant building credit.”

The matter was referred back for further consideration by the Council’s Licensing, Planning and Policy Committee that next meets 19th January 2023.

Cllr Chinn writes to The Epsom and Ewell Times – see our letters page.

Auriol school field for golden years?



Auriol School sports field in Cuddington is earmarked by Surrey County Council for 50 elderly care housing units. According to SCC: “The Cuddington site is ideally situated for Extra Care Housing and has been selected specifically for its location. The site will provide new homes in the form of 1-bedroom self-contained apartments. All of the homes will be accessible, with features designed for wheelchair users.

The accommodation has been designed around the constraints of the site and its neighbours but is still able to offer residents ready access to safe external space including landscaped gardens designed expressly to address the needs of older people; encouraging activity and promoting exercise, healthy living and wellbeing.

The design focuses on ensuring residents have sufficient space, both private and communal, and key to this have been considerations around accessibility. The development has been designed to ensure residents can remain in their homes as they grow older and/or as their needs change.”

SCC have plans for three other sites in the County. **Mark Nuti**, Surrey County Council’s Cabinet Member for Adults and Health, said: “Our ambition is to bring affordable extra care housing to locations around Surrey and these four sets of proposals bring us a step closer. Not only would the schemes help older people live life to the full, they would also breathe new life into four community sites.”

SCC is holding a consultation exercise and if you want more information and to participate go to:

Cuddington Extra Care Housing (communityuk.site)

Low turnouts see political changes in Surrey



The Liberal Democrats have taken two seats off the Conservatives in Surrey County Council by-elections. Winning by just 15 votes, a vote in the Sunbury Common and Ashford Common division took place on Wednesday November 30), with the Liberal Democrats beating four other candidates to be elected.

Harry Boparai got 735 votes, with the Conservative candidate Naz Islam in second place with 720 votes. The by-election was held following the death of Councillor Alison Todd, which was announced in September. With a turnout of 17.5 per cent, the votes for each party broke down as below:

Harry Boparai, Liberal Democrats 735 (elected)
Naz Islam, Conservative 720
Khalid Mustafa, Labour Party 383
Rory O’Brien, Reform UK 144
Helen Couchman Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition 63

Councillor Todd’s death following a terminal lung cancer diagnosis in 2021 was announced in September. Colleagues on the council described the county and former Spelthorne borough councillor as a “strong and determined” councillor who wanted to use her own experiences to “make the world a better place”.

In May 2021, Cllr Todd was elected for the Conservatives with 1,509 with the second place Liberal Democrat getting 610 votes.

The result represents a 17 per cent swing to the Lib Dems, with no Green or Independent candidates standing, as there was in the 2021 election.

The Liberal Democrats took another Conservative council seat in Surrey after a by-election on Waverley Borough Council.

Dave Busby won the Chiddingfold and Dunsfold by-election on Thursday (December 1) with 652 votes, with the second place candidate getting 297 votes.

The Conservative candidate for Chiddingfold and Dunsfold, Ian Mitchell, was suspended on Monday (November 28) and stood as an independent, though ballot papers had already been issued listing him as a Conservative. A spokesperson for the South West Surrey Conservatives said an investigation was pending regarding a social post “that could be considered to be an inappropriate use of social media”.

The association said in a statement: “Given this, we have suspended Mr Mitchell from the Conservative Association pending an investigation into his conduct that may potentially lead to disciplinary proceedings being taken.”

No Green candidate stood in the Waverley by-election, and the result represents a 43 per cent swing to the Lib Dems since the 2019 election.

The borough council’s Lib Dem leader Cllr Paul Follows (Godalming Central and Ockford) said: “I am ecstatic by the result, further strengthening the progressive coalition at Waverley Borough Council that I have the honour of leading with the addition of a fantastic, local, and hard-working new councillor.

“This is also a huge win and swing in a part of our borough in which the Conservatives have long just assumed the vote was theirs.”

The election took place following the death of Cllr John Gray, who died in September, having been a councillor since 2015.

The full results were as follows:

Dave Busby, Liberal Democrat: 652 (66.6 per cent) Elected

Ian Mitchell, Independent: 297 (30.3 per cent)

Rebecca Aitken, Labour 30 (3.1 per cent)

There are now 16 Liberal Democrat councillors on the county council, of a total of 81 seats.

Surrey schools energy hikes



Surrey schools are being advised to plan for increases in gas prices of more than 129 per cent.

Along with this, council finance teams are telling schools to plan for a 73 per cent increase in electricity prices, according to a cabinet member on Surrey County Council.

Councillor Claire Curran (Conservative, Bookham and Fetcham West), the county council’s cabinet member for education and learning, described the rises as “very significant increases”.

At a meeting of the authority’s cabinet on Tuesday (November 29), Cllr Curran said the school finance team had been working with schools on budget planning and sharing recommendations.

She said utilities generally accounted for around two per cent of a school’s budget, while the largest part of their budget goes on staffing costs, adding: “Even though there’s enormous pressure, it is for a relatively small amount of their budget.”

Many schools are on annual fixed contracts, meaning they were likely protected from the immediate pressure of increasing prices, which Cllr Curran called “a comfort for some”.

She told the meeting: “I don’t think anybody or any organisation is immune from the pressures of gas and electricity costs.”

She said the council was “comfortable” that schools were “not in immediate danger of runaway electricity or energy prices”.

Cllr Curran also highlighted the pressures faced by the county’s smaller schools, which had fewer pupils and were seeing falling birth rates in their areas.

She said schools in rural areas in particular, mostly concentrated in the south of Surrey, were under “very significant pressure” because of the way school funding is allocated on a per pupil basis.

There are 29 schools across the county with fewer than 90 pupils and 73 schools with less than one form of entry.

Cllr Curran said: “That just goes to show that when schools are funded on a per pupil basis we can understand why they’re under pressure.”

The Department for Education is increasing schools funding nationally by £1.5billion in 2023/24 with minimum (average) per pupil funding levels being increased from £4,265 per primary pupil to £4,405 and from £5,525 per secondary pupil to £5,715.

ENDS

Twisting out a little more for Xmas?



Surrey children on free school meals will receive food vouchers over Christmas in what one councillor described as “an absolute lifeline” for some families.

The scheme, which will give families a £30 voucher per child, was confirmed by the council’s cabinet member for education and learning on Tuesday (November 29).

Councillor Clare Curran (Conservative, Bookham and Fetcham West) said the vouchers would be issued to children who were eligible for free school meals to be used over the holiday, and that the “wheels were already in motion” on the scheme.

She said: “I know they are an absolute lifeline for very many families.”

The vouchers can be spent in certain supermarkets, and with some conditions in place on what they can be spent on – covering food and other essential items only.

England footballer Marcus Rashford piled pressure on the government during the coronavirus pandemic, forcing a u-turn on the policy not to provide help for struggling families during the school holiday.

The authority’s cabinet meeting also heard about measures being taken to help residents with the cost of living crisis, including a directory sent out to residents to signpost support organisations and funding available.

Meeting documents said: “Whilst the majority of Surrey residents are not in crisis situations at the moment, many are beginning to make cutbacks.

“It is also important to note that there are some residents in crisis already before the full effects of inflation and the winter months are felt.”

Council statistics showed that more than 500 new clients had registered with Surrey Citizens Advice between April and June with more than 1,600 issues being raised particularly around benefits, debt, housing and foodbanks.

Particular groups in the county accounted for the increased demand, with 66 per cent of claimants identifying as having a disability or long-term health condition, and two-thirds of clients identifying as female.

Figures also showed a 300 per cent increase in demand at some foodbanks across Surrey.

Council leader Tim Oliver (Conservative, Weybridge) said the authority would continue to lobby government over energy prices and support for households after April, when the energy price guarantee ends.

Cllr Oliver said: “I hope that residents see what this council is doing, and see that we are genuinely trying to do whatever we can, in whatever way we can, to help support them through what I know will be a difficult period for many people.”

ENDS