

Budget Report: More council tax for Epsom and Ewell



Epsom and Ewell households will pay more council tax from April after the Borough Council agreed on its budget for 2022-23 at a meeting of the full Council on Tuesday evening (February 15).

The budget-setting meeting sets out the Borough Council’s expected revenue and expenditure for the forthcoming year and, as a consequence, the additional amount the Council needs to raise in council tax.

The budget proposals were put forward by the governing party, in Epsom and Ewell’s case the Residents’ Association group, stating how they are managing the council’s finances. This was followed by speeches from the opposition council groups.

Councillor Colin Keane (RA, Nonsuch), chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee proposed a Borough council tax increase of £4.95 a year for a B and D property, or 2.38%, as a result of what he called “a robust and sustainable budget” and despite “another challenging year”. “Our strong financial position” he said, “has been the result of many years of sound advice and excellent financial management by our finance team.”

Councillor Keane criticised the Labour opposition for arguing that council tax should not be raised. He argued that such a course would create a £165,000 shortfall and accused Labour of failing “to propose what policies and strategies could be adopted to fill the reduced income”.

Cllr Kate Chinn (Lab, Court Ward) argued that “residents of Epsom and Ewell, along with everyone else in this country, are facing a huge rise in the cost of living” and put forward ways of increasing revenue and cutting costs. “Review of venues such as the Playhouse and Bourne Hall can increase revenue and tackling homelessness can reduce costs,” she argued and went on to propose other measures, even questioning whether the Town Hall itself is needed now that many staff continue to work from home.

But, later in the debate, veteran Councillor Jan Mason (RA, Ruxley Ward) responded angrily to Labour, saying that, for the £4.95 rise, “we get weekly bin collections, we get our parks and open spaces that are second to none, and we have the wonderful centre in Sefton Road. These are things we are choosing to do for our residents. We have one of the best boroughs in this country. If the Labour party are worried about nine and a half pence a week, the price of 2 cups of coffee a year, then all I can say to them is – get a grip of yourselves.”

Speaking for the Liberal Democrat group, David Gulland (College Ward) concentrated on the Climate Emergency, arguing that, 3 years on from the Council’s own Climate Action Plan, “we still have no funds allocated for specific actions to reduce our own emissions...Let’s get on and do some of these projects.” He also suggested that the Council should take a lead by shifting its own investments. “It would be relatively easy to ensure some of our portfolio is redeployed into equivalent funds with Green credentials,” he said “Let’s join up and live our values.”

Another veteran Councillor, Eber Kington (RA, Ewell Court) quoted independent auditors as saying that “the Council has a track record of delivering robust financial plans”. He attacked the Labour party’s zero tax rise policy and went on to criticise the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives, whose one Borough Councillor was unable to respond as she was in the hospital.

Leading committee member, Cllr Hannah Dalton (RA, Stoneleigh), was the last to speak in the debate. Also responding to Labour’s comments, she said that “review of the venues and venue strategy, the Town Hall strategy, and homelessness, they’re all in here [the annual plan being discussed]”. And responding to a Liberal Democrat comment about sharing services with other Councils, she said that “we are working closely with East Surrey to look at opportunities [for] synergy – we’ve got to be doing that”.

26 Residents’ Association Councillors, voted for the budget, the Labour group voted against, and Liberal Democrats, arguing they were broadly in favour but there were some aspects they couldn’t support, abstained.

The £4.95 increase in the Borough Council’s precept is not the only extra amount of council tax to pay in the forthcoming year. The Borough Council accounts for only 10% of the overall amount of council tax collected. Conservative-controlled Surrey County Council receives 76% of the council tax and the remaining 14% is taken by Surrey Police. SCC’s portion is increasing by £77.31 this year (4.99%) for a Band D property and Surrey Police’s precept by exactly £10 or 3.4%. This means that the overall council tax increase for a band D property in the forthcoming year will be £92.26 or 4.52%.

Sites sorely needed

Landowners, developers, site promoters and individuals are being invited to suggest sites across the borough that might be suitable for future development.

The Local Plan is being prepared and the Council has opened a new ‘Call for Sites’. This is to inform and refresh the Local Plan evidence base and ensure the information remains up-to-date.

Councillor David Reeve, Chair of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee, said “The Call for Sites is a part of the process required by central government in the preparation of our new Local Plan.

“We are committed to ensuring that our Local Plan is sustainable, and that sufficient infrastructure is provided to support it. Land will be needed for a wide range of uses, so people are invited to propose locations that could be used for housing and economic purposes”.

Sites should only be put forward with the owners’ permission. Submissions are invited until 27 March 2022

All of the sites put forward will be assessed for their suitability, availability and achievability for future development in due course. There is no guarantee that any site put forward through process will ultimately be developed, given constraints such as environmental sensitivity, infrastructure capacity, etc

Councillor Reeve added “Epsom and Ewell is a popular place to live. One aim of a new Local Plan is to set out how the borough will meet the challenge of delivering the government’s required increase in new homes in the most sustainable way.

“We want to include the borough’s communities in this process. The council must demonstrate that it has followed a logical approach to finding sites and narrowing down ones that are not suitable – the more options the council can demonstrate it has considered, the stronger its argument for the number of homes it is planning to build”

The Local Plan is a document which sets out planning policies and proposals for new development. When it is adopted, the Epsom and Ewell Local Plan will be used to help determine planning applications in the Borough.

Herald the new Bourne Spring

Herald of Spring, Bourne Hall, Saturday 12 March

Herald of Spring, a popular annual community event since the 1970s, returns this year as a celebration of local horticulture and spring flowers.

This year’s extravaganza is all about sustainability, reusing, replanting and recycling – as well as all the little things we can do to cut down on waste and protect the environment.

Alex Coley, Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee, said “After what has been an incredibly difficult couple of years for everyone, we are delighted to be able to welcome everyone back to Herald of Spring and help bring a little joy and colour into people’s lives again.

“We’ve called on some help from our recycling friends from Wimbledon and we’ll be getting some tips from the Wombles, so keep an eye out for these shy creatures.

“Shake off the winter chill and come and explore the beautiful indoor and environmentally friendly floral displays from Ashtead Park Garden Centre. And maybe gather some inspiration for your own garden at home!”

Returning for 2022 is the Gift Fair, organised by What’s On In My Town Group, with a range of locally-made and hand-crafted items – perfect for that upcoming Mother’s Day present!

Children will be able to enjoy a wide range of free activities and entertainment.

It’s competition time!

There are two competitions this year.

1. Scarecrow Competition

Our scarecrow competition is back with a twist. Local primary schools and youth groups are invited to submit their best creative work “making good use” of pre-loved and recycled materials in a Womble-themed pageant.

2. Make Your Own Garden Tray Competition

Could you be the next Capability Brown? Have fun making your own picturesque garden in a tray! This competition is open to all children including school gardening clubs.

Full details on the competitions can be found on the Bourne Hall website

Lighting up commuters

Improvements to pedestrian routes around Epsom, Ewell West and Stoneleigh stations will be taking place over coming weeks thanks to a grant awarded to Epsom & Ewell Borough Council from South Western Railway’s Customer and Communities Improvement Fund.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council successfully secured the grant through a highly competitive bid process that saw over £14m of applications for the £5.5m fund available for the whole South West Railway network. The Council’s award is available to improve the routes to and from the stations, enhancing the public realm, and making areas safer through enhanced lighting and route-finding. We have worked with local partners to allocate funds to key measures that will make a real difference to local communities and everyone using the stations.

The project has already commenced in Epsom Town Centre with festoon lighting introduced along Station Way, the access route between the marketplace and Epsom station. Additional measures are being planned, including new planters that will be placed around the borough’s stations adding seasonal colour and making the areas more attractive and enhancing local wayfinding signage.

Councillor Colin Keane said: “We are delighted that South Western Railway have provided this funding, which will enable us to significantly enhance the visual, physical and pedestrian links between Epsom, Ewell West and Stoneleigh stations and their respective retail centres”.

Mark Youngman, CCIF Project Manager at South Western Railway said: “Here at South Western Railway, we recognise the vital role that rail plays in the local as well as the national economy, and our Customer and Communities Improvement Fund is designed to give an economic boost to the villages, towns and cities that we serve. We are delighted to have been able to support Epsom and Ewell District Council with their imaginative scheme, which enhances the links between our rail services and Epsom, Ewell and Stoneleigh centres”.

Council Meeting: Does Epsom need more trees?



Thursday 30 September 2021 the first in-person full Council meeting since Co-Vid was held in the Council Chamber Town Hall The Parade Epsom.

The Council considered the Annual Plan 2021-2022 in the context of the Council’s Four Year Plan 2020 – 2024. Agreement was sought to update key objectives and performance indicators for 2021 – 2022.

One point of contention was raised by Cllr Julie Morris (College Ward Liberal Democrat) concerning the small number of trees the Council aims to have planted in the year. 10 being too few in her opinion.

Where on Council land do you think Epsom and Ewell Borough Council could plant a new tree? Could you or your neighbourhood buy a sapling and ask the Council to plant it? Let us know your thoughts

Council Meeting: Privatising Legal Advice?



Amardip Healy, the Chief Law Officer of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, resigned from her post in August. She filled the statutory role of “Monitoring Officer”. The function of a Monitoring Officer is reporting on contraventions or likely contraventions of any enactment or rule of law and reporting on any maladministration or injustice where the Ombudsman has carried out an investigation; establishing and maintaining registers of Members’ interests and gifts and hospitality; maintaining, reviewing and monitoring the Constitution.

During the Full Council of **30th September 2021** convened to authorise the appointment of an interim monitoring officer for 12 months, many Councillors were taken-aback by a decision reached “behind closed doors” to outsource this important function to a solicitor in private practice for a monthly fee of £1900 for an

unspecified commitment in time and an hourly rate of £190 for exceptional work. One presumes VAT at 20% is added to the legal bills. The solicitor appointed, Olwen Brown of the firm Anthony Collins, is undoubtedly expert in this field and she impressed the inner circle of Councillors who had the privilege of interviewing her for the position.

Labour Councillors and some Residents Association Councillors expressed their concerns as to the cost. Eber Kington, former leader of the ruling Residents Association Group, defended the decision and claimed it would demonstrate resilience. Cllr Debbie Monksfield Court Ward (Labour) complained that this arrangement would inhibit her in the performance of her democratic duties. The Monitoring Officer provides neutral advice to Councillors in Opposition and from now she would be afraid to ask for advice knowing the lawyer’s billing meter might be running at Council Tax payers’ expense.

Cllr David Gulland (College Ward Liberal Democrat) criticised the process by which this *fait accompli* had come about but voted in favour of it reluctantly because the law requires a Monitoring Officer to be in place. The three Labour Councillors who form the official Opposition against the 33 strong ruling Residents stood firm and voted against.

The Council’s view is that the fixed rate will cover the expected workload and only exceptional work such as complex investigations of a Councillor would attract additional fees. For more detail of the financial arrangements see [HERE](#).*.

Support for Afghan Refugees



Following the British and allies’ humiliation in Afghanistan in August this year the UK Government has urged local Councils to participate in the Afghan Locally Employed Staff Relocation Scheme. The urgent need is to provide homes to those refugees who fled from the Taliban takeover and are currently in temporary accommodation in the UK. Funds are promised to local authorities willing to support the resettlement of Afghan interpreters and others (and their families), who worked for UK Forces, the UK Embassy and other official British interests.

The scheme supports rent and other housing costs, local authority support staff salaries and “integration support” (e.g., English language, education and health). The funds promised by the Government range over a three year period from £22,340 for one adult in a one bedroom property to £134,040 for a 2 adult 4 children family in a 4 bedroom property.

The Council Officers recommended that Epsom and Ewell Borough Council undertake support for 2 families but an amendment moved by Court Ward Councillor Kate Chinn (Labour) was accepted by all Councillors and 5 families will be supported. The greatest challenge to the programme will be identifying landlords willing to provide suitable properties.

Nina Kaye of the Epsom Refugee Network responded to the decision We are pleased to hear that the Council has voted to take up to five Afghan families being re-settled under the LES (Locally Employed Staff) scheme. These families have risked so much to support our troops in Afghanistan and as a result have had to flee their homes and their country. There are many highly skilled individuals in this group who will be a real asset to our Community. Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network will be working with the Council to support these families when they arrive, helping them to learn English and settle into life in the UK”.

Joanna Sherring of Epsom Community Sponsorship stated: “Our Charity is applying to be a Community Sponsorship group in Epsom & Ewell and it’s great to see such support for refugees in our community. Hopefully we will never know what it feels like to lose everything and have to start a new life in a different country. I am so proud to be part of a such a passionate group of people who want to offer the chance of a new life to a refugee family”

Epsom and Ewell is by no means alone in the County in supporting the scheme with all the other 10 District Councils supporting between 2 (Mole Valley) and 5 to 10 (Waverley).

Full details of the scheme and Government explanations are available [HERE](#)

New Ward of Horton proposed for Borough

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council met online July 19th and considered the proposed submission regarding **changes to Wards of the Borough**. The **Boundary Commission** confirmed the forecasted electorate figures for 2027. The forecasted electorate in the Borough is shown to be 64,889. On the basis of these figures, based on 35 Members the ratio for electorate to Member in 2027 is estimated to be 1: 1853.9. For the purposes of calculation for equality of Ward representation, the Council has worked to the 2027 figures at a ratio of 1:1854. It is important to note that the Electoral Review changes will take effect from 2023, which is before the next local Borough elections

The roads, railway lines, open spaces and rivers, criss cross the Borough. These features have helped to shape the Wards which currently exist. For this reason, there are key challenges to building a Warding Map which is distinctly different from what currently exists. The development of the Hospital Cluster since the last review, identified a clear need for the creation of a new Ward which encompassed the settlement. The creation of this new Ward directly helps to address the electoral variances which had grown over time. The mapping of the Borough in terms of Warding, focused on the natural and built divisions which have themselves, created distinct communities. In turn these communities have built their own local support infrastructure and arrangements. Although the advice on an Electoral Review is to start with a blank map, it is also to note the nature of the environment and the settled communities which exist.

The proposals being put forward for submission include:

The creation of a **new Ward of Horton** which would address electoral variances within key existing Wards;

To redistribute the electoral variances and addressing anomalies in Ward boundaries which have developed over time.

The table below sets out the comparison between the current arrangements alongside with recommended to Council for approval.

Table 1: Proposed 14 Wards Option for 35 Councillors

Wards	Current Councillors per Ward	Electors in Current Ward Boundary & Ratio on 38		Electors in Proposed Ward Boundary & Ratio on 35		Proposed Councillors per Ward
Auriol	2	3126	1:1563	3045	1:1522	2
College	3	4330	1:1443	5018	1:1672	3
Court	3	5113	1:1704	5124	1:1708	3
Cuddington	3	4558	1:1519	5376	1:1792	3
Ewell Court	3	4379	1:1459	3642	1:1821	2
Ewell	3	4409	1:1469	3324	1:1662	2
Horton	3	0	0	2980	1:1490	2
Nonsuch	3	4796	1:1589	5089	1:1696	3
Ruxley	3	4706	1:1568	3736	1:1868	2
Stamford	3	5563	1:1854	3729	1:1864	2
Stoneleigh	3	3693	1:1231	3693	1:1846	2
Town	3	5593	1:1864	5008	1:1669	3
West Ewell	3	4762	1:1587	4853	1:1617	3
Woodcote	3	4572	1:1524	4983	1:1661	3

