

Late hour Epsom kebab decision gets a grilling

2 June 2026



Fans of late-night burgers, kebabs, and wraps are in for a treat after the Epsom Grill was given permission to extend its opening hours. The hot food takeaway in Waterloo Road, between High Street and Epsom Railway Station, can currently keep cooking until 2am to close at 2:30am at weekends. On Monday to Thursday it can serve until 1am, and on Sundays this is brought back to midnight.

Now, following a January licensing application that granted the extension, and a 'Pythonesque' planning meeting where Epsom and Ewell Borough Councillors almost voted against its own decision - those hours are to be extended.

The grill originally applied to allow service and closure until 4am, with all remaining days unchanged, but this was revised to 3am on weekends, subject to a condition requiring security door staff until 3:30am.

It then went to planning to be confirmed.

Councillor **Robert Leach** (Residents Associations of Epsom and Ewell: Nonsuch Ward) told the May, Thursday 28 planning committee. "This area is next to a railway station that has two lines going up to London. Every few minutes 300 tons of metal storms through Epsom station creating socking great sound and we're worried about the disturbance from a few people sitting in a grill eating burgers? I mean this is something straight out of Monty Python. I don't see why we have any restrictions on any hours at all.

"Frankly, if someone wants to eat a burger at 3 o'clock in the morning and Epsom Grill is prepared to stay open and cook them, I mean, why should anybody stop them?"

The meeting, and subsequent vote, went back and forth; between those who thought the matter had already been decided at licensing and that the planning decision was a formality, and those who wanted to reopen the debate.

Cllr **Jan Mason** (Residents Associations of Epsom and Ewell: Ruxley Ward) said: "It's far too late, three. I think what the police are saying must be from past experience and my own experience of it all. I feel that that time is far too late, they'll all be as drunk as lords. They will cook to three, it wont be four until they get out and people live here. They live in flats in Station Approach.

"Surely they want a decent night's sleep and I think four o'clock is ridiculous. So as far as I'm concerned, I agree with the police."

Opponents pushed to reject the plan, only for the motion to fail by one vote.

It left the officer recommendation to approve as the sole option remaining - which only passed after the chair's deciding vote.

Cllr **James Lawrence** (Independents Group: College Ward) said: "We're at risk of duplicating the debates that happened at licensing and came to a decision."

He added: "We have case law in front of us that says...you need to have a really good reason why we are going go against a decision that we just made at our licensing (committee) and why you think it will hold up against a judge's decision that's just been made a few months ago."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

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Fresh Local Plan row as residents challenge legality of latest Epsom and Ewell consultation

2 June 2026



A fresh dispute has erupted over Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's embattled Local Plan process after residents challenged the constitutional validity of the council's latest planning consultation.

The row follows an email issued by the council's Planning Policy Team reminding residents that consultation remains open until 15 June on "Additional Documents Submitted by the Council during the Local Plan Examination", ahead of a further examination hearing scheduled for 2 July at Epsom Town Hall.

The consultation concerns documents submitted during the government inspector's examination of the borough's long-running Local Plan — a process that has already generated years of political controversy, debate over Green Belt development, and repeated questions about governance and committee oversight.

In one of a number of near-identical emails reportedly circulated by concerned residents to councillors and senior officers, resident Philip Brown argued that the current consultation "appears to have been launched in breach of the council's constitution" and therefore could not be regarded as valid.

Mr Brown's complaint centres on the role of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee (LPPC), the council committee whose constitutional terms of reference include responsibility to "consider and approve" Local Plan documents for public consultation. According to the resident correspondence, there is no evidence in the published minutes of LPPC meetings in late 2025 and early 2026 that the seven consultation documents had been reviewed and approved by the committee before the consultation was launched.

The email goes further, alleging that at the LPPC meeting of 10 March 2026, "the Chair explicitly declined a request to allow the committee to review the Local Plan documents".

On that basis, the resident contends that "the current consultation appears not to be constitutionally compliant and is therefore invalid", adding that it would be "both inappropriate and pointless for consultees to comment on an invalid consultation". The email asks the council to arrange for the documents to be considered by LPPC and then to issue what it terms a "constitutionally-compliant consultation".

The issue touches on themes previously explored by the *Epsom and Ewell Times* during coverage of the borough's Local Plan disputes.

The Local Plan has divided opinion sharply over housing targets, Green Belt release, infrastructure pressures and the extent of member oversight of the process. Recent EET reporting on the LPPC proceedings highlighted tensions over whether councillors were being afforded sufficient opportunity to scrutinise crucial planning material and the degree to which committee oversight was shaping the evolving plan.

The controversy arrives against a backdrop of political transition. Following local government reorganisation, powers will ultimately pass to the new East Surrey Council in 2027, although Epsom & Ewell Borough Council remains the planning authority for the present Local Plan process.

Among those responding to the resident correspondence was David Buxton OBE, Liberal Democrat Shadow Councillor for Epsom West and Shadow Cabinet Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Health on East Surrey Council.

Cllr Buxton stated that he was not involved in the current EEBC Local Plan process and therefore could not determine whether the consultation complies with the borough council's constitutional requirements, saying those matters are for "the Borough Council, its officers and, where necessary, independent legal advice".

However, he described the issues raised as "important matters" and said he would encourage relevant officers "to provide clarification so that residents can have confidence in the process and in any representations submitted".

Cllr Buxton also cautioned elected members involved in future Local Plan deliberations against prejudging specific proposals, saying councillors should remain able to consider evidence, hear residents' views and participate fully in future decision-making processes.

Restating the Liberal Democrats' previously expressed planning position, he said development should prioritise brownfield sites first, "underused land second", and only consider Green Belt land "as a last resort", adding: "no GP provision, no infrastructure, no development."

The latest consultation was initiated following a request by the government-appointed planning inspector in a letter dated 23 April 2026, according to the residents' correspondence.

EEBC has advised that interested members of the public may attend the further examination hearing on 2 July as observers. Those wishing actively to participate must indicate this in their consultation response and notify the

Programme Officer before the consultation closes.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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Did Epsom and Ewell councillors approve more Green Belt release?

2 June 2026



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's special Licensing and Planning Policy Committee ("LPPC") meeting on 19 May — convened after a motion by Cllrs **Kieran Persand** (Conservative - Horton), Rob Geleit (Labour - Court) and **Julian Freeman** (LibDem - College) — produced one clear answer to the question troubling many residents: LPPC did not itself vote to approve additional Green Belt land for development.

In summary the effect of the lengthy five-part motion was to ensure Council officers should not be sending revised Local Plan evidence and potentially significant Green Belt-related material to the Inspector without renewed political scrutiny and approval by LPPC / Full Council. All parts of the motion were defeated.

But the two-and-a-half-hour meeting revealed a deeper and increasingly bitter dispute over whether officers have already steered the Local Plan examination towards further Green Belt release without fresh political approval.

The meeting unfolded against the backdrop of continuing examination of EEBC's Local Plan by the Planning Inspectorate and followed recent publication of officer work identifying additional sites "potentially suitable for allocation", including five Green Belt sites, as part of the Inspector's request for further work.

At the centre of the argument lay a constitutional question: once the Local Plan entered examination, did political control of substantive Green Belt decisions remain with councillors — or had delegated authority lawfully passed practical control to officers working under the Inspector's direction?

The atmosphere in the chamber suggested members were debating much more than planning procedure.

Before debate even began, Cllr **Shanice Goldman** (Conservative Nonsuch) made an unusually direct statement from the public seating area challenging how the council had reached this stage. She said delegated authority granted in November 2024 had been understood to concern "small grammatical errors", but had, in her view, later been exercised more broadly than members intended.

"These are not minor administrative matters," she told the committee. "They are material decisions which properly fall within the remit of elected councillors who are accountable to the public." She added: "This issue is bigger than one site or one submission. It goes to the heart of governance, transparency, constitutional process, and public confidence in decision making."

Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development Ian Mawer then delivered a lengthy procedural update attempting to clarify what officers say has — and has not — happened.

Mawer stressed repeatedly that the Local Plan remains the version submitted in March 2025 and that no modifications

have yet been made.

“I wish to emphasize that the Local Plan remains as submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in March 2025 as it stands — no changes have been made to it,” he said. “It is the Inspector alone that can make changes known as main modifications to address soundness issues.”

He explained that the Inspector had required additional work after October 2025 hearings, including revisiting part of the Green Belt Topic Paper and reassessing urban sites. That work, he said, eventually produced 17 sites considered “potentially suitable for allocation” — 12 urban and five Green Belt — but only as evidence to assist the examination.

He also cautioned against confusion over “Grey Belt”, noting EEBC’s plan is being examined under a pre-Grey-Belt version of national policy.

The procedural explanation did little to calm critics.

Persand opened by objecting that no legal officer was present, saying he had only been informed late in the day. “I feel that we should push this to another date, and then discuss it with a legal officer present,” he said. “This is about the delegation of power that was out of scope by officers in the submission of documents.”

His motion to defer was seconded by Freeman but failed.

From there the meeting descended into repeated procedural clashes.

When Persand attempted to play a recording from a previous meeting concerning how delegated authority had been described, Chair **Peter O’Donovan** (RA - Ewell Court) stopped him: “You can’t play recording... it’s not relevant to the motion.” Persand countered that recordings were permissible and argued earlier comments were directly relevant to understanding what members thought they had approved.

Freeman challenged the Chair’s ruling: “How is it not relevant? Comments that were made at a previous meeting of this committee... when you said something along the lines of... minor grammatical errors and omissions.” O’Donovan replied: “I said there were minor grammatical errors... it is not relevant to the motion in front of us.”

The core disagreement, however, concerned substance rather than theatre.

Persand argued that documents identifying additional Green Belt land had gone well beyond anything councillors believed officers were authorised to do.

“Submitting a document that has 40% extra Green Belt sites to be allocated, and you’re changing the evidence base, is not minor amendments,” he said. “That is major material changes. That is completely out of scope of this delegation of power.” He warned: “This will go to JR, this will go to Judicial Review.”

Freeman broadly backed that critique while distancing criticism from officers personally.

“With the greatest of respect to Mr Mawer, and I know he’s an officer doing his job... this plan is for councillors to review and approve, not for officers,” he said. “We are the councillors who have been elected to represent this community... and we should not be putting that on officers. I find that behaviour to be disgraceful and reprehensible.”

Mawer firmly rejected the suggestion that officers had independently redirected policy.

“We’ve prepared the documents... under the advice of the Inspector,” he said. “We’ve done the work that is necessary for the examination to proceed.” The documents, he stressed, are now published and subject to consultation. “It will be the Inspector ultimately who decides if any extra sites go into the Local Plan.”

Pressed by Persand on whether the Inspector had ever explicitly required more Green Belt allocations, Mawer drew a distinction between the Inspector’s concerns about unmet housing need and the work requested in response. The Inspector had asked for reassessment, he said; the resulting correspondence led to officers being asked to identify sites “potentially suitable for allocation”.

Vice-Chair **Clive Woodbridge** (RA - Ewell Village) attempted several times to steer discussion toward a pragmatic middle ground.

At one point he suggested the motion had been “overtaken by events” but that the committee might still usefully discuss the submitted material. “I don’t really see why this committee shouldn’t... have the chance to ask questions about the work they’ve done on the Green Belt.”

Later, seeking a compromise on future meetings, Woodbridge proposed softening one motion element so that further LPPC meetings would “update on the Local Plan examination” rather than purport to re-approve already-submitted documents. He acknowledged limits on councillors’ powers once the examination is underway but argued members should not face “a complete gap without the opportunity to ask questions.”

Labour councillor Rob Geleit was unconvinced by the dilution. “Surely that amendment really eviscerates the whole point, does it not?” he asked.

Substitute member **Christine Howell** (Independent Nonsuch) repeatedly returned the discussion to democratic legitimacy and Green Belt trust.

“If there is even the slightest doubt in anyone’s mind about the integrity of this process, it must be reviewed again thoroughly and transparently,” she argued, saying residents had expressed “serious concerns and lack of trust” regarding Green Belt inclusion.

In one of the evening’s more striking exchanges, Howell sought clarity about councillors’ practical role if the Inspector ultimately proposes extra sites.

“So... some [sites] have been identified, and at any set time the Inspector could put them all in... and then we don’t have

any ability to question that?" she asked.

O'Donovan's reply was blunt: "Yeah, basically, but you have ability to question it through the consultation." He added that members would later be able to vote on the final modified plan. Howell observed that during consultation councillors would effectively be participating "just as a resident, as a neighbour, and not in any position of power or influence." O'Donovan answered: "That's right."

In procedural terms, the committee rejected all five elements of the motion, including proposals to require LPPC review of documents before submission, tighten delegated authority wording, revisit earlier submissions and mandate additional scrutiny meetings.

So did LPPC approve more Green Belt release?

Not directly. The committee did not vote to allocate new Green Belt sites on 19 May. Officers maintained throughout that the Local Plan remains unchanged and that only the Inspector can propose "main modifications". Critics, however, argue that by submitting revised evidence identifying additional "potentially suitable" Green Belt sites without renewed member approval, the council has already moved materially toward expanded Green Belt release during examination.

The public consultation on the new documents runs until 15 June, with a further Inspector's hearing scheduled for 2 July.

For residents trying to understand the state of play, one point emerged clearly from an evening of procedural warfare: the argument is no longer simply about how much Green Belt land might be released, but about who, in practice, is making the decisions.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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Image: Cllrs Freeman, Persand and Geleit at the LPPC meeting - EEBC YouTube channel.

Persand parses the Local Plan process in Epsom

2 June 2026



The Epsom and Ewell Times has seen detailed exchanges of correspondence between Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative - Horton) and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council concerning the torturous progress of the Local Plan.

The correspondence from Kieran Persand reveals a serious and highly technical dispute about governance, constitutional compliance and member oversight in the handling of the Epsom and Ewell Borough Council. The exchanges suggest a widening disagreement between some councillors and officers over who was authorised to make and submit significant Local Plan amendments during the examination process, and whether the council's Licensing and Planning Policy Committee ("LPPC") has effectively been bypassed.

The background is the troubled examination of EEBC's draft Local Plan, particularly its Green Belt strategy and housing allocations. During the public examination hearings in October 2025, the Planning Inspector criticised Topic Paper TP02 dealing with Green Belt assessments. In the appendix circulated by Persand, the Inspector is quoted as saying that conclusions within the paper were inconsistent with the evidence, that errors existed in individual site assessments, and that the approach lacked consistency.

Persand's central concern is that following those criticisms, officers produced revised documents — particularly COUD_020 and COUD_021 — and submitted them to the Inspector in January 2026 without prior scrutiny or approval by

LPPC or Full Council. He argues this breached both the committee's Terms of Reference and the council's wider obligations as Local Planning Authority under section 20 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

The key constitutional dispute concerns delegated authority known as "P7", granted in November 2024. Officers rely on this delegation to justify submitting amended Local Plan material directly to the Inspector. Persand argues the wording only permitted officers "to propose changes and corrections" and did not authorise officers actually to make substantive policy changes or submit revised documents independently.

He also says councillors originally understood the delegation to mean officers would propose changes back to LPPC for political scrutiny and approval, not directly to the Inspector. In his later emails he repeatedly presses officers to explain:

- under whose authority the consultation was launched;
- whether any councillor ever reviewed or approved the revised Green Belt conclusions;
- whether the council's constitutional obligations had effectively been suspended; and
- whether the Inspector had in practice been allowed to influence policy direction indirectly through officer-led document revisions.

A particularly sensitive issue concerns Green Belt sites. Persand points out that the Inspector never explicitly instructed the council to release more Green Belt land. Rather, she criticised weaknesses in the council's evidence base and requested further work. He argues that revised papers subsequently reached different conclusions about some sites — including areas in Horton Ward — without those new judgements ever being debated politically.

Persand therefore contends that:

- officers may effectively have altered strategic planning policy without member authority;
- LPPC's statutory oversight role was bypassed;
- and Full Council approval may also have been required before revised submission documents were sent to the Inspector.

The appendix attached to his email is effectively a constitutional and legal critique of the process. It proposes:

- mandatory LPPC review of all future submission documents;
- clarification and narrowing of delegation P7;
- retrospective review of COUD_020 and COUD_021;
- further LPPC meetings during purdah if necessary; and
- possible revised submissions to the Inspector after member scrutiny.

The response from Ian Mawer, Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development, rejects much of Persand's interpretation. Mawer argues that once the Local Plan was submitted in March 2025, the examination process became led by the Planning Inspectorate. He relies on national examination guidance stating that inspectors may request additional work and that modifications can be consulted upon during examination.

Mawer further states:

- LPPC already fulfilled its constitutional role through Regulation 18 and Regulation 19 stages;
- the additional work requested after October 2025 was carried out under delegated authority granted in November 2024;
- only the Inspector can recommend "main modifications" required for soundness;
- and the council remains formally committed to the submitted Local Plan unless and until the Inspector proposes modifications.

However, Persand's subsequent emails demonstrate that he remains unconvinced by that explanation. He repeatedly distinguishes between:

- the Inspector controlling the examination process; and
- the council still retaining responsibility for the accuracy, content and strategic direction of its own documents.

His concern appears to be not merely procedural, but constitutional: whether councillors have in practice surrendered political control over crucial Green Belt decisions to officers during the examination stage.

The issue does not appear fully resolved in the correspondence provided. Instead:

- officers maintain the process was lawful and properly delegated;
- Persand maintains that substantive constitutional obligations remain unmet;
- and he continued pressing for additional LPPC meetings and wider member scrutiny as recently as 18 May 2026.

The significance of the dispute is broader than procedural technicalities. It touches directly upon:

- democratic oversight of Green Belt decisions;
- transparency in Local Plan governance;
- the balance of power between elected members and officers;
- and whether major planning policy shifts can emerge during examination without fresh political approval.

A further politically sensitive dimension is timing. Persand repeatedly objected that consultation on revised documents commenced before LPPC had debated the issues, and during the post-election transition period leading into the new East Surrey Council arrangements.

There will be a special meeting of the LPPC tomorrow evening at The Town Hall.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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Next phase in the journey of the Epsom and Ewell Local Plan announced

2 June 2026



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has opened a further public consultation on documents submitted during the examination of its draft Local Plan, as a Conservative councillor has questioned whether the process has bypassed the council committee responsible for planning policy.

The Local Plan, covering the period to 2040, is now at examination stage, described by the council as the final stage before the plan can be legally adopted. EEBC says the government-appointed Planning Inspector instructed the council to carry out additional work on potential further sites that could be allocated through main modifications to the plan. The consultation opened on Monday 11 May and closes at 11.59pm on Monday 15 June 2026.

The council says the consultation is limited to the additional documents submitted to the Inspector since October 2025, which identify potential additional sites that could increase housing delivery. It says all comments will be passed to the Inspector and published on the council's website, with a further one-day hearing to follow after the consultation closes.

Council documents sent to residents state that the Local Plan was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate on 10 March 2025, with public hearings held in September and October 2025. Following those hearings, the Inspector required further work, resulting in the submission of additional documents identifying extra potential sites for allocation. Responses are being invited on those additional documents only.

Councillor **Peter O'Donovan**, (RA Ewell Court) chair of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee, said the submitted Local Plan "provides less than 50% of the identified housing need within the borough", which the council had considered to be a balance between meeting development needs and protecting green spaces, heritage and character. He said the additional work had been required to progress the plan towards adoption and urged residents to review the documents and respond.

However, Cllr **Kieran Persand**, Conservative councillor for Horton Ward, has written to senior councillors and officers raising what he describes as a "significant governance and constitutional concern". In emails dated 9 and 11 May, he said the additional sites were "put forward by the Council itself" and were not requested or identified by the Inspector. He also said the documents had been submitted, and the consultation launched, without prior scrutiny or approval by the

Licensing and Planning Policy Committee.

Cllr Persand cited the committee's terms of reference, saying it is responsible for considering and approving Local Plan documents for public consultation. He asked why the consultation had started without the committee first considering it, what legal advice had been taken, and whether the chair and officers regarded the process as compliant with the council's constitution. He also asked whether the consultation should be postponed until the committee meets on 19 May, not to stop the process, but to allow member oversight.

The issue now places two questions before residents: what they think of the additional potential development sites, and whether the route by which those documents reached consultation has followed the council's own democratic procedures. For a Local Plan already politically sensitive because it falls well short of assessed housing need while seeking to protect parts of the borough from development, the latest consultation may prove as much about governance as about planning policy.

Residents wishing to examine the latest documents or submit comments can do so through the council's consultation portal at EEBC Local Plan consultation platform. Background examination papers, inspector correspondence and post-hearing documents are also available via the council's Local Plan Examination webpage, including the Post Hearing Documents library and Documents from the Inspector. Responses can be submitted on a form available through the consultation portal, by email to localplan@epsom-ewell.gov.uk, or by post to Planning Policy, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom, KT18 5BY.

Comments can be submitted by email to localplan@epsom-ewell.gov.uk or by post to Planning Policy, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom, Surrey, KT18 5BY. The deadline is 15 June 2026.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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Redhill data hub plugs into AI boom

2 June 2026



A major expansion of a Redhill data centre campus worth an estimated £500 million has been approved by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council.

The development at Foxboro Business Park, Holmethorpe, will see older industrial buildings demolished and replaced with a large new data centre building containing four server halls, offices, electrical infrastructure and cooling equipment.

The scheme was approved by councillors at RBBC's Planning Committee subject to conditions, including controls over construction activity and further work into the possible reuse of waste heat from the site.

The project is being brought forward by property investor Castleforge in partnership with Galaxy Data Centers, which operates data centre facilities.

Data centres are effectively the industrial warehouses of the digital age. Instead of storing goods, they house vast numbers of computers and data storage systems that support cloud computing, artificial intelligence, online banking, business systems, streaming services and internet communications.

The Redhill expansion is intended to strengthen the area's role as part of London's growing digital infrastructure network,

with the developers saying demand for computing capacity continues to rise rapidly because of AI and other data-heavy technologies.

Planning papers show the new building will provide around 15 megawatts of computing power capacity — enough electricity usage to rival that of a small town.

The council report describes a highly serviced technical building featuring secure server rooms, cooling systems, rooftop plant equipment, backup diesel generators and new electricity substations to ensure uninterrupted operation during power outages.

The development will also include roof-mounted solar panels and has been designed to achieve a BREEAM “Very Good” environmental rating.

One feature highlighted by both the developers and council planners is the potential reuse of heat generated by the computers inside the building.

Data centres produce very large amounts of heat, normally removed by industrial cooling systems. In this case, the planning permission requires further investigation into whether excess heat from the site could eventually be exported to nearby homes through a district heating network.

The approved site lies within the Holmethorpe Industrial Estate, about a mile north-east of Redhill town centre.

Planning documents indicate the wider Redhill Data Centres campus already occupies around 11,800 square metres across three buildings and serves clients in sectors including finance and artificial intelligence.

The site was already authorised for data centre use under earlier planning permissions dating back to 2007 and 2009, meaning the latest approval represents an intensification and modernisation of an existing technology campus rather than an entirely new industrial use.

Residents raised concerns during the planning process over issues including traffic, construction disruption, noise, flood risk, visual appearance and possible health impacts.

However, specialist consultees including Surrey County Council officers, Surrey Fire and Rescue Service, Surrey Police and London Gatwick Airport did not object, subject to planning conditions.

The development also reflects a much wider national trend as Britain competes to expand the infrastructure needed for AI and cloud computing.

The UK Government designated data centres as Critical National Infrastructure in 2024, recognising their growing importance to the economy and public services.

Industry analysts CBRE describe London as Europe’s largest data centre market and one of the most important globally, although growth has increasingly been constrained by electricity supply and the difficulty of finding suitable sites close to major urban areas.

Castleforge says it has already invested more than £100 million into the existing Redhill campus since 2024 and now intends to proceed with a further major phase of development following the council’s approval.

For local residents, the project represents another sign of the gradual transformation of industrial estates into high-value digital infrastructure hubs serving the modern economy — largely unseen by the public, but increasingly essential to everyday life.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Solar Panels green-light in Mole Valley a grey area?

2 June 2026



Solar panels powering up to 5,500 homes have been approved for prime Surrey agricultural land that could have been used to put the “wheat in our Weetabix”. Mole Valley District Council’s April development committee green lit the renewable energy plant for Little Flanchford Farm in Flanchford Road, Leigh.

The former green belt site was considered to be some of Surrey's best and most versatile agricultural land, but the plans were recommended because the council sees renewable energy as central to achieving a sustainable, low-carbon future. The panels will convert light into electricity and contribute enough renewable electricity and low carbon energy to cut 4,052 tonnes of CO2 per year from the atmosphere, with the development standing for up to 40 years before being decommissioned and the site returned to agricultural use.

Residents objecting said special circumstances of the solar farm were not enough to outweigh the harm it would cause to green belt land, with one saying it would significantly affect the area for up to 10 years as planting would be ineffective for the first quarter of its lifespan and, even when fully in place, would not provide screening for several months a year, adding: "A decade of admitted damage is a serious policy conflict."

Councillor Joanne Willoughby of Leigh Parish said the council was not against the principle of solar development but was concerned that open undeveloped agricultural countryside within the wider rural green belt was being classed as grey belt. The solar farm's agent said the plant would improve local energy resilience and support businesses and homes through lower network charges, and would also curb the need for pylons crisscrossing the country.

Councillor Simon Budd (Conservative: Brockham, Betchworth, Buckland, Box Hill and Headley) said: "Saying that it is a grey belt, that is an absolute nonsense. That is green belt all day long. Nothing is out there. I'm told that green belt is only to protect Dorking and Reigate merging, well I don't think it is. I think the green belt is there to protect the villages. I'm in favour of solar panels on top of buildings, on top of car parks, but not now on 'best and most versatile land. And that is what it is, that is the land that feeds us, that puts the wheat in your Weetabix."

The plans were approved by eight votes to four with three abstentions.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Flanchford Road, Leigh (image Google)

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Luxury spa and restaurant coming to Ockley

2 June 2026



A "beautiful" and "fantastic" high-end luxury hotel, spa and fine dining restaurant set in the Surrey countryside has been approved.

Gatton Manor and Country Club will be transformed as part of a £41 million project to demolish the closed hotel and failing golf course and replace them with 81 guest rooms, two restaurants, and a spa featuring indoor and wild swimming pools, a gym, and treatment and relaxation areas.

The 22-hectare site near Ockley is expected to generate around 290 construction jobs during the two-year build, followed by 145 permanent roles once the development is operational.

Planning officers told Mole Valley District Council's April development committee that the proposal would create a destination venue in the borough and bring significant investment into the rural economy. They added: "It is such a beautiful site, it is such a large site, it has got woodland, open areas, it is really a lovely, lovely, rural area and because of its size and the amount of landscape it is more than capable of absorbing this amount of development."

In addition to the hotel, new facilities will be open to the public, including a fine dining restaurant and gym. The scheme also includes two tennis courts and three padel courts, with up to 100 gym memberships offered at preferential rates to residents living within 3km of the site.

Access to the hotel and spa will be via Standon Lane, linking the A29 Stane Street with Horsham Road. The existing hotel closed in 2022, and its adjoining 18-hole golf course had already been earmarked for closure regardless of the planning outcome.

Officers noted the development would also support businesses further along the supply chain. However, some residents objected, raising concerns about the impact on the openness of the countryside and increased pressure on local roads.

Developers acknowledged the loss of the golf course was regrettable but said it had been operating at a loss for several years and was no longer viable.

Councillor Roger Adams (Liberal Democrat, Bookham West) said: "With global warming and rising temperatures I suspect a lot of people seeking a holiday will no longer be heading to the Mediterranean but may well seek to have staycations,

and where better to stay for a holiday than Surrey. We've got beautiful country here and we do need developments such as this. It will provide employment and enhance the visitor offer."

Councillor Monica Weller (Liberal Democrat, Bookham West) added: "It really is quite fantastic as far as I'm concerned. A business like this has got to bring something really quite fantastic to our area and that is really to be welcomed."

Plans for new hotel and spa in Ockley (MVDC)

Plans for 130 Kingswood homes 'absolute disgrace' as nearly 700 objectors speak

2 June 2026



Plans to build up to 130 homes on protected green belt land between Kingswood and Burgh Heath have sparked a fierce backlash, with nearly 700 objections lodged by residents.

Developers want outline planning permission for the scheme on 13 hectares of farmland off Canons Lane, with details like layout and design to be decided later. The proposal includes a mix of homes, nearly half classed as "affordable", alongside green space, play areas, allotments and a community orchard.

Lightwood, the developers, state the land presents a "opportunity to create a high-quality, thoughtfully designed place to live, work and connect with nature".

But the scale and location of the development have become the biggest flashpoints. The site sits in the Metropolitan Green Belt and an Area of Great Landscape Value, currently made up of open fields used for farming. It also borders existing homes and is criss-crossed by public footpaths used by walkers and cyclists.

Residents say building here would mean sacrificing one of the last stretches of countryside before Greater London.

One objector called the plans "an absolute disgrace", warning they would "start the loss of the last remaining parcels of farming land" and harm wildlife. Others pointed to records of protected and declining bird species on the land, arguing the development would fragment habitats and disrupt migration routes.

Traffic is another major concern. Access would come from Canons Lane, with opponents saying the rural road is not fit for the extra cars likely to come with 130 households. Nearby routes, including the busy A217, are already under pressure at peak times.

There are also doubts about whether the scheme would genuinely tackle the housing crisis. Some residents argue that so-called affordable homes (typically priced below market rates rather than at social rent) would still be out of reach for many.

Despite this, developers say the site is in a sustainable location, within walking or cycling distance of schools, shops and transport links, including Kingswood railway station. They argue it would form a logical extension to the existing built-up area and deliver much-needed housing.

The plans also promise environmental measures, including new tree planting, upgraded footpaths, and sustainable drainage systems designed to reduce flood risk.

In planning terms, the application is only seeking approval 'in principle', with all detailed design matters reserved for a later stage except for the main access point.

Supporters say the benefits, particularly new homes and affordable housing, should carry significant weight. But with objections outnumbering supporters almost 175 to one, the council faces a contentious decision over whether those benefits outweigh the loss of protected countryside.

Emily Dalton LDRS

View of the outline of the proposed development site between Canons Lane and Doric Drive, Kingswood. (Credit: Lightwood planning documents)

Caterham will try to force a rental of long empty Post Office

2 June 2026



A long-empty post office building in the heart of Caterham could finally be brought back into use under new council powers despite concerns over cost, risk and whether it will work.

Tandridge District councillors approved plans on March 26 to use a Government-backed High Street Rental Auction to force the former Station Avenue site to be let after years of vacancy in a prominent town centre location.

Members said the building has become a “significant eyesore” and a source of frustration for residents and businesses. Cllr Rob Spencer said: “You come to Caterham and you’re looking at a dead, old building,” adding the council had reached “the end of our tether” waiting for it to be occupied.

How the scheme works

Under the scheme, the council can designate the town centre for a High Street Rental Auction and formally notify the landlord. If the owner fails to secure a tenant, the council can step in to market and auction the lease, with a tenant potentially in place within around six months.

If successful, the move could bring the building back into use, boosting footfall and improving the high street.

However, officers warned the situation is complex. The property has multiple owners, and high asking rents and sale prices have deterred interest so far. They added it is still possible no suitable offers will come forward, even through an auction process.

Concerns over cost

The project is expected to cost around £15,000, with some money potentially recovered through grants and fees. Officers also noted the council cannot guarantee it will recover costs, with much of the expense tied up in staff time.

However, councillors raised concerns about where the funding would come from. Cllr Jeremy Pursehouse said: “It does sound like we’re rummaging down the side of the sofa.”

Mixed views from councillors

Opinion among members was divided. Cllr Mike Crane backed the proposal, calling it “a no-brainer” and suggesting the committee was “over-thinking” the issue.

But Cllr Perry Chotai warned the move could “set a precedent” and criticised the lack of detailed analysis. “This sounds a bit like a Trumpian style of analysis,” he said, calling for clearer evidence on risks and outcomes.

Despite reservations, councillors agreed to press ahead, viewing the auction as a potential way to revive the town centre even if success is not guaranteed and public money may be at risk.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Former Caterham post office. (Credit: Google street view)

Oxshott Uproar as 800 Object to Green Belt Housing Plan

2 June 2026



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Emily Dalton LDRS

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

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Three beers for Dorking

2 June 2026



Beer fans will be pumped to know that Dorking Halls will be able to offer customers a greater variety of booze after planning permission was secured to convert storage units into cellars. Antique hunters may be less than thrilled however. Mole Valley District Council has given itself the green light to convert the units at the northwest of the halls so they can be used by the town's flagship theatre. The block had been in long-term use by Dorking auctioneers P F Windibank to keep its wares and will force the company, which been based there for over half a century, to move elsewhere. Officers, who recommended the conversion be approved, said it would support the "popular leisure and cultural facility", Dorking Halls, and help its long-term viability.

They told the March development management committee: "They consider they need more (space), to provide a greater variety of drinks and they need more storage for beer kegs. The proposed change of use would support Dorking Halls and the wider town centre economy. Dorking Halls is an important venue for Mole Valley, it provides opportunities for leisure and recreation both for those living within and outside the district."

John Collins, speaking on behalf of the application, said the increased storage was needed due to the scale of activities and that revenues generated through bar sales underpinned the venue's viability. He said the Dorking Halls was cherished by the community and added: "The current cellarage was simply not adequate and more space needed to improve back of house operations and comfort within the facility. Being able to have a comfortable welcoming place with a decent bar is all part of that experience."

Councillors at the meeting expressed concern over how it would impact the town's antique scene - although that lies outside the committee's remit. Cllr Claire Malcomson (Liberal Democrat: Holmwoods and Beare Green) said: "I know Dorking Halls is an extremely precious asset that we have but I do also think this is going to (impact) some of the trade in Dorking. So I am not going to pass judgement or anything but I wanted to make that comment because I think this could be quite a loss for us." Cllr Kirstie Havard (Liberal Democrat: Capel, Leigh, Newdigate and Charlwood) added: "This application is causing great harm to that business they have been there for 80 years. It's arisen after the first phase of Dorking Halls (refurbishment) was completed and it was decided that space was needed, and I understand the reasons, but I'm very worried about Windibank and what they are losing, and it is very harmful to their business."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Dorking Halls (image Google)