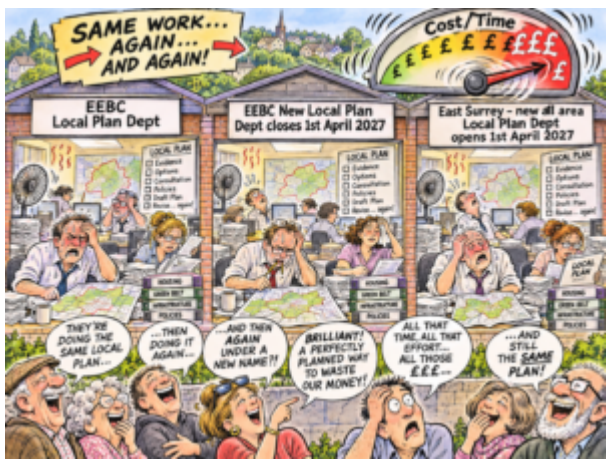
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26th November 2026

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Another Local Plan? Epsom Councillors vote to begin again

25 November 2026



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has voted to start preparing another Local Plan, even though its existing plan remains unfinished and the Council itself will cease to exist in just over four months.

At a meeting of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee on Tuesday 24 November, councillors questioned the logic of the Government's demand that the authority begin a new planning process before it hands over responsibility to East Surrey Council on 1 April 2027.

The decision comes after years of controversy surrounding Epsom and Ewell's existing Local Plan, including disputes over Green Belt housing allocations, public consultations, planning inspectors' requirements and the extent of democratic oversight.

The Government nevertheless insists that a new process must begin, despite the Borough Council having already missed two statutory deadlines.

Councillors ultimately agreed to publish a formal notice of intention to commence a new Local Plan and a timetable before the end of December. Much of the actual work will fall to the new East Surrey authority, which has already expressed a preference for preparing a single Local Plan covering all five existing boroughs and districts.

"It's a nonsense"

Cllr Clive Woodbridge (RA Ewell Village) challenged the proposal, questioning why a council approaching abolition should begin a process that its successor would almost certainly wish to undertake itself.

"I am struggling to agree to this because it's a nonsense," he told the committee. "We're not going to exist in four months' time. A new local authority is going to come in, and they're going to want to start this process."

He suggested that the sensible course would be for East Surrey Council to take responsibility from the outset. Reflecting on the prolonged controversy surrounding the current Local Plan, he added: "We've just gone through this very lengthy, very politically charged exercise, which we haven't finished yet."

He feared that announcing another process so soon would damage public confidence. "It makes us look stupid, and just because the government wants something stupid, do we agree with it?"

Cllr Phil Neale (RA Cuddington) expressed similar reservations and referred to a letter sent to ministers by East Surrey Council's Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Growth, Cllr Bradley Nelson.

The letter, dated 25 September, explains that five existing authorities are being required to progress plans they cannot complete before their abolition, while East Surrey cannot formally commence its own plan until April.

Cllr Neale asked whether the committee could defer its decision until the Government responded. Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development Ian Mawer confirmed that no response to Cllr Nelson's letter had been received.

However, he explained that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government had already rejected local government reorganisation as sufficient reason for Epsom and Ewell to delay its own new plan.

Government intervention threatened

The committee heard that national regulations introduced in March 2026 required Epsom and Ewell to publish a notice commencing a new Local Plan by 30 June and complete an initial readiness assessment, known as Gateway 1, by 31 October. Both deadlines had passed without compliance.

Cllr Kieran Persand (Conservative Horton) asked what difference another short delay would make, given that both deadlines had already been missed. Mr Mawer acknowledged the missed deadlines but explained that the Council had spent the intervening period corresponding with ministers and seeking clarification of its obligations.

Cllr Neil Dallen (RA Town) asked what powers the Government possessed if the committee refused to proceed. Mr Mawer referred to section 15HA of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, explaining that the Secretary of State could intervene where an authority was failing to take necessary steps in preparing or revising a Local Plan.

"The Secretary of State can take over the preparation of a plan," he explained, although he could not say whether ministers would actually exercise those powers.

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Cllr Dallen suggested that refusing to comply might ultimately generate more work for council officers than taking the limited steps requested. “We can either lay back and say, ‘Okay, you told us to do it, we’ll do it.’ It’s not much work, or we can be obstinate and say no, we’re not going to, and probably cause a lot of trouble, which would be more officer time than just doing what we’re asked to do.”

Cllr James Lawrence (Independent College) agreed that the Government’s approach was difficult to justify but favoured taking the minimum necessary steps. “I do agree with Councillor Woodbridge that this is a somewhat bizarre decision by the government to do this,” he said.

However, he warned that refusal could attract unwanted ministerial attention and additional demands on officers. “I think the less effort option might actually be to agree to this, do the minimum that’s required to make sure that we’re legally compliant.”

Cllr Lawrence said he would support the recommendations reluctantly, believing compliance would involve less work than confrontation.

How much will another plan cost?

Questions were also raised about the financial implications of beginning another planning process. Cllr Lawrence asked whether approving the report would authorise additional expenditure and what costs might arise. Mr Mawer explained that the immediate work involved publishing a notice, preparing a timetable and updating the Council’s website, using existing officer resources.

No separate budget has been allocated for the new Local Plan Review.

However, he acknowledged that the cost of preparing a complete Local Plan could be substantial. “One million pounds is not unusual, or thereabouts. Sometimes a bit less, sometimes more,” he told councillors.

The officer report notes that any additional expenditure from the Council’s corporate projects reserve, which has an uncommitted balance of approximately £1.5 million, could significantly reduce funds available for other priorities.

Mr Mawer stressed that the committee was not being asked to authorise major evidence-gathering, external consultancy work or other substantial expenditure. Such decisions would fall to East Surrey after April.

Councillors restrict officers’ powers

There was a further discussion about exactly what the committee was authorising. Cllr Woodbridge initially questioned whether the matter required approval by Full Council. Mr Mawer clarified that the committee itself had authority to make the decision.

Cllr Persand then questioned a recommendation allowing the Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development to “finalize and publish” the new documents. He expressed concern that this wording might permit officers to make substantive changes without returning to elected members. “The word ‘finalize’ is quite vague,” he said, explaining that the documents could potentially be altered after the committee’s approval.

Mr Mawer replied that the changes envisaged were principally the insertion of publication dates and other missing administrative details.

Following discussion, Cllr Persand proposed an amendment restricting the finalisation authority to the highlighted text in Appendices 2 and 3 of the report. The amendment was seconded by Cllr Lawrence and approved.

The committee then passed the amended recommendation, alongside the decision to commence the preliminary planning process.

Another round of housing targets and Green Belt disputes?

The decision comes while the existing Epsom and Ewell Local Plan 2022–2040 remains under examination by a Government-appointed Planning Inspector.

Its history has been particularly troubled.

Preparation was paused by councillors in March 2023 before resuming in October that year. The plan was eventually submitted for examination on 10 March 2025.

Following hearings in autumn 2025, the Inspector sought additional evidence concerning the Council’s approach to Green Belt land and potential housing sites.

The resulting changes have generated further disputes over the inclusion of land previously protected from development.

At an extraordinary Full Council meeting on 26 October 2026, councillors divided 13–13 over whether to consult on the Inspector’s proposed Main Modifications. Mayor Cllr Lucie McIntyre used her casting vote in favour.

The resulting consultation, which includes additional housing allocations on Green Belt sites such as Downs Farm and Priest Hill, remains open until 14 December.

The new Local Plan Review would therefore begin before the Inspector has completed consideration of the existing one.

The Council’s report emphasises that starting the new process will not affect the ongoing examination of the current Local Plan.

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CPRE: “Not another Local Plan – unbelievable!”

Tim Murphy of CPRE Surrey, the countryside protection organisation, has criticised both the requirement to begin again and the Government’s escalating housing targets.

In an opinion piece entitled “Not Another Local Plan – Unbelievable!“, Mr Murphy observes that several versions of the draft plan have already been produced, with at least four rounds of public consultation and considerable expenditure.

He estimates that the current draft plan, incorporating the Inspector’s proposed modifications, would provide for slightly fewer than 350 additional homes annually, compared with approximately 200 approved annually in recent years.

The housing target against which the existing plan is being examined is just under 600 annually.

But the Government’s subsequently revised methodology produces an even higher figure for the next plan, approaching 900 homes a year.

Mr Murphy warns that this presents an enormous challenge in a borough where much of the undeveloped land is Green Belt.

“Just about all this new housing would have to be built on the Borough’s Green Belt, unless we are to lose our local parks and school playing fields,” he argues.

He is particularly critical of the Government’s standard method for calculating housing need, which uses existing housing stock and an adjustment based on the relationship between local house prices and earnings.

Mr Murphy argues that this fails to reflect Epsom and Ewell’s position in the London commuter belt, where many residents earn considerably more than the borough’s locally recorded wages.

He also questions the assumption that increasing housing supply will necessarily reduce prices, arguing that developers may instead delay construction to protect their returns.

These are CPRE’s assessments of the housing market and the consequences of national planning policy, rather than findings reached by the Borough Council or Planning Inspector.

Mr Murphy also raises the fundamental question of how East Surrey will handle housing requirements inherited from its five predecessor authorities.

“Will the new Unitary Authority challenge the figures? Will it take a more strategic approach to accommodating more people in East Surrey? At this juncture, we simply do not know.”

What happens after April?

The timetable approved for publication provides for a new Local Plan Review covering 2027–2040.

Its provisional stages include a scoping consultation from 26 April to 7 June 2027, an initial Gateway 1 assessment in June 2027, further consultations during 2028, examination in 2029 and adoption scheduled for October 2029.

However, those dates are expressly subject to decisions by East Surrey Council after it assumes statutory planning responsibilities on 1 April.

East Surrey’s stated intention is to begin work on a single Local Plan for its whole area as soon as possible, rather than produce five separate successor plans for Elmbridge, Epsom and Ewell, Mole Valley, Reigate and Banstead, and Tandridge.

If that happens, Epsom and Ewell’s newly published notice and timetable may be superseded by a single East Surrey planning programme.

For residents already following the lengthy and contentious history of the existing Local Plan, the immediate consequence is therefore another formal planning exercise, but with important decisions about housing distribution, Green Belt protection, infrastructure and future development still to be taken by a different council.

The Borough Council will initiate the process. East Surrey will determine what ultimately becomes of it.

Lionel Blackman

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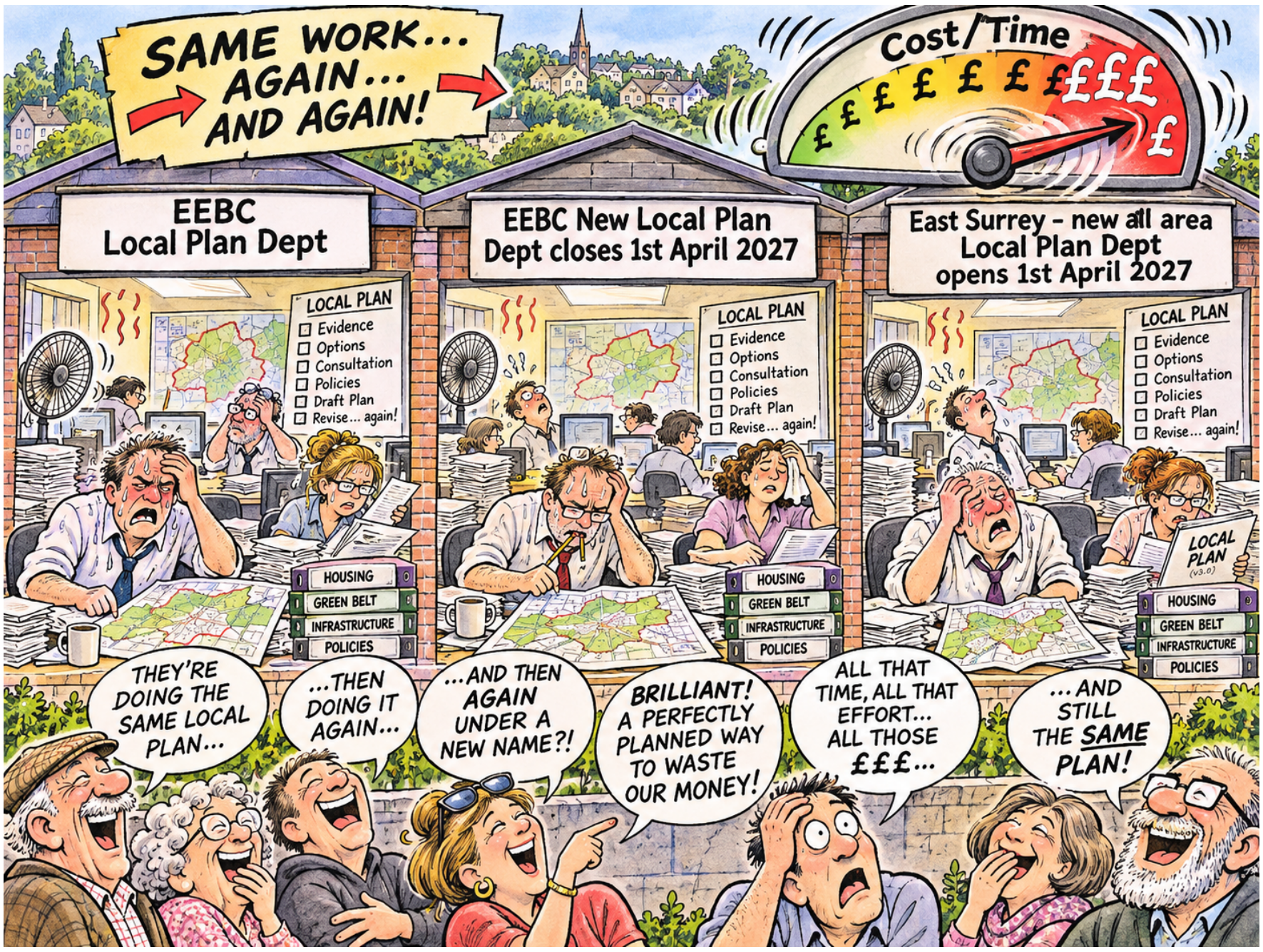
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Any one for polo? Buzz in to Ewhurst or trot over to Epsom

25 November 2026



A huge polo club where neighbours complained helicopters arriving and leaving for events disrupted their peace, has been granted a new alcohol licence. It comes after residents objected to the plans following concerns over the summer.

The Hurtwood Polo Club in Horsham Road, Ewhurst, was acquired by its current owners earlier this year. During the summer, it hosted a number of events under temporary permission, and neighbours claimed the constant helicopters to and from the site was a real nuisance.

The owners said they have learned from past mistakes and would not want further disruption on their conscience, but claim a new licence is integral to making the club, which provides jobs for the community as well as a social hub, a financial success.

Failure to grant the licence, they warned, could result in the site being sold for potential housing – losing huge swathes of open space to development. To ensure the club becomes a better neighbour it was agreed to cut its licence to 11pm, down from the applied for 1am, and to install noise limiters that would either cut power if levels were breached – or automatically reduce the volume.

A spokesperson for the applicant said: “We do not dispute what residents experienced and we understand why it has shaped their response. Future bookings will be on new reduced hours with noise management plans in place.” The site’s period oak barn serves as a clubhouse and event venue. In summer, a marquee is erected and can be used by members.

There had been questions as to whether windows and doors should be kept closed in the summer months but the use of

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regulators meant this would not be necessary. The spokesperson said: “The reality is that this is not an economic model at the moment and we are asking for support from residents and the council to support what your economic strategy says.

“Organic development in sympathy with the community, that is what we want, which is why I’ve accepted their calls for reduced hours. We are in a very fortunate position to have bought 180 acres in Surrey and to have the opportunity to keep that in tact and to keep the developers away.

“We are in that position to do that, but we do need to make this business stand on its own two feet. The high street is closing, AI is taking jobs at the rate of knots. Who has the chance to do something?

“Its not to create a night club. We have a genuine opportunity to create a self-sustaining business, create some jobs, and do some good things in synergy with the community.”

One objector said: “I moved to the area because I wanted peace and tranquillity, and that is exactly what I found. That will be decimated if this goes through.”

Councillor Jacquie Kean chaired the Waverley Borough Council meeting on November 23 and agreed to issue a new licence. She said the committee noted concerns raised by residents and the response to them, but agreed the concessions such as time limits and noise limiters, were significant enough to mitigate potential problems.

Chris Caulfield Local Democracy Reporter

Epsom and Ewell Times adds: Polo on Epsom’s doorstep

Epsom has its own polo club, situated in Horton Country Park off Horton Lane. Founded in 1989 by David Anderson, Epsom Polo Club offers opportunities for both complete beginners and experienced players to enjoy a sport more often associated with grand country estates.

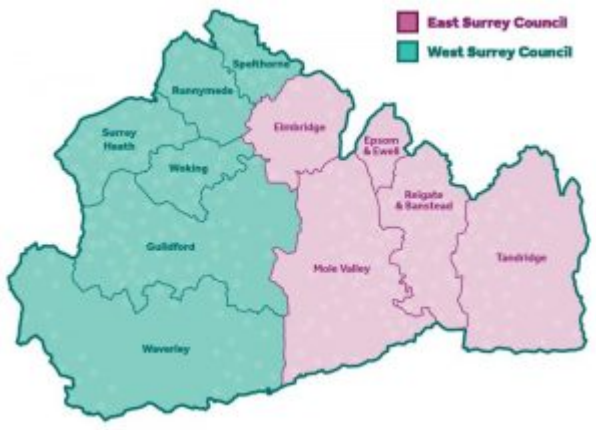
The family-run club provides polo lessons, professional coaching, practice sessions and competitive play, with ponies available for hire and livery facilities for horse owners. Polo can be played throughout the year, with instruction catering for different levels of riding experience.

The club was established by the Anderson family and is now run by David Anderson’s four sons. Its location, just 14 miles from central London, makes it accessible to enthusiasts from across Surrey and the capital.

Further information, including lessons and enquiries, is available at www.epsompoloclub.com.

The Surrey Unitary Councils agree to go two-tier again

25 November 2026



East and West Surrey Shadow Authorities have consented to the establishment of a Foundation Strategic Authority (FSA) for Surrey from 1 April 2027.

The decision marks an important step in Surrey’s devolution journey and will create a new strategic authority for the county, bringing more powers and decision-making closer to local communities and giving Surrey a stronger voice with government.

It follows a government-led consultation on establishing an FSA for Surrey. Following the consultation, government confirmed that Surrey had met the statutory tests and that it intended to proceed, subject to consent from East and West Surrey.

Both shadow authorities have now considered the proposal through their respective governance arrangements.

In East Surrey, the proposal was considered by the full Shadow Authority on 18 November, before formal consent was given by the Shadow Executive on 19 November.

In West Surrey, the Shadow Executive considered the proposal on 10 November, before formal consent was given by the full Shadow Authority on 19 November.

The Leaders of East and West Surrey will now jointly write to government confirming their consent, allowing government to lay the statutory instrument that establishes the FSA.

A Foundation Strategic Authority is the first level of the government’s devolution framework. It will provide strategic

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leadership across Surrey on areas expected to include transport, skills, economic development and strategic planning, while the new East and West Surrey councils remain responsible for delivering local services.

Councillor Steve Wotton, Leader of the East Surrey Shadow Authority, said: "We welcome this next step in bringing greater decision making closer to Surrey and giving our area a stronger voice with government.

"A Foundation Strategic Authority will give Surrey greater influence over areas such as transport and infrastructure, skills and economic growth.

"This is about making sure Surrey is well placed to take advantage of the opportunities that greater devolution can bring. We want to build an approach that works for Surrey, reflects the needs of our communities and delivers real benefits for residents and businesses.

"We will continue to work closely with government, West Surrey and our partners as the detailed arrangements are developed."

Councillor Paul Follows, Leader of the West Surrey Shadow Authority, said: "I support the principle of devolution and bringing powers closer to our residents. Establishing a Foundation Strategic Authority is a sensible first step that gives us the opportunity to explore what greater devolution can offer Surrey.

"We want to take a pragmatic approach. The FSA should start as a relatively lean organisation, bringing democratically elected representatives from East and West Surrey together to make decisions on issues that are best considered at a Surrey-wide level.

"As these arrangements develop, it will be important that government provides the right funding to support the responsibilities being devolved and that local government has a meaningful role in shaping what devolution looks like for Surrey.

"Our priority remains making sure these arrangements deliver better outcomes for residents and businesses, stronger local accountability and sustainable public finances."

The government's current timetable would see the necessary legislation laid in early 2027, with the Foundation Strategic Authority established on 1 April 2027 alongside the new East Surrey and West Surrey councils.

East and West Surrey will continue discussions with government to develop the detailed governance and operating arrangements for the FSA.

Establishing the FSA will also provide the foundations for the next stage of Surrey's devolution journey. The government has announced that it is in the final stages of agreeing a Mayoral Strategic Authority devolution deal for Surrey, which could bring further powers, funding and strategic opportunities to the county plus an elected mayor.

East and West Surrey will continue discussions with government to understand the detailed proposals for a Mayoral Strategic Authority, including the benefits, opportunities and practical implications for residents, businesses and communities.

Surrey County Council

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Surrey honeymoon?

25 November 2026



An East Surrey councillor has quit the majority group on the council in protest at a contentious proposal to move the location of a Reigate primary school.

Councillor Mark Johnston (Liberal Democrats: Reigate) has resigned from the Liberal Democrat grouping on the East Surrey shadow authority after its cabinet green lit the relocation of Reigate Priory Junior School to Woodhatch Place last month.

In an email seen by the Local Democracy Reporting Service, Councillor Johnston told colleagues he believes East Surrey Council "acted hastily", and that the school move is something the new authority "should have nothing to do with".

The move of the highly-regarded primary school from its historic current location had been passionately debated by cabinet members, with two of them ultimately voting against it.

Some raised fears over the new site's distance from the centre of Reigate and potential for greater buildup of traffic in the area. Councillor Ashley Tilling (Liberal Democrats: Walton South & Oatlands), who opposed the move, said in the meeting that moving the school would leave the old site as a "boarded up, looking rather ugly Grade I building".

Conversely, finance lead Councillor Andy Burton (Liberal Democrats: Esher, Claygate & Oxshott North) argued the decision had been made by the outgoing county council "many years ago" and that the "financial binds tighten" around such moves over time.

After a spirited discussion, East Surrey's cabinet would ultimately approve the school move by seven votes to two.

Councillor Johnston has now quit the majority Liberal Democrat grouping on East Surrey Council over this choice, and continues to urge for the decision to be reconsidered.

In his email, he wrote: "None of the existing Reigate ward councillors support the move. Nor do many county and borough councillors in neighbouring divisions and wards.

"Alongside them thousands of local people, including hundreds of families – past and present users of local schools – are also in opposition."

He said East Surrey had "squandered" the opportunity to "reverse this scandal" and was quitting the majority group as a result.

While he has left the Liberal Democrats on East Surrey Council, he remains a member of the national party and a part of the Lib Dem group on Reigate & Banstead Borough Council (RBBC).

"I intend to remain a member of the Council and to continue serving residents of Reigate and, to the extent possible, of the East Surrey area as a whole," he wrote.

"As one should expect, I will consider carefully all matters before the Council on their merits including proposals brought by any member or group. I do not plan to leave my party or my RBBC council group."

East Surrey Council will assume all responsibility for education across the five boroughs set to be brought under its banner from April 1 – a service area that is currently overseen by Surrey County Council.

Responding to Councillor Johnston's resignation, East Surrey council leader Steve Wotton (Liberal Democrats: Horley West, Salfords & Sidlow) said: "We are, of course, disappointed that Mark has chosen to resign from the Liberal Democrat council group.

"We understand his strength of feeling on this issue as a Reigate councillor and will value his local input based on the decision we have made to progress with the new school, including how we repurpose the existing site to benefit the town."

However, Councillor Wotton stood by the "extremely difficult" decision to approve the school move, while acknowledging the strength of feeling on both sides of the argument.

He noted that, as East Surrey remains a shadow authority solely tasked with setting up the new council until April, cabinet members' role was limited to deciding whether to approve Surrey County Council's project.

"We were not in a position to progress alternatives through this process without exposing the council to material financial risk," he said. "Planning permission for the new site and the underlying education decisions had already been agreed through Surrey County Council."

"The existing site does not meet the children's needs, as confirmed by the Department for Education. Not proceeding with the relocation to Woodhatch Place would risk significant further delay, leaving children in accommodation that falls short

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of the standards they deserve.

“Now that the decision has been made, our focus is on ensuring that the children who attend the new school have the best possible environment in which to learn.”

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

Cllr Mark Johnston speaks at a council meeting (Credit: ESC)

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Kissing goodbye to anti-social behaviour in Long Grove Park in Epsom?

25 November 2026



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has installed new kissing gates at Long Grove Park in Epsom as part of ongoing efforts to improve safety, tackle antisocial behaviour and create a more welcoming environment for residents and visitors.

Long Grove Park has been identified as an area affected by the misuse of motorcycles, mopeds, quad bikes and high-powered e-bikes, which can have a detrimental impact on the safety and enjoyment of other park users. The new gates have been carefully designed to deter unauthorised motorised vehicles while maintaining access for pedestrians, wheelchair users and cyclists.

The improvements form part of a coordinated approach with the council’s Safer Epsom & Ewell partners, including Surrey Police, to address concerns about illegal and antisocial vehicle use across the borough. Both organisations recognise the growing nuisance and danger caused by the reckless use of non-compliant e-bikes and e-scooters in public spaces.

Through Operation Scramble, Surrey Police have been targeting illegal and modified vehicles, seizing those that do not meet legal requirements and educating riders about the risks they pose to themselves and others.

Councillor Alan Williamson, Chair of the Crime and Disorder Committee, said:

“Everyone should be able to enjoy our parks and open spaces safely. These new kissing gates at Long Grove Park are a practical measure that will help deter unauthorised motorised vehicles, while ensuring the park remains accessible and safe for other users.

“Tackling antisocial behaviour is a priority for the council, which is why we launched the Safer Epsom & Ewell partnership earlier this year. By working closely with Surrey Police and our other partners, we have taken a coordinated approach to addressing the issues that matter most to residents.

“The installation of these gates, alongside enforcement activity such as Surrey Police’s Operation Scramble, demonstrates our shared commitment to making Epsom & Ewell a safer place for everyone. We will continue to listen to residents’ concerns and take action where it is needed.”

Inspector Tommy Pearson, Borough Commander for Epsom and Ewell, said:

“The illegal use of e-bikes and e-scooters is a growing problem in our borough, as it is across the country. We are committed to working with the borough council to tirelessly pursue riders who are causing fear and nuisance in our community.

“Last month saw two days of action targeting e-scooters in Epsom which delivered excellent results. I hope this activity, alongside deterrents such as the new kissing gates, provides direct reassurance that we are listening to your concerns around illegal and reckless riding and taking decisive action.”

- A RADAR key arrangement will be in place for disabled park users.

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- Find out more about Safer Epsom & Ewell – Safer Epsom & Ewell | Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

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Photo: The Borough Commander and Cllr Alan Williamson at the kissing gate

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Surrey carers charity at the final crossroads

25 November 2026



A Surrey charity which has supported unpaid carers and vulnerable families for more than 40 years is closing at the end of November, following a bitter dispute with Surrey County Council over the withdrawal of funding for respite and emergency care services.

Crossroads Care Surrey, based in Leatherhead, will cease operations on 30 November 2026 after its trustees concluded that the organisation was no longer financially viable.

The closure follows the council's decision to terminate contracts covering carers' respite breaks, emergency care planning and end-of-life support. The charity says the loss of funding has made its position unsustainable despite efforts to reduce costs, attract private clients and secure alternative income.

Surrey County Council has defended its decisions, insisting that the previous contracts failed to deliver the expected results and that its replacement arrangements are supporting more carers.

The dispute raises fundamental questions about how the county supports thousands of unpaid carers who provide essential care for elderly, disabled and seriously ill relatives, often at considerable personal cost.

A charity's final appeal goes unanswered

Crossroads chief executive Terry Hawkins described the closure as an "incredibly sad day" for staff, volunteers and the families who have depended on the charity.

He accused Surrey County Council of making decisions that had removed essential support from some of the county's most vulnerable residents.

"It is also a damning reflection of what happens when vital support for unpaid carers is withdrawn. Surrey County Council has made decisions that have removed essential services from some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. Those decisions have had consequences, and the closure of the charity is now another."

The charity says it had appealed to councillors, local MPs and council executives to reconsider the withdrawal of funding, including through a petition signed by more than 5,000 Surrey residents.

Mr Hawkins said those appeals had gone unanswered.

"We have done everything possible to keep this charity going and explored every realistic option to secure our future. It is heartbreaking that, despite those efforts, we have reached a point where we can no longer continue."

He warned that the consequences of reduced support would not disappear but would instead fall on families, the NHS and already stretched social care services.

"The loss of Crossroads Care Surrey is not simply the closure of an organisation; it is the loss of a vital source of support for carers and families who still need help."

The £3.5 million funding dispute

Central to the disagreement is the extent to which council-funded support has been reduced or replaced.

Crossroads says the remaining value of its three withdrawn contracts was approximately £3.7 million. These funded practical respite breaks, emergency care planning and assistance for people caring for relatives approaching the end of

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life.

The charity obtained figures through a Freedom of Information request showing that £204,600 had been issued under Surrey County Council's replacement £300 Carers Wellbeing Break Payment scheme between 1 June 2025 and 1 September 2026.

It calculates the difference at approximately £3.5 million and argues that this represents a substantial reduction in practical support for unpaid carers.

However, the figures do not establish that overall council spending on carers has fallen by £3.5 million. The £3.7 million represents the remaining value of several contracts, while the £204,600 covers payments under one replacement scheme during a specified 15-month period. The council also funds other services.

The figures nevertheless raise questions about how much of the previous provision has been replaced, particularly for carers who need trained staff to take over care responsibilities rather than financial assistance to arrange a break themselves.

A £300 payment may provide welcome flexibility for some families, but it is not necessarily equivalent to several hours of professional replacement care, particularly where a person has complex medical or personal care needs.

Council says more carers are being helped

Surrey County Council's Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Cllr Sinead Mooney, rejected the suggestion that the authority was abandoning carers.

"The council's decision to end the carer services contracts we previously held with Crossroads Care Surrey wasn't taken lightly. The contracts had failed to achieve the impact and take-up we expected, and we have a responsibility to make sure that public funding is used as effectively as possible for Surrey residents."

She said the council continued to support other carers' organisations and had invested in new respite facilities at Emily Lodge in Woking and The Squirrels in Banstead, providing breaks for carers while adults with complex needs received support.

She also defended the £300 wellbeing payment, saying the new scheme was reaching more carers than the previous arrangements.

"Our new flexible £300 wellbeing break payment to help carers with immediate needs is reaching more carers than ever before, with more carers supported under the new scheme than previously."

Cllr Mooney said carers had welcomed the flexibility of the payments and that the council intended to expand the scheme further.

She added that funding transferring to East Surrey and West Surrey councils when local government reorganisation takes effect in April 2027 would allow thousands more carers to benefit.

According to the council, money not spent on the wellbeing payment scheme is reinvested in care packages for people with care needs, thereby providing additional support to their carers.

A dispute with a long history

The closure marks the culmination of a controversy previously reported by the Epsom and Ewell Times.

In August 2025, EET reported how Crossroads had stepped in to protect respite arrangements for 274 unpaid carers following the early termination of a council contract that had originally been due to continue until March 2027.

At the time, Crossroads accused the authority of withdrawing a commitment to honour carers' remaining respite entitlements. The charity secured substantial donations to continue providing the promised breaks until November 2025.

Further controversy followed in March 2026, when Crossroads warned that the withdrawal of emergency care planning and end-of-life support could leave families without essential assistance during crises.

The charity said approximately 1,500 carers had existing emergency plans and questioned what would happen if they became ill or otherwise unable to look after someone dependent on them.

The council maintained that emergency arrangements would remain available through its existing adult social care services.

The latest announcement confirms that the charity has been unable to survive the loss of its council contracts, despite seeking alternative sources of income.

Who takes responsibility when a charity closes?

Cllr Mooney emphasised that Crossroads was an independent charity and that the decision to close had been made by its trustees, rather than the council.

"We recognise the important role that charities and voluntary organisations play in supporting Surrey communities, and acknowledge the impact that the closure of any local charity can have on its staff and the people who have drawn on its services."

She added: "At the same time, we have a responsibility to make sure that public funds are directed towards services which deliver the greatest benefit for Surrey residents, rather than being used to sustain any individual organisation."

The distinction is important. Although the trustees have made the final decision, the charity maintains that the withdrawal

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of council contracts was the decisive factor in its financial collapse.

The council, meanwhile, argues that its responsibility is to secure effective services for residents rather than guarantee the future of a particular provider.

The question for carers is whether the new arrangements offer support comparable to what has been lost.

There is also the issue of continuity. Specialist charities often build relationships with families over many years, acquiring detailed knowledge of individual needs and providing reassurance that familiar carers will be available when required.

Cllr Mooney said the council would work directly with the small number of people still receiving support from Crossroads to ensure a smooth transition.

“We will be working directly with the small number of clients who currently receive support through Crossroads to make sure they continue to receive the support they need and transition smoothly to a new provider as appropriate.”

What happens to Surrey’s carers now?

Crossroads says its remaining priority is to support service users during its final days and help identify alternative care arrangements wherever possible.

Mr Hawkins paid tribute to the staff, volunteers, supporters and families who had sustained the charity over four decades.

“Above all, I want to thank the unpaid carers and families who have trusted us. It has been a privilege to support you and we are deeply sorry that we cannot continue.”

The closure comes just over four months before Surrey County Council itself is due to cease operating, with responsibility for adult social care passing to the new East Surrey and West Surrey unitary authorities on 1 April 2027.

Those authorities will inherit not only the replacement wellbeing payment scheme but also the responsibility for ensuring that carers can obtain practical help when illness, exhaustion or family emergencies make it impossible for them to continue without assistance.

For families across Epsom, Ewell and the wider county, the critical test will not simply be how many people receive a £300 payment, but whether effective replacement care is available when they need it.

Crossroads Care Surrey can be contacted before its closure on 01372 869976. Carers requiring continuing support should also contact Surrey County Council’s adult social care services.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

- Carers left with nowhere to turn
- Some Surrey care services at a crossroads?
- Carers respite at the Crossroads in Surrey?
- Surrey’s Cutting-Edge Respite
- Calculating the cost of care in Surrey

Fly-tipping in Epsom and Ewell: footpaths bear the brunt

25 November 2026



Six in ten fly-tips reported in Epsom and Ewell are dumped on footpaths and bridleways, official figures show,

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and the borough's true total is higher than the statistics suggest. The Council has confirmed to the Epsom and Ewell Times that fly-tips its own street-cleaning crews clear are not counted.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council recorded 452 fly-tipping incidents in 2024/25, up 7% on 423 the year before, according to figures published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in February 2026.

That works out at 5.4 incidents per 1,000 residents, a quarter of the England average of 21. But the low figure comes with a large caveat. Epsom and Ewell is one of only 25 councils in England that report to Defra only the fly-tips logged by members of the public.

Asked why, the Council told EET: "We currently report only cases logged through My Council Services (MCS). Fly-tipping is collected as part of routine street cleansing, but is not yet included in our data collection methods. We are working to develop a way to record all incidents."

The Council gave no date for the change. Until it happens, waste that crews spot and clear on their rounds does not appear in the borough's official count.

Across England, councils dealt with 1.26 million fly-tips in 2024/25, up 9% on the year before.

Footpaths bear the brunt

Of the 452 incidents, 280 (62%) were on footpaths and bridleways. Nationally, footpaths account for about one fly-tip in five. In Epsom and Ewell, only 16 incidents (3.5%) were recorded on roads and pavements, against about a third across England. Council land accounted for 93 (21%).

The footpath share has climbed steadily: 40% in 2022/23, 55% in 2023/24 and 62% in 2024/25.

EET asked which footpaths and bridleways were worst affected. The Council did not name any, saying only that the figure reflects "the locations recorded by the teams when collecting fly-tipping reported by the public, through the council's website". Nor did it say whether the surveillance cameras placed at hotspots in 2023, including Old London Road, Hook Road and Christ Church Road, are still in use.

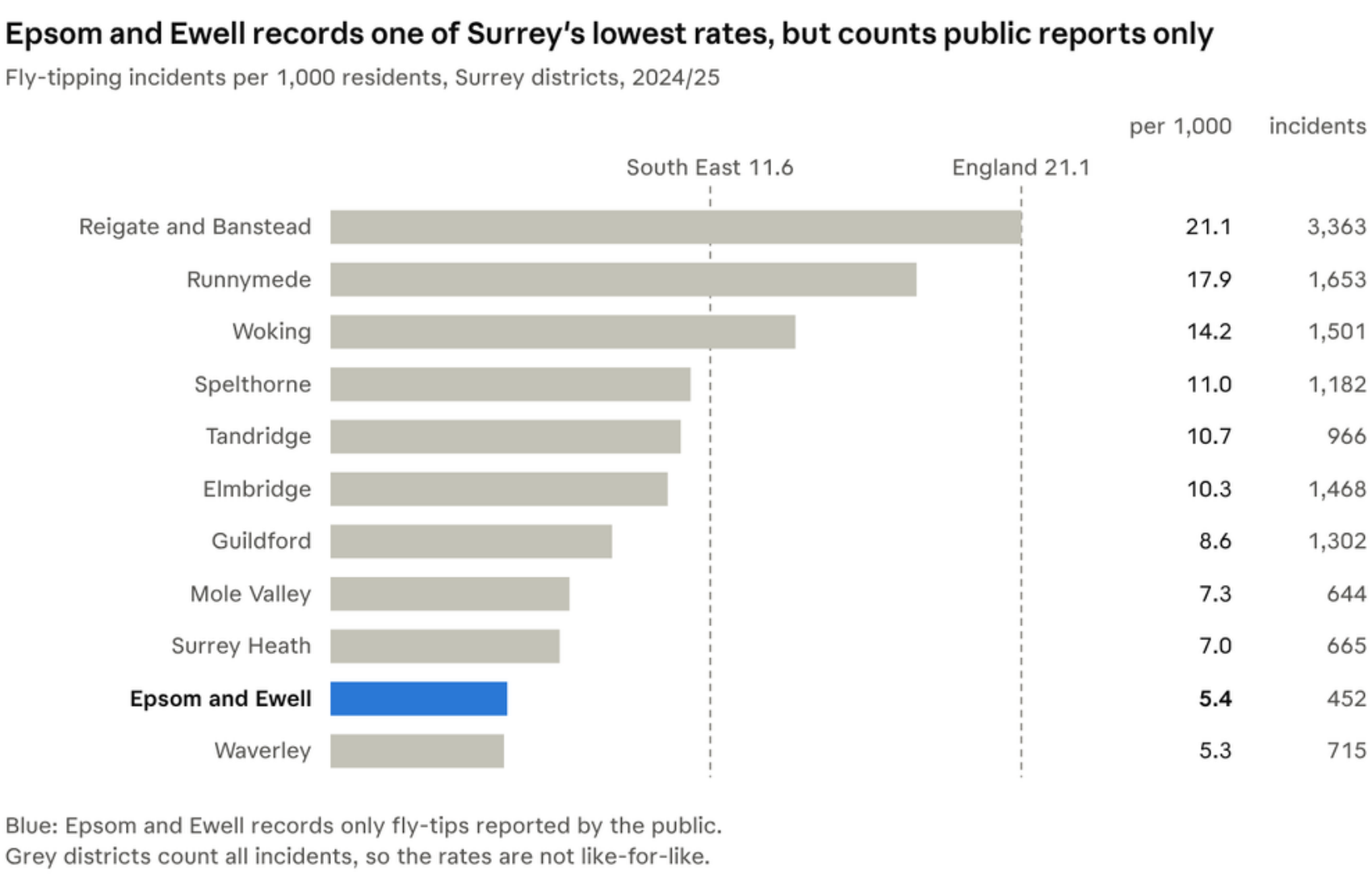
What is being dumped

The loads are mostly substantial. 266 incidents (59%) were the size of a small van load, nearly double the national share of 31%, and a further 37 were transit-van sized. The largest dumps have disappeared, however: for the third year running, the borough recorded no fly-tips of tipper-lorry size, as EET has previously reported.

Household waste made up just over half of what was dumped. Unwanted fridges, washing machines and other "white goods" featured in 41 incidents (9%), almost twice the national rate. Other electrical items appeared in 22, and there were smaller numbers of tyres, building rubble and garden waste, plus one case of asbestos.

How the borough compares

On paper, Epsom and Ewell has one of the lowest fly-tipping rates in Surrey. Neighbouring Reigate and Banstead recorded 3,363 incidents, or 21.1 per 1,000 residents, the highest in the county. But every other Surrey district counts all fly-tips, including those found by council crews, so the comparison flatters Epsom and Ewell.



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Source: Defra local authority fly-tipping data, 2024/25, published 25 February 2026

Few fines, and a prosecution missing from the figures

The Council took 438 enforcement actions in 2024/25. Almost all of them (416) were investigations. It issued four fixed penalty notices (three for fly-tipping and one to a householder who passed waste to an unlicensed carrier), sent eight warning letters and carried out ten duty of care inspections. Across England, fixed penalty notices make up about one in eight enforcement actions; in Epsom and Ewell it was fewer than one in a hundred.

Asked why so few investigations led to a fine, the Council said a fixed penalty is offered "as an alternative to prosecution where appropriate", and that in some cases it goes straight to court. It added: "Any prosecution for fly-tipping must satisfy both the evidential and public interest tests. Criminal proceedings can only be pursued where sufficient admissible evidence exists to provide a realistic prospect of conviction. While the council investigates all reported fly-tipping incidents, this evidential threshold cannot always be met."

The official return for the year shows no prosecutions. That is incomplete. In March 2025 the Council's own magazine, Borough Insight, reported that a man who dumped waste in the World's End area in February 2024, and ignored a fixed penalty notice, had pleaded guilty and been ordered to pay £2,330 in fines, costs and surcharge. The Council has confirmed to EET that the case, covering one fly-tipping offence and two of failing to cooperate, was heard on 10 February 2025, within the 2024/25 reporting year, and "was not included in the 2024/25 Defra return".

The Council did not state the level of its fly-tipping fixed penalty, instead referring EET to a committee paper. Councils can set the penalty between £150 and £1,000.

Nor could the Council say what clearing fly-tips cost in 2024/25. It explained that dumped waste "is collected alongside other street-cleansing materials, so actual collection costs are combined with wider street-cleansing costs rather than recorded separately for each fly-tip".

How to report fly-tipping

Because only public reports are counted, every report helps build an accurate picture of where fly-tipping happens in the borough.

- **Online:** use the Council's form at epsom-ewell.gov.uk/fly-tipping. The Council aims to clear fly-tips within three working days where practical.
- **By phone:** 01372 732000.
- **Blocking a road:** contact Surrey County Council Highways on 0300 200 1003.
- **On private land:** clearing the waste is the landowner's responsibility.

Householders can also avoid being fined themselves. If you pay someone to take your rubbish away, check they hold a waste carrier's licence and ask for a waste transfer note, which you should keep for two years. If your waste is later found dumped, you can be held responsible.

About the figures: Incident and enforcement figures are from Defra's Fly-tipping statistics for England (published 25 February 2026) and its local authority data, compiled from councils' own returns. Surrey comparisons draw on the same data as republished by policestatistics.co.uk. Council comments were provided by Epsom and Ewell Borough Council in response to questions from EET on 18 November 2026.

Sources

- Fly-tipping statistics for England (Defra landing page)
- Fly-tipping statistics for England, 2024 to 2025 (Defra release)
- Defra local authority data, 2012-13 to 2024-25 (ODS)
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- EET: Fly-tipping in Epsom and Ewell part of national problem (8 Jul 2025)
- Borough Insight: fly tipper ordered to pay over £2,000
- EEBC: fly-tipping

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Is Woking being woke?

25 November 2026



Flying the Palestinian flag outside civic buildings “does nothing to help those suffering in the Middle East and risks deepening divisions here at home” said the leader of the Conservative opposition group at West Surrey Council.

The flag has been displayed outside Woking Borough Council to mark Palestine National Day on November 15.

The authority said that this was done as an expression of solidarity, but Councillor Jane Austin said that residents expressed anger at the gesture and labelled it as virtue signalling.

She has called on the new West Surrey Council to keep its sites “free from political statements on divisive international issues.”

Cllr Austin said: “I head from many residents over the weekend who were deeply concerned about Woking Borough Council’s decision to fly the Palestine flag.”

She added: “We all feel enormous sympathy for innocent people caught up in war and conflict, wherever they are in the world.

“Council buildings belong to the whole community, and councillors have a responsibility to consider how decisions like this affect the people they represent.

“In my view, this decision does nothing to help those suffering in the Middle East and risks deepening divisions here at home at a time when antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred are both serious concerns.”

“Woking Borough Council faces extraordinary financial challenges in its final few months.

“Residents rightly expect it to bring communities together and focus on the everyday business of local government, from collecting the bins to making timely planning decisions.”

Cllr Ann-Marie Barker, leader of Woking Borough Council is also a member of the West Surrey executive – which will take over services from April 2027.

Woking, she said, was a diverse borough, and the council was proud to support all members of its community, regardless of their faith, creed or background.

Cllr Barker said: “Throughout the year, we recognise and mark significant occasions, including Holocaust Memorial Day, Remembrance Sunday and other moments of remembrance, reflection and solidarity. We will continue to stand by those values and by our commitment to supporting and respecting all communities.

She added: “We stand by our decision to fly the Palestinian flag to mark Palestine National Day on November 15 as an expression of solidarity with those suffering, and we stand equally firmly by our commitment to a Woking in which all communities are treated with dignity and respect.”

The leader of West Surrey Council, Councillor Paul Follows has been approached for comment.

Chris Caulfield Local Democracy Reporter

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Woking Borough Council flew the Palestine flag (image WBC/Facebook)

Leatherhead leisure pot diverted to nearby bridge

25 November 2026

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A “very popular and well used” bridge is set to undergo a quarter of a million worth of repairs after being damaged by heavy goods vehicles.

Serious defects have been found in the concrete beam and slab Thorncroft Bridge in Leatherhead.

They were discovered following a specialist inspection carried out when Mole Valley District Council received reports of larger and heavier vehicles using the river crossing.

Money for the project will come out of a pot earmarked to cover repairs in the nearby Leatherhead Leisure Centre.

The work was recommended by the council’s November scrutiny committee and still requires full cabinet approval.

Councillor Keira Vyvan-Robinson, cabinet member for property and project said: “It’s a very popular and well used bridge used by pedestrians and light vehicle traffic which supports local business and leisure in the area.

“A specialist non intrusive inspection identified a range of works needed to fix a range of defect and safety improvements.”

Among the work will be road resurfacing, new speed limit signs, new coping stones and new signage.

There will also be new measures put in place to make it more difficult for larger vehicles to use the River Mole crossing.

The £240,000 budget includes a 25 per cent contingency for any overspend, the meeting heard.

The exact age of the Thorncroft Bridge is unknown, but it is thought to have been built “post war” committee papers read.

The proposed project would also include traffic management, safety barriers, lifesaving equipment, with additional work carried out to clear the riverbed and banks of any obstructions.

The report read: “The repairs would support continued access for tenants and landowners together with pedestrians and light vehicles.

“The bridge also supports active travel and connections to the riverside and leisure centre.”

Officers have recommended carrying out the work at the first opportunity to avoid any risks of the project stalling once services are taken over by East Surrey Council in April.

The report said: “Taking no action, would increase health and safety risks, require additional inspections and could lead to closure.”

Chris Caulfield Local Democracy Reporter

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Throncroft Bridge in Leatherhead (image Google)

Popular Epsom and Ewell Councillor Jan Mason dies

25 November 2026



A veteran councillor who “tirelessly” represented her community for more than three decades has sadly died, it has been announced.

Residents Association Councillor Jan Mason, who served on both Surrey County Council and Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, passed away earlier this month.

The flag at Epsom Town Hall will be flown at half mast as a mark of respect to Councillor Mason.

Epsom & Ewell council leader Hannah Dalton (Residents Associations of Epsom and Ewell: Stoneleigh Ward) said: “It’s been an honour to work alongside Jan.

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“She worked tirelessly on behalf of residents in Ruxley Ward and was a passionate advocate for people across Epsom & Ewell.

“Her commitment to public service was unwavering, earning her the respect and admiration of colleagues and residents alike.

“I know that councillors and staff will miss her kindness and great sense of humour. Her contribution to our borough will be long remembered.”

Councillor Mason was first elected to Epsom & Ewell Borough Council in 1995, and would go on to be elected to Surrey County Council in 2001.

She also served as Mayor of Epsom from 2009 to 2010, and gave her backing to several charities during her tenure including Hearing Dogs for Deaf People, St John Ambulance and Riding for the Disabled.

In a statement, a Surrey County Council spokesperson said: “We are sad to share the news that Jan Mason, County Councillor for West Ewell, has passed away.

“As a long-standing, highly respected member of the Residents Association, Jan was elected to Surrey County Council in 2001.

“She dedicated many years of service to the Communities Select Committee, as well as her role as an Epsom & Ewell Borough Councillor.

“Jan was a determined advocate who worked tirelessly on behalf of her residents. She will be remembered for her kindness, integrity and dedication to the communities she represented.

“Our thoughts are with Jan’s family and friends at this difficult time.”

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

Epsom and Ewell Times adds: During the course of our four years observing and reporting on Epsom and Ewell Council meetings we could always rely on Jan Mason to liven up proceedings. Never fearful of expressing her opinions in a plain and sometimes challenging way. She will be missed. Epsom and Ewell will be a little less colourful without her.

Jan Mason (Credit: EEBC)

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Cllr Dallen’s “arrogance” complaint continues to consume Epsom and Ewell Council time

25 November 2026



Questions have been raised about the impartiality of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s handling of complaints against councillors after it emerged that a committee chairman who withdrew from a controversial standards hearing is now involved in reviewing the procedures that brought it to a halt.

At the Council’s Audit and Scrutiny Committee meeting on Thursday 12th November, councillors challenged Chief Executive Jackie King over the aftermath of the September hearing concerning a complaint by Cllr **Neil Dallen** (RA Town) against Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court).

The discussion raised wider questions about the Council’s governance, the role of its Monitoring Officer and whether external auditors had been informed of difficulties with the complaints procedure.

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A chairman's return raises questions

Cllr **John Beckett** (RA Auriol), chairman of the Standards and Constitution Committee, had originally been identified to chair the hearing into Cllr Dallen's complaint against Cllr Ames. However, Beckett had himself participated in the January Strategy and Resources Committee meeting from which the complaint arose.

During that meeting, Ames challenged the decision to withhold information about an urgent authorisation involving up to £500,000 in potential liabilities at the Rainbow Leisure Centre. Beckett intervened to defend the confidentiality of commercially sensitive financial information. Cllr Dallen, who was chairing the meeting, expressly endorsed Beckett's contribution.

The subsequent complaint alleged that Ames had failed to treat Dallen with respect during the heated exchange.

The proposed involvement of Beckett in determining that complaint had already attracted criticism. Epsom and Ewell Times previously questioned whether a councillor who had participated in the original dispute should sit in judgment upon the conduct of another participant. Beckett subsequently stood aside from the September hearing, which was chaired instead by Cllr **Rachel King** (RA Town), vice-chairman of the Standards and Constitution Committee.

That makes the latest development particularly significant.

At the November Audit and Scrutiny meeting, the Chief Executive disclosed that Beckett and Monitoring Officer Piero Ionta had met to review the complaints process following the September hearing's adjournment.

The question now arises: if Beckett's involvement in the original dispute was sufficient reason for him to withdraw from hearing the complaint, why is he participating in examining the procedures whose application is disputed in that same case?

There is an important distinction between deciding whether Ames breached the Code of Conduct and considering the Council's general complaints arrangements. Withdrawing from one role does not automatically prevent involvement in the other. Nevertheless, the circumstances raise a legitimate question about the appearance of impartiality, particularly where a review of procedural shortcomings could have consequences for the complaint itself.

A hearing stopped by uncertainty over the rules

The hearing on 22nd September was intended to consider an investigator's recommendation that Ames had breached the councillors' Code of Conduct. Instead, it became embroiled in a dispute about which procedural arrangements the Council was entitled to use.

Ames and his legal representative questioned whether the Council had correctly identified the arrangements adopted under the Localism Act 2011 and whether the hearing panel had authority to establish its own procedure.

The Council's external legal adviser maintained that the necessary arrangements existed across its Constitution, delegated powers and published guidance, but could not establish when the complaints guidance relied upon had been formally adopted. Earlier arrangements, dating from 2012 and used in a previous standards hearing in 2019, had not been clearly addressed in the September hearing papers.

The panel did not determine the dispute over the applicable rules. Instead, it unanimously adjourned the hearing and recommended that the Standards and Constitution Committee review the arrangements for complaints against councillors and sub-committee hearings. No finding was made about Ames's conduct.

Who was authorised to conduct the review?

At the November Audit and Scrutiny Committee meeting, Cllr **James Lawrence** (Independent College) raised the failure of the September proceedings as a potential governance concern.

Jackie King (EEBC CEO) acknowledged the confusion surrounding the hearing and revealed that the Monitoring Officer and the chairman of Standards and Constitution had subsequently met to discuss the complaints process. "There was a lot of confusion at the pre-hearing," she told the committee. However, she said that she had not yet received the conclusions of their review and could not say whether any procedural shortcomings had been identified. She undertook to communicate the outcome to members.

Cllr Ames challenged the arrangement. He pointed out that the September panel had recommended a review by the Standards and Constitution Committee itself, not by its chairman and the Monitoring Officer acting separately.

He questioned whether the people responsible for advising on and administering the disputed procedure should themselves determine whether it had been defective. He accused officers of attempting a "behind-the-scenes stitch-up", an allegation rejected by the Chief Executive.

Ms King defended the Monitoring Officer and maintained that it was necessary to await the review's conclusions before deciding whether there had been a failure.

Ames argued that the review should be conducted through the Council's established committee system, with appropriate member oversight. His concern was not simply whether the eventual procedure might be corrected, but whether the Council was following the democratic decision made by the September panel.

The question of Beckett's involvement adds another dimension. The original hearing was conducted without him, following concerns over his participation in the underlying dispute. Yet he has now returned to a role in examining the process by which that same dispute was to be adjudicated.

It remains unclear whether the review undertaken by Beckett and the Monitoring Officer will be presented to the full

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Standards and Constitution Committee for consideration and decision.

Auditors were not informed

The disagreement emerged during the committee's consideration of the Council's annual accounts and external audit findings.

Grant Thornton, the Council's external auditors, had assessed its governance arrangements, including the systems intended to maintain standards of conduct and accountability. Cllr Lawrence questioned whether the difficulties surrounding the aborted hearing ought to have been identified as a weakness in the Council's governance. Ames went further, asking whether officers had informed Grant Thornton that a standards hearing had been adjourned amid uncertainty about the applicable procedures.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the auditors had not been told. She explained that the Council could not know whether there was a governance failure until the review had been completed.

Ames disagreed, arguing that the inability to identify and agree the correct arrangements at the hearing was itself a governance concern, irrespective of any subsequent efforts to resolve the uncertainty. He reminded the committee that the September panel had itself recommended a review, rather than simply accepting the assurances of officers.

Grant Thornton indicated that the auditors could consider the matter and, if appropriate, amend their reporting once the outcome of the review was known.

The exchanges therefore brought the handling of a single councillor complaint into the wider question of how accurately the Council's Annual Governance Statement reflects problems identified in its decision-making arrangements.

Cost of the unresolved complaint

Ames also raised the financial implications of the proceedings, reminding the meeting that more than £8,000 had already been spent on the complaint. The case has involved an external investigator, legal advice and the preparation of a hearing which was adjourned without reaching the merits of the complaint.

The original dispute concerned the manner in which Ames questioned Dallen over confidential treatment of information about the Rainbow Leisure Centre.

The external investigator recommended a finding that Ames had failed to show respect. The investigator did not, however, determine whether Ames's underlying questions about the Council's urgent decision and confidentiality arrangements were justified. Nor has the hearing panel yet determined whether Ames breached the Code.

Commenting after the meeting Labour Group leader on the Council, Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Court) said "One man can stop the disproportionate time being wasted on this petty complaint. Cllr Dallen's refusal to withdraw appears to be demonstrating the very characteristic of "arrogance" he is complaining about."

Standards for the standards committee?

The developments leave the Council facing several questions.

Why has a chairman who withdrew from adjudicating a complaint because of his earlier involvement returned to participate in a review connected with that complaint?

Why has a recommendation addressed to the full Standards and Constitution Committee apparently been pursued initially through discussions between its chairman and the Monitoring Officer?

And should the difficulties which prevented the September hearing from proceeding have been disclosed to external auditors without waiting for the Council's own review to conclude?

These questions do not establish that Beckett or the Monitoring Officer acted improperly. Nor do they resolve the underlying complaint against Ames. They do, however, concern the independence, transparency and accountability of the procedures through which elected councillors are investigated and judged.

With Epsom and Ewell Borough Council due to disappear on 1st April 2027, the authority has only a few months remaining to demonstrate that its complaints arrangements are clear, properly authorised and capable of commanding public confidence.

The September panel asked for a review by the Standards and Constitution Committee.

Whether that is what the Council ultimately delivers remains to be seen.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Image: A&S Meet November 2026 EEBC YouTube channel

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From paddock to housing at edge in Epsom?

25 November 2026



More than 60 new homes could soon be built under proposals to develop a paddock on the edge of a Surrey town.

Wates Developments Limited is seeking outline planning permission to install dozens of homes on the field by Burgh Heath Road in Epsom.

If approved by Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, it would pave the way for as many as 68 homes to be built on the 7.5 acre plot of land.

The developer's planning statement argues that Epsom is "the most suitable and sustainable location for growth in the borough".

"The settlement offers an excellent range of services, facilities, employment and public transport opportunities," the document reads.

"Direct rail connections into central London and out into Surrey and onwards to the south coast can be reached from Epsom railway station."

It adds: "The area is also well served in terms of healthcare and education along with green infrastructure in the form of a number of golf courses, Epsom Downs Racecourse and public access woodland and open space."

Of the 68 homes proposed in the development, up to 34 could be allocated as affordable housing, the planning statement says.

The developer believes the project could help address a "clear and demonstrable" need for housing within the borough.

While the site falls within the green belt, the developer has argued that exceptions allowing for these proposals to go ahead would apply.

They have made the case that the patch of land would qualify as a "grey belt" site, and that it meets the "golden rules" that would deem it not to be inappropriate green belt development.

The concept of grey belt is a recent addition to national planning guidelines that allows for lighter planning restrictions on sites that are not deemed to adequately contribute to green belt purposes.

"In overall terms the proposed development would result in landscape and visual effects in a landscape that is already influenced by built form and infrastructure associated with Epsom," the documents say.

"The proposed development would be viewed as infill development amongst existing development associated with Epsom to the north and south and would not substantially alter the character of the landscape."

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

Epsom and Ewell Times will follow the application and report

Image: Burgh Heath Development (Credit: Wates Developments Limited)

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Stoneleigh library giving away trees

25 November 2026



Surrey County Council is set to give 450 free trees to residents, at three Surrey library giveaway events.

The giveaway is part of the county council's tree strategy which launched in 2019 and saw the council pledge to facilitate the planting of 1.2 million trees, one for every resident in Surrey, by 2030. This will bring the total number of trees planted across Surrey to an impressive 885,172.

The following libraries are giving away trees on a first-come, first-served basis, on **Saturday 21 November 2026:**

- **Woking library** 9.30am to 12 noon*
    - **Ashford library** 9.30am to 12 noon*
    - **Stoneleigh library** 9.30am to 12 noon*

The trees are native, broad-leaved species and come with a stake and guard, ready for planting in your garden. A leaflet containing information on how to plant and care for the tree will be provided with every tree.

Marisa Heath, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning, said: "We have been running tree giveaway events since 2022 and know they are popular with residents. I'm pleased to give residents another opportunity to be part of a Surrey legacy while tackling the impact of climate change and improving biodiversity. We are well on our way to achieving our tree planting target, but couldn't have done this without the ongoing support from schools, communities, businesses and residents and volunteers."

Find out about the tree giveaway event and visit the website for details on the Surrey's Tree Strategy.

*The giveaway events will finish at 12 noon at the latest, this may be earlier if the trees have all been allocated.

Surrey County Council

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Epsom Green Belt Housing Battle Now in

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Inspector’s Hands

25 November 2026



A Government-appointed Planning Inspector will now decide whether 110 homes can be built on Green Belt farmland beside Langley Vale, Epsom. The decision follows a six-day public inquiry at Epsom Town Hall, which closed Friday 13th November.

Developer Fairfax Aspire Ltd is appealing against Epsom & Ewell Borough Council’s refusal of outline planning permission for the 5.2-hectare site at Farm View, Langley Bottom Farm. The site is part of the countryside leading up to Epsom Downs. Councillors refused the application in February 2026, against the advice of their own planning officers.

Inspector Joanna Bowyer must weigh the scheme’s benefits, including 55 affordable homes, against objections on Green Belt harm, landscape, ecology, transport and the safety of racehorses.

From consultation to campaign

Fairfax unveiled its plans in June 2025. Residents saw them as a threat to the rural character of a village closely tied to Epsom Downs and the racing industry. Woodcote (Epsom) Residents’ Society helped villagers set up the Langley Vale Action Group (LVAG), chaired by John Mumford, under the banner of keeping the valley green. By February 2026 a petition had passed 2,000 signatures, and later fundraising paid for professional planning and highways consultants.

Councillors overrule officers

When the application reached the Planning Committee on 26 February 2026, officers recommended conditional approval. Approval would have depended on a legal agreement securing affordable housing and infrastructure contributions. Officers accepted some harm to the openness of the Green Belt and to landscape character. However, they judged the site to be “grey belt”, a national policy category that can include undeveloped countryside, depending on how much it contributes to Green Belt purposes. In their view the scheme met the national tests for such land. Even if it did not, they considered that its benefits could amount to the “very special circumstances” needed to justify permission.

Councillors disagreed. After hearing from residents and the racing industry, they refused permission on four grounds:

- the site’s unsustainable location and reliance on cars
- harm to the Green Belt
- harm to the landscape
- risks to horses and riders using the routes to Epsom’s training grounds

The developer’s case

Half of the homes would be affordable. That meets the higher requirement of the Green Belt “golden rules” in national policy and is a significant offer in a Borough under long-standing housing pressure.

Fairfax also proposes:

- biodiversity net gain of more than 10 per cent
- retention of mature trees and hedgerows
- a landscaped buffer next to nearby ancient woodland
- sustainable drainage
- public green space, a children’s play area and improved footpaths

To reduce car use, it offers cycle parking, electric vehicle charging, a car club and funding to extend the Surrey Connect on-demand bus service to Langley Vale. A new vehicle access would come off Langley Vale Road.

Fairfax argues that the field has limited biodiversity value and that new landscaping would improve it. Opponents reply that new planting cannot make up for the loss of an open field and the habitat it already provides.

The appeal covers only the principle of development and the access arrangements. If it succeeds, layout, appearance and landscaping would be decided through later applications.

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Roads, racehorses and remoteness

LVAG argues that Langley Vale is remote from shops, public transport and services. In its view, 110 more households would add car journeys to narrow roads that are already busy, whatever travel measures are promised.

Those roads also carry racehorses between stables and training grounds. The Jockey Club and local racing interests fear that more traffic will bring conflict with horses and riders. For opponents, the question is not whether a new junction can cope with the traffic, but whether an established and economically important local industry would suffer. Fairfax maintains that access and transport can be made acceptable.

Residents at the inquiry

LVAG secured “Rule 6 party” status, which allowed it to take part as a main party alongside the appellant and the Council. Its consultants gave evidence, and its representatives cross-examined the appellant’s witnesses.

Beyond transport and the site’s planning status, the group stressed three further points:

- the site lies within the Area of Great Landscape Value
- the development would take an arable field, still farmed by a tenant, from a rural corridor leading towards Epsom Downs
- the field supports wildlife including badgers, nesting skylarks and deer

John Mumford said:

“This was a splendid example of the local resident community coming together with the Jockey Club, a local trainer Pat Phelan and the CPRE to reject this housing proposal which was considered to be the wrong scheme in the wrong place. If this appeal were to be allowed it would undermine public confidence in the Local Plan process which had firmly rejected the release of this site from the Green Belt. Other more sustainable sites have been identified in the emerging Local Plan and these should be given priority in meeting the Borough’s outstanding housing needs.”

The Local Plan question

LVAG says the site was assessed while the emerging Local Plan was being prepared and was rejected for allocation as less sustainable than other Green Belt options. It argues that allowing the appeal would undermine that plan-led approach.

However, national policy does not require proposals to wait for a new Local Plan. Where a council cannot show enough housing land supply, schemes that help meet unmet need can carry greater weight. The Inspector must take the emerging plan into account without treating it as decisive.

What the decision could mean

If Fairfax wins, it will show that national housing policy can outweigh both local opposition and a council refusal on Green Belt farmland. If the appeal is dismissed, it will underline the weight given to transport sustainability, landscape and Epsom’s racing industry. Either way, each site is judged on its own merits, though the Inspector’s reasoning may influence later cases.

Campaigners expect a decision within the next few months.

Lionel Blackman

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Related reports:

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Keep our Valley Green say Langley Vale campaigners – 13 August 2025

110-home scheme at Langley Vale sparks Green Belt fears – 27 June 2025

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Image: Langley Vale proposed development layout – Fairfax Homes

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West Surrey’s financial mess

25 November 2026

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West Surrey "will operate in a very challenging financial environment, with significant budgetary pressures and limited financial resources" after its constituent councils reported a £4.92million annual shortfall in their accounts.

The new authority is set to take over services from six boroughs on April 1 and early Q1 figures suggest huge overspends in Spelthorne £3.97m, Guildford £1.06m, Runnymede £0.79m, and Surrey Heath £0.536m, will need to be balanced.

It will also inherit it's share from the county council with the upper tier reporting a £12.19m shortfall – although this is against a budget of more than five times the combined boroughs and will be split with East Surrey Council.

Council staff say the biggest drivers to this are from its children's, families and lifelong learning service at £8.4 million and adult social care at £3 million.

The long-term picture presents further challenges with the six-legacy boroughs lumping significant debt onto West Surrey's balance sheet.

Combined Woking, Spelthorne, Runnymede, Surrey Heath, Guildford and Waverley are £3.98 billion in debt having borrowed more than £4billion in a series of investment and regeneration projects that brought mixed returns.

"The borrowing position is significantly influenced by Woking's debt of £2.19 billion, which is subject to government support, Spelthorne £719 million debt, and Runnymede £587 million debt", papers presented to West Surrey's shadow council read.

In all it leaves the councils forking out about £18.07m this quarter in interest repayments -and only taking in about £2.8m in investment income, with the largest returns reported by Waverley £0.9m and Guildford £0.67m.

Surrey County Council has borrowed about £1.87 billion and is forecast to pay £45.1m this year in interest – partially offset by £23.5 million in returns.

The report read: "The Quarter 1 monitoring position highlights a number of emerging financial pressures across the sovereign councils.

"The most significant relate to demand-led services, income shortfalls, inflationary pressures, treasury volatility and the continuing implementation of Local Government Reorganisation.

"West Surrey will operate in a very challenging financial environment, with significant budgetary pressures and limited financial resources from Vesting Day, coupled with increasing demand and costs of services, and reducing government funding.

"West Surrey Council will be increasingly reliant on council tax as the primary source of income and decisions made by the sovereign councils in West Surrey and the West Surrey Shadow Authority will need to consider the ongoing financial impact and ensure that expenditure does not exceed the resources available.

"It is vital that significant importance is placed on effective financial management and medium-term financial sustainability to deliver a balanced budget going forwards and protect service delivery."

Officers told the meeting: "These are forecasts based on positions at the time it was calculated but I would expect the position to come out more favourable.

"That's generally the trend."

Leader of the Council, Councillor Paul Follows added that Q1 figures "need to be taken with a pinch of salt but needs to be monitored."

He said: "If we were at Q2 the year after that is probably the first set of numbers that I'm going to go 'that is legitimately West Surrey's position'.

"I think everything here is an indication, it's information, I don't think it's going to be everything we might need."

Chris Caulfield Local Democracy Reporter

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