

Local Parking (enforcement) Wars

26 January 2023



An opinion piece from **Cllr Eber Kington**: This week SCC announced a seven-year contract worth £96.5 million, with private company Marston Holdings Ltd, for parking and traffic enforcement. In April, SCC will be centralising parking enforcement, a service which currently is managed by Surrey's Borough and District on behalf of the County.

Image: Cllr Eber Kington on patrol

The accompanying comments to the announcement, made by the Kevin Deanus, Cabinet member for Highways and Community Resilience, promise much. But residents need to be aware, SCC does not have a great track record when it comes to taking back decision making and centralising services previously provided by the Borough Council on behalf of the County.

When SCC took back the maintenance of highway verge trees the policy became one of no maintenance unless a tree is diseased, dying or dead. And no longer will SCC automatically replace a tree lost to our urban streets. Instead, our residents have to pay £25 just to get a location looked at. £25 which is not refundable and, as often is the case, ends with the site being declared as unsuitable for a tree.

In April, SCC is also taking back the cutting of verges. The 6 to 8 seasonal cuts by the Borough Council, recognising seasonal weather conditions, will be reduced a standard county-wide cut of 4. Hardly an upgrade on what has gone before. And will SCC be pro-actively managing overhanging branches in our urban alleyways? My concern is that SCC does not even realise it's a job to be done.

And the abolition of Local Committees and centralisation of highway decisions. Now residents have no public meeting to ask questions of Highway Officers, petitions are determined at SCC's HQ in Reigate by council officials or a SCC Cabinet Member, and road safety schemes are decided by a Cabinet Member rather than local County Councillors.

So, what will this £96.5 million contract mean? Kevin Deanus, Cabinet member for Highways and Community Resilience, said: "The new contract will mean that Surrey County Council can more directly and consistently manage on street parking enforcement across the county, helping to tackle inconsiderate parking and make parking restrictions more effective."

We all want safe and considerate parking, and there has to be a penalty for those who do neither. But that £96.5 million contract has to be paid for somehow. Will we see parking meters introduced where currently there are 1 hour or 2 hour waiting limits? Will additional yellow lines, designed to push drivers into paid for parking spaces, be introduced. Will the new system be flexible enough to ensure that our local primary schools are visited regularly to manage dangerous parking and idling cars? And will Residents Parking Zone Permit charges go up once again.

Personally, I'm not sure that SCC's desire for consistency and effectiveness in parking enforcement also equates to fairness in delivery and a recognition of local needs, and it won't be just another way to make our residents pay.

County Councillor Eber Kington

Eber Kington is a former Mayor of Epsom and Ewell. He represents the Epsom and Ewell Borough Council Ward of Ewell Court Ward and on the County Council of Surrey he serves the ward of Ewell Court, Auriol & Cuddington.

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Doing the Right Thing? Gina Miller

26 January 2023

From Gina Miller PPC for the True and Fair Party in Epsom and Ewell.

Doing the right thing

By Gina Miller, Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Epsom and Ewell, Leader of the True & Fair Party

Epsom and Ewell's Labour and Liberal Democrat branches must answer a simple question. Do they want to unseat Conservative Chris Grayling at the general election or would they prefer - yet again - to stand and lose?

The two parties have tried and failed to defeat Grayling across six general elections over 21 years. This is despite his record in the House of Commons, which includes, as transport secretary, bringing train delays and cancellations across the rail network affecting commuters right here in Epsom & Ewell. Despite Mr Grayling being told by the Supreme Court that he acted beyond his powers as Lord Chancellor, bypassing parliament and restricting legal aid to the most vulnerable in society. Despite two-thirds of residents feeling that Mr Grayling is not the strong advocate for their constituency that all MPs should and must be.

Neither party has come within 10,000 votes of the Conservative candidate since the seat was formed in 1974. That's 14 general elections, 28 failed attempts - and heavy losses - between them.

Rather than charging towards electoral doom for the 29th and 30th times, Labour and the Liberal Democrats must stand aside at the next election. Epsom and Ewell needs a candidate the majority of voters can coalesce around. Someone who has a record of success in business, who has successfully challenged ministers' abuse of power in court, and who will promote the potential we have in Epsom and Ewell.

My candidacy is not driven by right and left, but right and wrong. Straightforward political reforms to root out corruption at the heart of our democracy, such as banning paid lobbying by MPs, compulsory weekly surgeries to help residents and putting the ministerial code into law. I want to see stronger anti-corruption and ethics laws across central and local government, police, regulators, and the NHS. These types of reforms are backed by voters across the political spectrum, good people who are aghast at the sleaze and disregard for the law, honesty and integrity in parliament and our public institutions. Epsom and Ewell residents can vote for me knowing that I will represent them no matter their natural mainstream party affiliation.

Our voting system needs to change so that every vote counts, but, until then, political parties must be pragmatic. The Liberal Democrats will not win here. No one doubts the party's skills at by-elections, which date back to the early 1960s and Eric Lubbock's remarkable win in Orpington. But those successes have never been repeated on a national scale. Pouring resources into a single seat cannot be replicated 600-plus times all at once, as they have to be at a general election if you are a national party.

My True & Fair Party, which is concentrating its resources in a handful of seats, is pragmatic. We haven't stood in Esher and Walton against Dominic Raab, even though his actions in government make him a natural opponent for us. We respect that this is a constituency that the Lib Dems really can win, particularly with an impressive candidate in Monica Harding.

We ask the Lib Dems to extend us the same courtesy. They have failed to defeat Grayling six times. This is despite a political record of buying a Brexit boat from a firm with no ships and ditching mandatory housebuilding targets that would help young people, including right here in Epsom and Ewell.

No one doubts Labour's resurgence under Sir Keir Starmer. There is little doubt that his party will take back seats lost to the Conservatives under Jeremy Corbyn. Yet his predecessor failed so badly in 2019 that even a commanding polling lead will not translate into a huge majority.

The unfair quirks of our electoral system mean that, in many seats, all this lead will mean is the party might regain second place. That's certainly the case in Epsom & Ewell, where Labour was nearly 21,600 votes behind Grayling in 2019. That's a number Labour cannot overturn, particularly in a seat where the voters were savvy enough to never fall for even Tony Blair's electoral charm.

Labour has failed to defeat Grayling six times, despite outdated views about gay couples and banning books for prisoners that are completely out-of-kilter with the good natured people of Epsom and Ewell.

Conservative voters who admired Thatcher, Major or even Cameron, but have been let down by the scandals of the economic failures of the May, Johnson, Truss and Sunak years won't vote Labour or Liberal Democrat. They might, however, vote for a party not bogged down by any tribal history and a candidate who can actually win if only the Lib Dems and Labour stand aside.

Those parties have been given more than enough opportunities. We all know what will happen if they stand again - they will lose. It's time for the Lib Dems and Labour to answer my initial question and give someone else a chance to properly represent Epsom and Ewell.

Gina Miller.

More affordable housing now. Cllr Kate Chinn

26 January 2023

The Local Plan of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council should specify a minimum requirement of 40% of affordable housing in each new housing development of 10 or more units (Use Class C3) of which at least 25% will be reserved for social rent and comply with the vacant building credit.

Labour are asking that the Local Plan specifies a minimum amount of both affordable housing and social housing for rent. Our targets are quite low with many councils providing more however, other councils don't have such a low bar as their starting point. Epsom and Ewell have the lowest percentage of social housing in the county.

In the last 3 years the affordable homes built in the borough were: -

2019-2020 15%

2020-2021 3%

2021-2022 6%

If Covid was a factor in this its even more important for even more homes to be rapidly built in the borough to catch up and, it's very clear indeed, many more affordable homes must be built to make the strategy deliverable.

I think that the Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy, for those who don't have much homelessness in their ward, clearly explains the cost of homelessness for an individual, a family and society. There's also the financial cost to the borough of just under £2m and to society as the health and well being impact of homelessness increases the demand for health and social care resources.

I hear of individuals living in overcrowded accommodation. I have families who live separately during the week, often with grandparents, so the children can attend schools which meet their need. Many people are living out of borough losing contact with their known and trusted support networks.

Building affordable homes - I recall just two units, as part of a development, coming to planning recently and they were not of a good standard space or amenity wise and affordable housing should not be substandard housing so on the advice of the officers it was rightly refused.

I constantly hear that providing affordable homes as part of a development is unviable. Well, why not tell developers to open their books as they must do in Brighton and the council can check their calculations.

I see application after application being refused or deferred and Epsom needs to be building homes of a good standard that residents can afford to live in, settle in and raise their families.

The Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy recognises that residents are unable to access affordable homes, and this is a main causal factor for homelessness in the borough.

At the briefing on the Homeless and Rough sleeping Strategy some of us attended a graph showed a clear dip in homeless numbers which was when the Hollymoor Lane development became occupied. A development of affordable and social housing, environmentally friendly, with solar panels and EV points, and built to a good standard.

The borough needs more developments like this

The Labour group welcomes the action plan to increase availability of affordable accommodation and welcomes the action to build homes and identify appropriate council owned sites.

However with soaring rents, S21 evictions happening again coupled with the lack of social housing we do fear numbers of homeless people will increase.

Epsom and Ewell council needs to ensure and facilitate building affordable homes. Currently it is changing from a NIMBY borough to a BANANA borough. Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anyone.

It needs to change. The council should identify appropriate sites and continue to engage with Housing Association and responsible developers to get homes built.

Affordable Homes for residents need to be built and they need to be built now.

Councillor Kate Chinn - Labour Court Ward

Local Planning Matters

26 January 2023



Tim Murphy's opinion piece on Epsom and Ewell's Local Plan. An up-to-date Local Plan is a necessity. It indicates to those proposing new developments or conversions to properties just what they are allowed or not allowed to do. It is also the yardstick by which locally elected councillors assess whether a particular planning application should be permitted.

The current Epsom and Ewell Local Plan was approved as long ago as 2007. It does not meet the requirements of the most recent planning legislation. In particular, it is failing to deliver the type of housing that is needed locally - affordable and in close proximity to a range of retail and social facilities and public transport. By contrast, the current Plan has been very largely successful in protecting the Borough's much valued Green Belt from inappropriate development. Two reports commissioned by the Council have confirmed that our Green Belt is performing as it should against the five criteria set out in planning legislation.

A new draft Local Plan is very likely to be discussed by the Council's Licensing and Planning Policy Committee on 21 st November. The preparation of the Plan has been overshadowed by a quite unrealistic housing target of nearly seven hundred new homes to be provided every year in the Borough.

Where does this target come from? It is set by central government and is based on outdated projections about how fast our number of households will grow in the future. Astonishingly, the number is so high because it incorporates what is known as an 'affordability' uplift - because house prices locally are so high, it is assumed these will fall markedly as more houses are built. There is no evidence that this is how our housing market operates.

Our councillors have a choice to make. They can try to meet most, and maybe all, of the centrally-determined housing target. The Borough has only limited built-up areas that would lend themselves to redevelopment for housing so, inevitably, extensive areas of our Green Belt would be sacrificed. Judging by the type of housing that has been approved over the past few years in the Borough on what are called greenfield sites, it is unlikely that the homes that are provided will meet local needs.

What guarantees will be in place to ensure that such significant increases in population will be matched by more educational and medical facilities and better transport provision? Alternatively, as in neighbouring Elmbridge, our councillors could decide not to meet the housing target but rather prioritise the provision of those types and sizes of housing most needed locally, including affordable homes, on existing built-up areas so that no valuable Green Belt need be lost.

The comprehensive redevelopment of existing commercial estates to incorporate a significant element of new housing should be a component of this way forward. Excellent design standards will be essential. Recent statements by our new Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Communities, Michael Gove, support this approach.

What will our councillors decide?

Tim Murphy

Tim Murphy has worked as a Chartered Town Planner in local government in London, and as an environmental specialist both with WS Atkins and Partners, the Epsom-based engineering consultants, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) where he was responsible for examining the environmental and social impacts of the EBRD's investments in Eastern Europe. Since retiring, Tim chaired the Surrey Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) for several years, and he is currently Chair of CPRE's South East Region and heads up CPRE's Epsom and Ewell local group, campaigning to protect the local Green Belt and other open areas.

If you have views and opinions on "Local Plan Matters" - do write to us admin@epsomandewelltimes.com

David King, Epsom Common Assn. on BBC's "nimbyism" report.

26 January 2023

David King, Chair of **Epsom Common Association** writes:

In my opinion several aspects of this BBC report are, at the least, questionable. I am not competent to comment on the important housing issues raised, but have serious concerns regarding the section discussing development on the Green Belt. Although not named in the BBC report, this clip was recorded on the the edge of Epsom Common at Woodcote Side.

The small part of the Common shown, grass and a highway ditch, was disparagingly described as “technically Green Belt land” by a representative of LandTech, a software company providing products for property developers.

Those recording the clip could not have missed the noticeboard headed “Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve” just feet out of shot, but chose to ignore the significance. They also chose not to show the mature woodland immediately behind the camera. The implication that the land shown was suitable for housing development was clear. By contrast, Natural England (the government body that advises on the natural environment) describe Epsom Common as a “nationally important wildlife site”; so clearly development would be a disaster for biodiversity.

Given its various designations: Registered Common Land, Local Nature Reserve, Site of Special Scientific Interest or Site of Nature Conservation Interest, as well as Green Belt, I hope that the Common is not at risk of development, but that ultimately depends on the will of politicians.

Even if the Common is safe from development, the suggestion made in the BBC report that Epsom & Ewell “could meet all of its annual housing need by by developing just 1% of the Green Belt in the Borough” does raise a more insidious threat. This statement means precisely what it says: at a typical outer London housing density of about 40 dwellings per hectare, 1% of the Borough’s Green Belt would provide space for just one year of central government’s imposed target of 577 houses per annum.

Of course not every piece of Green Belt is sacred and everyone must have a decent home, but we do have to be intelligent how we achieve this essential goal. After a few years development at the pace suggested in the BBC report, much of the rest of the green space in the Borough would have been built over. This would leave Epsom Common increasingly isolated, with many animals and plants unable to survive, having lost the essential freedom to move to and from adjacent land that previously also had space for nature. To quote a 2011 government White Paper: “We should be thinking not of isolated spots of green on a map of England but of a thriving green network linking wildlife sites with farmland, forestry and urban parks and gardens...” I should also note that an independent report by W.S. Atkins for the Borough Council in 2017 found that “Metropolitan Green Belt land within Epsom and Ewell is, on the whole, highly performing” and “continues to play a vital role in preventing urban sprawl”.

As well as damaging biodiversity, which government is legally obliged to improve, large scale development of green land (whether “Belt” or not) will also exacerbate the catastrophes of climate change and reduced food and water security that threaten both human society and much of life on the planet. The beneficial effect of open space to the physical and mental well-being of local (and often not so local) people would also be reduced. The value of the Common to many became particularly clear during the pandemic when it was exceptionally busy. Although some areas of Green Belt do not have good public access, an issue that could – with political will – be tackled, the more London is allowed to sprawl, the harder it will become for its population to visit and benefit from extensive natural spaces.

David King, Chair – Epsom Common Association

8th September 2022