## Paintball plans to entertain Epsom's youth

Plans for a new paintball and laser tag centre have been put forward in a former farm building. The new play shooting centre could be launched at The Paddock on Langley Vale Road, Epsom.

The proposed play shooting range already has a name-dubbed 'PandaWarz'-and will offer Lasertag to the under 16's and Tactical Paintball to those 16 and over.

Developers claimed Epsom is a "thriving town with much to offer" but is "limited in leisure". Planning documents sent to the council read there are "minimal opportunities for young children and young adults" particularly when it comes to their "special annual celebrations", or birthdays.

Details of the scheme include changing the existing agricultural building into an indoor children's Lastertag arena. Two containers could also be installed, making closed arenas, along with a temporary roof covering for the indoor Tactical Paintball.

Planning documents said that "PandaWarz's objective is to modernise the game" by using military skills and techniques from close range to build up obstacles.

The equipment will be modernised and operating with magazines, according to the applicant. Planning documents read: "The games are tactical, not simply spraying paintballs and hoping to hit."

The two purpose play area will be made up of shipping containers, internal rooms, mazes and obstacles. Fine mesh is proposed to cover the arenas so no paintballs can be fired beyond the confines of the play area. A gantry has been designed over and around the arena with a temporary roof covering to protect both spectator and player from any weather.

Planning details read: "Twenty minutes running around a dark room filled with obstacles and UV reactive artwork shooting each other in teams. A successful way of both entertaining [children] and wearing them out!"

Noise will be reduced by containing the games within the existing building and as well as using the constructed containers and temporary roofing, the application states.

Car parking for up to 15 vehicles is included, with additional parking directed to the open, free roadside parking a short walk away on the Downs.

Locals can comment on the proposals until April 30 on the council's website. Epsom and Ewell Borough Council will decide the future of The Paddock site at a later date.

Proposed site layout. Epsom and Ewell planning documents.

# On the Buses - Surrey going Green

Following a successful bid for funding to the Department for Transport, Surrey County Council has been awarded an additional £1.7m for 12 new zero emission buses. This follows a previous allocation in 2024, taking Surrey's total provision to over £5 million and 31 new buses in total.

Along with the 34 hydrogen buses already operating across the county, and a further 23 coming into service this Summer, this will see 88 zero emission buses operating on Surrey's roads.

The new fully accessible vehicles use green hydrogen and have a range of up to 600 miles. They offer a smooth, quiet ride with free Wi-Fi, charging points and social seating on board.

Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Growth at Surrey County Council said, "I'm delighted that Surrey will benefit from this extra funding which will help us to build upon our own significant investment in providing cleaner buses.

"Introducing these buses to our fleet is expected to deliver an estimated carbon saving of c112,000 tonnes over the life of the buses, which is great news for Surrey residents and for everyone else travelling in and out of our county.

"We've also invested £6.3m in more ultra-low and zero emission community transport minibuses, £9m in bus priority measures to ensure Surrey buses turn up on time, and £1.4m in improving information for passengers at bus stops.

"Our Surrey LINK card gives young people half-price bus travel and we've expanded our on-demand Surrey Connect bus services to cover areas where there are limited fixed bus routes, giving more options to travel by bus for all residents right across Surrey, particularly in our rural areas."

**Richard Telling, Managing Director of Falcon Buses said**, "Through the partnership working with Surrey County Council (SCC), who have been awarded Department for Transport (DfT) ZEBRA 2 funding, we are now enhancing our roll out of zero Emission buses, introducing 21 electric buses into our fleet.

"Financial investment from Falcon Buses, together with SCC and DfT has enabled us to place orders with Alexander Dennis for the supply of their brand new Enviro 200 EV next generation bus and we will see electric buses operating on a number of our services from Spring 2026. Exciting times are ahead for Falcon operating new technology with electric buses, and we look forward to our customers coming on the journey with us."

**Simon Rowland, CEO of White Bus said**, "We are incredibly excited about our new electric vehicle fleet coming later this year. Not only is White Bus providing greener, cleaner vehicles, but also giving our passengers the additional comfort of quieter vehicles. Our 446 and 555 will be the first routes to use the new Yutong E10s, and they will be branded in the green Flightline livery as part of other service improvements in partnership with Surrey County Council and Heathrow. Our thanks to DfT and Surrey County Council for their support in helping White Bus make the transition to a greener future."

Related report:

£12 million bus boost for Surrey

Image: 465 Enviro Bus in Dorking High St: Arriva436 Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license

## **QR Code Scams Surge in Surrey**

#### A 667% Rise Since 2019 as Criminals Target Public Spaces.

QR code-related scams in Surrey have surged by more than sixfold since 2019, new figures reveal — mirroring a dramatic national increase that experts say is the work of organised crime groups exploiting new technology to defraud the public.

According to Action Fraud data analysed by the BBC Shared Data Unit, the number of scams linked to QR codes in the Surrey Police area rose from just **three in 2019** to **23 in 2024**. In total, **54 reports** have been recorded over the five-year period.

The technique, known as *quishing*, typically involves fraudsters placing fake QR codes — often stickers — over legitimate ones on parking meters, menus, or public signage. Unsuspecting users are redirected to malicious websites where personal data and payment details can be harvested.

Nationally, nearly **3,000 QR scams** were reported between 2019 and 2024, with **1,386 cases reported in 2024 alone** — up from **100** in 2019. In Surrey, the jump from **3 cases in 2021 to 11 in 2022** and **23 in 2024** marks a particularly sharp local escalation.

### "Life savings lost"

Katherine Hart of the Chartered Trading Standards Institute warned the problem is vastly underreported. "People might only lose £2.99 initially and not realise they've passed their data to a criminal organisation," she said. "But days or weeks later, they receive a call from someone pretending to be their bank or the police. These criminals already have your personal details and use them to wipe out your bank account."

Hart described quishing as a "huge challenge" for global enforcement, with many scams tied to serious and organised crime. "We've seen huge amounts of money lost this way. People have seen their life savings gone — and that money is going to finance criminals," she added.

### Surrey councils and police urged to act

Local councils across the UK — including nearby Guildford — have issued public warnings, and experts are urging Surrey authorities to follow suit, especially given the rising number of incidents. The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) warned that QR codes in open spaces, such as car parks and train stations, pose a particular risk.

A spokesperson for the NCSC said: "When directed to a website by a QR code, take care to ensure it is genuine, and be cautious if you're asked to provide excessive personal information."

Detective Superintendent Gary Miles, head of the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau, urged the public to "stop and check" before scanning QR codes. "If the QR code looks tampered with or takes you to a site that doesn't feel right, don't share personal or financial information. Leave the website immediately," he said.

#### Victims speak out

Cases nationwide have involved parking scams, fake menus, and bogus delivery notices. In one instance, a woman in Thornaby lost £13,000 after scanning a code at a railway station. Other victims have lost hundreds of pounds at seafront car parks or fallen for codes found on leaflets and packaging.

National Car Parks (NCP) has responded by increasing daily checks of QR codes on its machines and is considering removing some payment-linked QR codes altogether to reduce risk.

#### What can you do?

- **Inspect OR codes** before scanning. Look for stickers, tampering, or signs of damage.
- **Be sceptical** of QR codes in public spaces or unfamiliar emails/texts.
- Avoid entering financial details after scanning a QR code unless you are certain the site is legitimate.
- Report suspicious activity to your bank and Action Fraud at actionfraud.police.uk or call 0300 123 2040.

Wayne Stevens, National Fraud Lead at Victim Support, reminded the public: "There is a lot of embarrassment and shame around cyber fraud, but it is vital victims don't blame themselves. If you've been impacted, contact Victim Support for free, confidential help."

As QR codes become a mainstay in everyday life, vigilance in Surrey and beyond is now essential. What was once a convenient shortcut can, in the wrong hands, become a costly trap.

## Surrey in race to capture carbon

A unique carbon capture technology developed by researchers at the University of Surrey could offer a more cost-effective way to remove carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) from the air and turn it into clean, synthetic fuel.

A study published in Applied Energy demonstrated that the Dual-Function Material (DFM) process – which combines carbon capture and conversion – could match or outperform more established industry methods. Under optimal conditions, it was shown to remove carbon at a cost of US\$740 per tonne, with the potential to drop below \$400 as materials improve.

Dr Michael Short, Associate Professor of Process Systems Engineering at the University of Surrey and lead author of the study, said:

"For the first time, we've been able to demonstrate it can be financially competitive to use DFMs for direct air capture (DAC) – all the while creating clean fuel like methane in the process.

"Using green hydrogen from renewable electricity and carbon from the atmosphere, our system can help to replace fossil feedstocks in sectors like steel manufacturing. If a steel mill uses this fuel, it could effectively have zero net emissions – offering a sustainable path to decarbonise industries that are otherwise hard to electrify."

Using superstructure optimisation – an advanced modelling technique – the team tested a wide range of configurations to identify the most cost-effective design for capturing 10,000 tonnes of  $CO_2$  per year – a scale comparable to other commercial systems.

With further improvements in material performance and catalyst cost, researchers suggest it could hold promise for large-scale deployment and can be integrated with existing industry infrastructure.

Dr Melis Duyar, Associate Professor in Chemical and Process Engineering at the University of Surrey, said:

"Recycling carbon in this way is a powerful idea, with potential to create many new value chains and enable energy independence

by embedding renewable energy into the production of conventional fuels and chemicals."

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that limiting global warming to  $1.5^{\circ}$ C will require not only cutting emissions but also removing billions of tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere this century.

In the lead up to Net Zero target deadlines, the technology offers a promising and economically viable route to help achieve that goal – while helping us to reduce overreliance on fossil fuels.

# Thames Water hopes £37m investment will end record sewer flooding

Thames Water has said it will spend £37m upgrading its Mole Valley network raising hopes it could spell the end of homes, gardens and rivers being flooded with sewage waste.

The private utility company came in for heavy criticism for the "damage it has inflicted" despite huge profits and shareholder payouts while its pipe network falls into disrepair during the latest scrutiny committee meeting at Mole Valley District Council.

However, it hopes investment projects in Dorking, Earslwood, and Horley will increase its ability to manage storm flows, treat more waste water, and prevent "effluent" flooding rivers and waterways.

The investment was welcomed as a step in the right direction but many at the meeting aired their disappointment with the firm for letting the situation get this bad.

Last year, Thames Water spent 13,101 hours pumping sewage into the River Mole and its tributaries according to new government data seen by the MP – an increase of 10.9 per cent despite there being less rain.

Speaking after the meeting, the Dorking and Horley MP, Chris Coghlan, described the record as "simply unacceptable" but has since had assurances from Thames Water and environmental regulators that "long overdue" upgrades were on the way

He said: "For years, the entire water industry has been poorly managed and woefully under-regulated.

"To expect hard-pressed customers to now pick up the tab for 35 years of under-investment by Thames Water, while the company continues to flood my constituents' homes and gardens with disgusting sewage is shocking.

"The Government and Ofwat have a duty to hold the water companies to account", he said, adding that the regulator needed to be replaced with a body that would "will make Thames water pay up for the damage it has inflicted."

In Dorking, Thames Water is putting £16m into new storm tanks to treat incoming sewage and reduce dumping of untreated waste.

At its Earlswood site, just outside Mole Valley, it will increase treatment volumes from 340 to 440 litres per second, helping to prevent effluent going into the river – and what does will be of a higher quality.

Horley will benefit from upgrades to improve performance in wet weather.

Councillor Stephen Cooksey, leader of Mole Valley District Council told the meeting: "The question that flows through my mind is, although you can't answer it tonight, is how as a responsible company you've allowed your infrastructure to get into such a dreadful condition?"

Thames Water's Alice Keeping described the £37m as "a substantial amount of money that we are going to invest going forward".

A Thames Water spokesperson said: "In 2024 parts of our region experienced some of the wettest months in 250 years. This overwhelmed our sewer network which resulted in diluted wastewater being released into rivers. While all storm discharges are unacceptable, the sewage systems were designed in this way to prevent sewage backing up into people's homes.

"Over the next five years we will deliver a record amount of investment across our network.

"We continue to execute our plans to upgrade over 250 of our storm overflows to reduce the number of storm discharges including at our sites in Crawley and Horley.

Esher Mill Road overflow sewage site (image Chris Caulfield)

## **New Surrey police division HQ plans**

Plans for a new Surrey Police headquarters have been put forward for its eastern division in Leatherhead.

The force said it hopes to develop a "bespoke and permanent" HQ on the former Electrical Research Association and Cobham Industries site. An application has also been put forward to develop an area of the Cleeve Road site into affordable housing.

After discovering Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in Reigate Police Station in September 2023, the division temporarily moved to the old Surrey Fire & Rescue Services HQ at Wray Park in Reigate.

Deputy Chief Constable Nev Kemp said the planning application is a "key step in our journey" to building a permanent location for police operations in East Surrey. He said the force has been focusing on finding a site that will help staff and officers to investigate and prevent crime and keep people safe.

Surrey Police bought the former Electrical Research Association (ERA) and Cobham Industries site on Cleeve Road in 2018 for nearly £20.5m, aiming to develop a new, purpose-built headquarters from the ground up. But by 2021 the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Surrey Police Chief Officer team decided to scrap the idea and look to Mount Browne, in Guildford, and redevelop the existing HQ.

The Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) revealed earlier this year that Surrey Police spent nearly £3 million, on top of the £20.5m used to buy the Leatherhead site, on failed plans to move its headquarters as part of disastrous money-saving efforts. Much of the money used was spent on building designs and surveys for the project which the Police and Crime Commissioner said was directly transferable to the Mount Browne redevelopment project.

The force said it had held public meetings with local residents, businesses, councillors, and community group representatives to share initial plans and gather feedback. The force is also working closely with key stakeholders in the community, including Mole Valley District Council.

Related report:

Surrey police to move to Epsom and Ewell constituency

Cleeve Road premises bought by Surrey Police. Google Street View

# **New priorities for Surrey Police?**

Going "back to basics" is the key part of Surrey Police's priorities under new plans announced by the county's Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC).

Surrey's new Police and Crime plan launched on April 4 includes ambitions to address the issues affecting people's daily lives as well as focus on safeguarding vulnerable children and adults. Seeking to strengthen community trust, the plan details that every neighbourhood will have a dedicated police officer or PCSO with clear contact details.

PCC Lisa Townsend said the new approach will "concentrate on what our policing teams do best - fighting crime in our local communities, getting tough on offenders and protecting people."

The plan, which runs to 2028, names violence against women and girls, the "growing scourge of shoplifting" along with rural offences and antisocial behaviour as priorities to deal with regionally. Boosting police morale and creating a supporting workplace culture is also listed as a prime concern to retaining officers in Surrey.

"I want Surrey Police to focus on tackling those crimes that blight our local communities, while also taking persistent offenders off our streets," Ms Townsend said. "I promised that we would return to a 'back to basics' approach to policing, and this pledge forms the cornerstone of my Police and Crime Plan."

The "back to basics" approach focuses on five crucial elements:

 Getting the fundamentals right - preventing crime, bringing offenders to justice swiftly, and tackling the issues that concern residents most.

- Protecting vulnerable people in Surrey from children and young people, to elderly residents, rural communities and those in a mental health crisis
- Preventing violence against women and girls helping women and girls in Surrey both be safe and feel safe whether in public or private
- Strengthening safe and resilient communities where people feel listened to, feel a visible police presence and confident issues will be resolved
- Fostering integrity, accountability and wellbeing in policing -creating a transparent and supportive workplace culture, aiming to improve officer wellbeing and reduce staff turnover

Safer roads have been left out as a priority from this police and crime plan, much to the dismay of Surrey county councillors at a meeting earlier this year. They slammed the plan for having a lack of objective targets for many of the measures.

However, the new plan does include addressing gaps in road safety, finding local initiatives and to support Surrey County Council's vision to reduce and eliminate deaths and serious injuries on the road.

Early intervention efforts are also set to include tackling knife related-crime, working with schools and community groups to educate young people about the nature and consequences of serious crimes.

Efforts to tackle violence against women and girls include building public confidence in the police's ability to investigate VAWG, but it does not specifically outline how. Plans also detail ensuring survivor voices and the needs of families of perpetrators are heard to understand experiences and challenges.

The plan also includes measures such as using data and intelligence to understand crime trends and find priority areas to keep neighbourhoods safe. Community and stakeholder collaboration will play a more active and important role over the next five years and the PCC hopes to create lasting solutions.

Tim De Meyer, the county's Chief Police Constable said: "There is much that Surrey Police and the PCC can do with our partners to build safe and resilient communities – especially in respect of our fight against pernicious crimes such as shoplifting.

"My meetings with the public have shown that theft, anti-social behaviour and drug abuse trouble people a great deal. I believe that this Plan, allied with that of the Force, will help us redouble our efforts to ensure that Surrey Police applies all its neighbourhood policing experience to combat these issues."

Local engagement has formed much of the basis of the new priorities with residents, community groups, business leaders and victims' services consulted over the last autumn and winter.

# **News and events from Surrey History Centre**

### **Surrey Photographers: A Day of Talks**

Join the **Surrey Local History Committee** for a fascinating day of illustrated talks on the history of photography in Surrey. Experts will explore a variety of themes:

- Keith Harding: Victorian Dorking in photographs by Walter Rose & John Chaplin
- Nigel Balchin: Picture postcards and local history
- Jane Lewis and Jill Hyams (Surrey History Centre): Portrait of a Surrey town between the wars: the photographic archive of Sidney Francis
- Julian Pooley (Surrey History Centre): Patient Portraits from Surrey Hospitals, 1850-1980
- Chris Shepheard: Farnham's war caught by the camera? Photographs that avoided the censor

There will also be a display of Surrey photographs from the archive for attendees to explore.

#### **Event Details**

Location: Surrey History Centre, 130 Goldsworth Road, Woking GU21 6ND

Date and Time: Saturday 26 April, 9.55am to 4.15pm

**Tickets:** £18 if booked online via the Surrey Archaeological Society website. £20 on the day (cash only).



### **VE Day 80 Display**

Visit our foyer display from early May to commemorate the **80th anniversary of VE Day**. Featuring photographs, records, and stories from Surrey's VE Day celebrations in **1945**, **1995**, **2005**, **2015**, and **2020**, the display highlights personal memories from those who experienced the historic day.

You can also discover records to help trace family members who served in WWII.

All the latest news from the Surrey History Centre HERE

# Surrey Uni leads microbe recyling of lithium batteries

A microbial electrochemical technology capable of recovering 90-95% of lithium from spent lithium-ion batteries has been developed by scientists at the University of Surrey.

The breakthrough offers a more sustainable and cost-effective alternative to conventional recovery methods and could be expanded to reclaim other valuable battery metals, like cobalt.

Funded by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), the BioElectrochemical LIthium rEcoVEry (BELIEVE) project set out to tackle one of the biggest challenges in lithium-ion battery recycling – reducing the environmental and economic costs.

Professor Claudio Avignone Rossa, Professor of Systems Microbiology at the University of Surrey and principal investigator on the project, said:

"Lithium-ion batteries power so much of our modern technology, from phones to electric vehicles, but current recycling processes remain energy-intensive, costly and inefficient. Our goal was to develop a bioelectrochemical system (BES) that uses microbial electrochemical technology to extract high-purity lithium from used batteries – which is currently very difficult to do."

Traditional methods recover small amounts of lithium, sometimes as little as 5%, while more advanced techniques achieve higher yields but rely on corrosive chemicals.

Professor Jhuma Sadhukhan, Professor of Engineering and Sustainability at the University of Surrey and co-lead on the project said:

"This project is timely due to stringent legislation for material security, particularly tech-metals like lithium. With this respect, extraction-precipitation, electrosynthesis and crystallisation have been tried to recover lithium from brines; however, the methods have posed specific challenges, including low recovery of lithium compounds.

"Biotechnology-based biorefining is needed to close the LIB loop and thereby improve product grades and recovery rates, process robustness, social justice, economic returns, health, safety, environment and legislation. In this research, we optimised a biological system to recover high purity lithium from industrial black mass, a used lithium-ion battery material after thermal and mechanical processing, separating aluminium and iron."

Dr Siddharth Gadkari, Lecturer in Chemical Engineering at the University of Surrey and co-lead on the project, said:

"By harnessing specially selected microorganisms to transfer electrons and extract lithium, we have developed a cleaner, more sustainable approach that dramatically reduces reliance on harmful chemicals.

"Our next steps will focus on proposals to expand the technology to recover and separate all valuable metals from batteries, including high-value cobalt, nickel and manganese. While challenging, this is a crucial step toward establishing a truly circular battery economy."

Developing a scalable process that efficiently recovers lithium, cobalt and other valuable metals will not only reduce waste but also lessen dependence on environmentally damaging mining practices.

It also closely aligns with EU Green Deal 2020 regulations, which aim for a 65% recycling efficiency for lithium-ion batteries and a 70% material recovery rate for lithium by 2030. Similar regulations are anticipated in the UK, underscoring the significance of the BELIEVE project's contributions to sustainable technology and resource management.

The team now plans to put forward new proposes to explore how they can recover all metals from lithium-ion batteries.

# Notice regarding RAWLINSON & HUNTER LIFE & ASSURANCE PENSION FUND

#### NOTICE UNDER SECTION 27 TRUSTEE ACT 1925

To members and others claiming a right to benefits under the Rawlinson & Hunter Life & Assurance Pension Fund (the Scheme).

Notice is hereby given pursuant to Section 27 of the Trustee Act 1925 that the Trustees of the Scheme have commenced the process of winding-up the Scheme (commenced wind up on 1 April 2025.

The Trustees wish to trace anyone, including former employees (whether full-time or part-time) of Rawlinson & Hunter LLP ("the Firm") or their spouse or dependant who believe that they have a claim against the Scheme or an entitlement or interest in the Scheme and have not heard from the Trustees recently.

If you think that you have a claim, entitlement or interest in the Scheme please write with full details of your claim, interest or entitlement including your full name, address, National Insurance Number, date of birth, dates of employment with either of the Companies and any relevant papers to:

The Trustees of the Rawlinson & Hunter Life & Assurance Pension Fund

c/o Claire Petzer

Cartwright Benefit Consultants Limited

Marlborough House

Victoria Road South Chelmsford, Essex CM1 1LN

Email: claire.petzer@cartwright.co.uk

All claims must be made by 1 June 2025 so they may be considered by the Trustees before the Scheme is wound up.

After that date, the Trustees will commence the distribution of the Scheme's assets process, as part of the winding-up of the Scheme, to provide benefits for its members and beneficiaries, having regard only to the claims, entitlements and interests of which they have prior notice. The Trustees will not be liable to or in respect of any person whose claim, entitlement or interest have not been notified.

Any individuals who have already been contacted by the Trustees about the matters above should not respond to this notice as the Trustees already have details of their claims and entitlements.

For and on behalf of the Trustees of the Rawlinson & Hunter Life & Assurance Pension Fund 1 April 2025

# Surrey Uni Study: long Covid patients proving their illness is real challenges

People living with Long Covid often feel dismissed, disbelieved and unsupported by their healthcare providers, according to a new study from the University of Surrey.

The study, which was published in the Journal of Health Psychology, looked at how patients with Long Covid experience their illness. The study found that many patients feel they have to prove their illness is physical to be taken seriously and, as a result, often reject psychological support, fearing it implies their symptoms are "all in the mind".

Professor Jane Ogden, co-author of the study from the University of Surrey, said:

"We found that the problem isn't people with Long Covid refusing help – it's about the deep need for people to be believed. When a patient feels dismissed, offering psychological support instead of medical care can be misconstrued as insulting."

According to the Office for National Statistics, there are 1.9 million people who live with Long Covid in the UK. Long Covid symptoms include fatigue, difficulty concentrating, muscle aches and shortness of breath, which persist for many weeks, sometimes months, after the initial Covid-19 infection.

Surrey's study involved in-depth interviews with 14 people in the UK between the ages of 27 to 63 who had experienced Long Covid symptoms for more than four weeks. The group included 12 women and 2 men.

Saara Petker, clinical psychologist, co-author of the study and former PhD student at the University of Surrey, said:

"We found that our participants are living a life of constant uncertainty, struggling to find treatment. People told us that they didn't feel listened to, some said they'd lost trust in doctors, their social circles and even their own bodies because of the whole experience.

"Medical advice is crucial - but psychological support must be offered with care. If it's seen as replacing medical help, it can feel dismissive."

Image: License details Creator: Jose Luis Navarro. Copyright: CC BY-SA 4.0

## Godstone "Sink-hole" residents to return

After a long wait, good news may finally be coming to some who were forced to evacuate after a massive sinkhole opened up in a Surrey town. Families living on the impacted street in Godstone have been told they may be allowed to return home this weekend.

The huge hole appeared on Godstone High Street on February 17 and was quickly declared a major incident due to its seriousness and complexity. Now scaled down to a 'significant incident' investigations are still ongoing as to what the cause is and how to solve it.

"We have some really good news for residents," said Lloyd Allen, Infrastructure Team Manager for Surrey County Council. "We're expecting them to return this weekend."

Wearing a hi-vis jacket and standing in front of part of the enormous hole, Mr Allen said families on Godstone high street can once again sleep in their own beds. He warned that the news is subject to a couple of issues the team is investigating and and depends on them getting the all-clear that water quality is up to standard.

Five weeks after the high street was almost swallowed up by the sinkhole, highway officials still do not know what caused the major incident. "The plan for the future is to carry on doing what we are doing," said Mr Allen with no clear indication of when the saga might end. The infrastructure manager said he and the team, as well as specially hired geo technical engineers are analysing the investigation results and seeing if there is a tunnel network.

In a new video released by the county council, the highways team gave a latest update on Godstone with some crucial insights. Surveys have revealed a lot of anomalies in the area which could be deep sewers, series of tunnels or even potentially soak away from properties. Further investigations are still needed to pin down exactly what they are, the team said.

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Afterwards, the team will plot a series of bore holes on the site that they can carry out to look under the surface. If more tunnels or voids are found, they can put cameras down and do some more testing. "But that work might take several months longer," Mr Allen said.

Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth at Surrey County Council, said: "Highways Officers have used foam concrete to temporarily fill the hole to stabilise the area and to ensure it doesn't get any bigger."

"Specialist surveys are continuing in areas which were previously inaccessible, to determine the underlying cause of the collapse and how best to permanently repair the area so it doesn't reoccur."

"Due to the unprecedented nature of this incident, we expect the full-scale repair of the site to take several more months although we expect residents will be able to return to their homes whilst works are carried out, once it is safe to do so. We thank them for their ongoing patience as we deal with this complex incident."

#### Related report:

Surrey sink-hole major incident

Image: Lloyd Allen, Infrastructure Team Manager for Surrey County Council, on Godstone high street. (Credit: Surrey County Council).