



## East Street development not off the Hook

On Tuesday, 16th of July, the Environment Committee at Epsom and Ewell Council sat down to discuss the possibility that there might be considerable environmental issues at the Hook Road Multi-Story Car Park.

It was decided in principle to release the Hook Road Car Park to facilitate wider redevelopment of the gas holder site. Hesitation is largely due to the lack of information on the severity of the level of contamination in the area.

In the report provided by council officer Mark Shepard, it was stressed that the issues of contamination are based on what is underneath the car park, that there is no present risk to people's health, and it is safe to use for its intended purpose.

The Hook Road Car Park sits on top of a water aquifer and operates directly adjacent to a former gas works that has been in operation since circa 1870 (which can be seen on the historical land use map). Given the lack of environmental research into the soil and water of the gas holder site, it's not known to what extent the Hook Road Car Park is dealing with a ticking time bomb of contaminants. Gas sites are generally considered some of the most contaminated sites across the United Kingdom, especially ones that have been in operation from the 19th to 20th century, when there were next to no regulations for the disposal of industrial waste.

The byproducts of coal gasification include tar and pitch, which contain toxic and potentially carcinogenic polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). Ammonia, another byproduct, can contaminate soil and groundwater. Other harmful substances, such as toxic phenolic compounds, spent oxides, and sulphur compounds, also pose contamination risks to soil and water. Additionally, the process involves toxic chemicals that contribute to heavy metal pollution, including lead, arsenic, mercury, and chromium. These byproducts pose significant environmental and health risks due to their persistence and toxicity. As for the gas holder site at Hook Road, council officer Mark Shepard stated in the committee meeting that "we don't yet know the level of contamination."

There is the additional factor of Thames Water's Epsom Water Works, located a short distance away. The East Street drinking water boreholes are in close proximity (less than 200m) to the former gas works site. This means that if there are any attempts for a clean-up at the former gas works site, it would necessitate thorough monitoring by the Environment Agency on account of its potential risk for contamination. In the meantime, the council's decision remains provisional as they await more detailed environmental assessments to determine the appropriate course of action.

Image: Hook Road Car Park and gasworks - Google

---

## Paving the way to better regulation?

The Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has voted to dispense its current pavement licence policy, rather than it being updated to copy the .GOV guidance. This change comes as part of a broader review conducted during an Environment Committee Meeting held on July 16th. Instead, Officers of the council will continue to determine applications under delegated authority, with the Council's website linking to the .GOV guidance.

[This post corrects an earlier post that incorrectly inferred that applications would no longer be processed by EEBC.]

The original pavement licence policy, introduced under the Government's Business and Planning Act of 2020, was a temporary measure designed to assist the hospitality sector amid the economic turmoil caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. It allowed cafes and similar businesses to place removable tables and chairs on adjacent council-owned highways for a capped fee of £100, a significant reduction compared to the more cumbersome procedures under the 1980's Highways Act.

As part of the 2024 Levelling Up agenda, this temporary policy was transformed into a permanent measure. However, the cost cap was raised, allowing councils to charge up to £500 for new licences and £350 for renewals. This shift aimed to provide local authorities with greater financial flexibility.

The decision has sparked a range of reactions. Some view the licence fee as an additional financial burden on small, independent cafes striving to thrive in a challenging economic environment. However, proponents argue that the policy plays a crucial role in ensuring pedestrian safety and accessibility, preventing removable furniture from obstructing pathways and ensuring compliance with accessibility standards.

During the committee meeting, concerns over the cost of the licence fees were voiced. Councillor Robert Leach criticised the high fees, particularly the notion of paying £555 to process a form and issue a licence, suggesting it seemed "ridiculous" and



speculating that the figure was derived using a “different unit of currency.” However, it was clarified that the actual cost of processing a new application exceeded the fees charged, necessitating the higher rate to break even, though this remains capped by the government.

However, doubts were also raised regarding the renewal fee of £350, with some committee members questioning the justification for this amount, given that most of the necessary work is completed during the initial application process

Image: Cafe tables outside Zig Zag Epsom High Street - Google

---

## Green Flag Awards Honour Epsom and Ashted Commons

Local communities are celebrating as both Epsom Common and Ashted Common have been awarded the prestigious Green Flag Award, recognizing them as two of the best-managed green spaces in the UK. This esteemed award, administered by the environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy, sets the benchmark for the management of recreational outdoor spaces across the UK and internationally.

Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve (LNR) has achieved this accolade for the 18th consecutive year, underscoring its continued excellence in environmental stewardship. The site, managed by **Epsom & Ewell Borough Council**, is a haven for biodiversity, featuring oak woods, pasture woodlands, and wetlands that are home to rare species like cotton spotted orchids and purple emperor butterflies. It is also designated as a Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI) due to its significance as a breeding bird habitat.

Councillor **Liz Frost**, (RA Woodcote and Langley) Chair of the Environment Committee, expressed pride in the achievement, attributing the success to the hard work of volunteers and partners, including the Epsom Common Association, the Lower Mole Partnership, and Natural England. “This award is a testament to the dedication of our volunteers and staff who work tirelessly to maintain this beautiful and biodiverse space,” she said.

In Ashted, the Ashted Common has also been honored with the Green Flag Award, further enhanced by receiving Green Heritage Site Accreditation. This recognition highlights the site’s exceptional conservation efforts and its status as a National Nature Reserve since 1995. Managed by the **City of London Corporation**, Ashted Common is renowned for its ancient oak pollards and diverse habitats, including those supporting rare invertebrates and breeding birds.

**Ben Murphy**, Chairman of the City Corporation’s Epping Forest and Commons Committee, noted the significance of the award, stating, “These awards demonstrate the effectiveness of our management plans in preserving open spaces like Ashted Common for future generations. It also reflects the positive impact of the City of London Corporation’s investments in local communities.”

Both sites were evaluated on several criteria, including accessibility, safety, cleanliness, community engagement, and efforts to combat climate change. The awards celebrate the commitment of the staff and volunteers who ensure these spaces remain welcoming and well-maintained for the public. The Green Flag Award scheme highlights the importance of well-managed green spaces in fostering community well-being and promoting sustainable living.

The achievements of Epsom and Ashted Commons underscore the value of preserving natural habitats and providing safe, accessible green spaces for all. As community members and nature enthusiasts enjoy these areas, the Green Flag Award serves as a reminder of the critical role that well-maintained parks and reserves play in our social and environmental health.

Image: Great Pasture at Epsom Common. EEBC

---

## Surrey’s LibDem MP majority take on Thames Water

Buoyed by having the majority of Surrey County’s 11 Parliamentary Constituencies returning Liberal Democrat Party Members of Parliament, the six new law-makers, including **Epsom and Ewell’s Helen Maguire** MP, have joined forces to tackle **Thames Water’s** shortcomings. A spokesman said “This is all part of the campaign by the Liberal Democrat Party to get our streams, rivers and coastline, cleaned up and to stop the often illegal dumping of sewage into our water.”



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Chris Weston  
Chief Executive  
Thames Water  
Cavendish Place  
14 Cavendish Street  
London  
W1G 9NU

16<sup>th</sup> July 2024

Dear Chris

We are writing to request an urgent meeting.

Our residents have expressed serious concerns regarding the levels of pollution in local rivers, particularly, due to sewage overflow and issues with water supply consistency all at a time when their water bills are continuing to rise. We share these concerns.

Specifically we would like to discuss:

1. Existing and future plans to improve water infrastructure across Surrey.
2. Monitoring of water quality at all overflow outlets across Surrey.
3. Existing and future plans to reduce and end sewage overflow into local rivers including time frames.
4. Funding of works and how you are ensuring that customers (domestic and business) are not providing a disproportionate amount of that funding.
5. How you are working with local authorities to ensure adequate water infrastructure as our population continues to grow.

We would like to meet in Parliament at the earliest date possible for us all.

Regards

**Zoe Franklin**  
**Guildford**

**Chris Coghlan**  
**Dorking & Horley**

**Will Forster**  
**Woking**

**Monica Harding**  
**Esher & Walton**

**Helen Maguire**  
**Epsom & Ewell**

**Al Pinkerton**  
**Surrey Heath**



## Poor road conditions a real test for learners

A driving instructor said he's on a "one man crusade" to fix the roads around Redhill Aerodrome Driving Test Centre. Martin Pitchley, 57, said he was "shocked" at the road conditions in Redhill, Surrey.

Unreadable road markings, overgrown hedges blocking speed signs and poor road conditions were some of the issues raised by the driving instructor.

"It's not very fair for students taking their test with all these problems with the road which is caused by poor road management by the [county] council," Martin said.

Emailing Surrey County Council (SCC) on June 3, Martin said nothing has been done to fix the issue.

A SCC highways maintenance officer said the vegetation covering road signs will be removed as part of the rural cut back of Earlswood and Reigate South on July 19. Fixing chevrons and replacing speed signs have also been requested on a list of works to be done.

Students who are just about to take their driving test come out of the centre not knowing what the speed limit is on that road, according to Martin. He claims a speed sign had been knocked over and lying down in a hedge for over six months.

Outside the driving test centre is the 40mph Kings Mill Lane, but Martin says there is no signage until a good few hundred yards up the road.

He said: "It's not fair to be giving students tuition and telling them there should be a speed limit here but there's not one, or it's knocked down.

"It's an unsafe speed for that road" he added, "It's got so many sharp bends, and big lorries yet students are expected to drive 40 mph up there.

"It's like a one-man crusade really. It's not really fair for the students going up to the test centre and taking their test with all these problems with the road."

Not only worried for his driving students, Martin said he was concerned for the general public including pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles.

"They are very severe and dangerous [roads] for any motorists, either for a learner or a full-time experienced driver," he said. "They have to drive up these roads and find there's a big steep dip in the roads or uneven roads that will make them steer awkwardly or crash their car."

According to Crash Map data, seven 'slight' accidents and two 'serious' incidents with vehicles have occurred on Kings Mill Lane between 2018-2022.

Martin said the county council has had enough time to fix the issues with the road and wants to see change. He said: "I just want this issue to be resolved so students can go up to their driving test, get a fair test, and members of the public are not going to get hit by a speeding car."

A SCC spokesperson said: "We appreciate the concerns raised and our Highways officers have been in communication with the individual to talk through the issues.

"The grass verges in question will be cut as part of our twice per annum rural cuts - information on where and when these take place are available on our website.

"Requests to replace speed signs in the area have been raised, however these need to be prioritised against other requests across the county and officers will review this as soon as they can."

Image: Driving instructor Martin Pitchley, Credit: Road Rules Driving.



## Tree falls on van in Ewell Village

On Saturday a tree close to the bus stop, opposite the entrance to Bourne Hall in Ewell Village fell across the road onto a passing red Mercedes van shattering its windscreen.

Surrey Police were quickly in attendance and a female police officer used a broom to sweep debris from the road to make the road as safe as possible for passing traffic.

After approximately 30 minutes, contractors arrived on site to remove the fallen tree. No one is believed to have been injured by the tree falling across the pavement.

A few months ago, a similar incident occurred when a large tree inside the entrance gates to Bourne Hall fell causing major damage to walling which has had to undergo major restoration.

Whilst Saturday's incident required Surrey Police's involvement, it is not believed that any of the other emergency services were called upon. Two trees falling within only a few metres of each other within such a short space of time in a busy village suggests that people were lucky to escape serious injury. Does more need to be done in the Borough to ensure trees overhanging public spaces do not pose a danger to anyone?

Ivy can choke a tree if allowed to climb it and dead branches will then fall to the ground below. Ivy can, however be easily dealt with by removing a section of it from the base of a tree so that the ivy above dies and loosens its grip on the tree.

The tree that fell across the pavement and road onto the top of a red Mercedes van on Saturday was visibly covered in ivy.

---

## Justice Stops Oil

A Surrey campaigner is "over the moon" after a landmark legal decision found that planning permission given to drill for oil at Horse Hill is unlawful.

The Supreme Court has found that the environmental impact of burning fossil fuels must be taken into account when granting planning permission.

Sarah Finch has been fighting Surrey County Council's decision to approve UK Oil and Gas's oil drilling site in Horse Hill, south of Reigate, for years - having first brought the case to the High Court in 2019.

On Thursday (June 20) the Supreme Court ruled, by three judges to two, that planning permission for fossil fuel production should not be granted unless the climate impact of the project - specifically downstream greenhouse gas emissions from the combustion of the fuel - have been fully assessed.

It means Surrey County Council's decision to grant planning permission for oil production was unlawful, her lawyers said at the end of the five-year battle.

Mrs Finch said: "I am absolutely over the moon to have won this important case. The Weald Action Group always believed it was wrong to allow oil production without assessing its full climate impacts, and the Supreme Court has shown we were right.

"This is a welcome step towards a safer, fairer future. The oil and gas companies may act like business-as-usual is still an option, but it will be very hard for planning authorities to permit new fossil fuel developments - in the Weald, the North Sea or anywhere else - when their true climate impact is clear for all to see.

"I thank the Weald Action Group, Friends of the Earth and everyone who has been part of our long journey through the courts. And I thank my lawyers for their commitment and hard work."

The Court found the council's reasons for refusing to assess the impact of burning the fuel was inadequate, her lawyers said, adding that it made the "common sense point" that combustion emissions were unavoidable and no other controls could be relied upon to reduce their impact.

They added that for similar reasons, the court also dismissed an argument that refining the oil somehow excused a failure to assess its impact at the earliest possible stage.

The decision means planning authorities in England and Wales must now assess the total climate impact of any proposed fossil fuel developments.



Stephen Sanderson UKOG's chief executive said: "The court's rather perplexing retrospective ruling, which is counter to all prior judgements, further underscores why the company's focus over the past few years has shifted away from oil and gas and firmly towards creating and delivering strategic underground hydrogen storage, an essential element of the UK's future low carbon energy system.

"These projects have the potential to create far greater sustainable value for the company and the UK than any small onshore field such as Horse Hill. They also have the added benefit of making a positive contribution to Net Zero.

"However, although Horse Hill is a small part of our portfolio, it still has a role to play in both the company's and UK's future transitional energy mix and thus we look forward to working closely with the local planning authority to rectify this retrospective change to EIA requirements."

The proposed expansion at Horse Hill Developments would have created five drilling cellars, four hydrocarbon production wells, four gas-to-power generators, a process, storage and tanker loading area, seven 1,300-barrel oil tanks, and a 37-metre drill rig to allow large-scale production of up to 3.3 million tonnes of crude oil for sale and use as transport fuel for 20 years, Mrs Finch's lawyers Leigh Day said.

UKCOG has said it plans to work closely with Surrey County Council to "promptly rectify the situation", either via an amendment to the original 2018 planning applications or a new retrospective planning submission, for which there is recent planning precedent within Surrey.

A spokesperson for Surrey County Council said: "The long awaited judgement of the Supreme Court in the case of R (on the application of Finch on behalf of the Weald Action Group) v Surrey County Council and others has found that the Environmental Impact Assessment undertaken for the planning application at Horse Hill to extract petroleum did not assess the effect on climate of the combustion of the oil to be produced.

"Council officers at the time of the planning application assessment believed that they acted in compliance with the law. The judgement makes it clear that local planning authorities must have regard to downstream emissions. The council was unsuccessful in defending its decision.

"The planning permission remains to be determined in due course."

Image: Redhill climate campaigner Sarah Finch at Horse Hill rally 5 Nov 2021. Credit Denise Laura Baker

---

## Epsom and Ewell braces for M25 closure traffic

Greater chaos has been avoided by the **Epsom and Ewell Times** correcting the **Highway Authority's** belief you could turn off the *northbound* A3 to go *south* at the Hook Junction. "Thank you for your email of 19 April 2024 in relation to the M25 junction 10/A3 Wisley interchange improvement project and specifically regarding the error in the M25 weekend closure diversion route published on our webpage. I'd like to apologise for this error and to also thank you for bringing it to our attention. This has now been corrected...." wrote Chris Davis, the Project Support Officer.

The Highways Authority has announced the closure of a section of the M25 motorway between junctions 9 (A243 Leatherhead) and 10 (A3 Wisley) from 9pm Friday, May 10, to 6am Monday, May 13, 2024. This closure is necessary for the installation of a new bridge.

Travellers are advised to avoid unnecessary journeys during this period, with the authority expressing gratitude to drivers who complied with similar closures in the past. A 19-mile diversion route has been planned, utilizing the A3 and the A240. Drivers are urged to follow this diversion and not rely on their SatNav systems.

For clockwise diversion, except for over-height vehicles, drivers are advised to leave the M25 at junction 8 onto the A217 (Reigate), then follow signs for London, Sutton, and Kingston on the A217 and A240. At the Esso roundabout, they should turn right onto the A24 (A240) towards Kingston, then left onto the A3 towards Portsmouth and Guildford. After 9½ miles, they can rejoin the M25 at junction 10.

Fortunately, the works at the Tolworth roundabout have all but completed for traffic. The northbound A240 has four lanes to filter at the junction approach.

For anticlockwise diversion, except for over-height vehicles, drivers should leave the M25 at junction 10 and join the A3 towards London. After 9½ miles, they should turn right onto the A240 towards Epsom and Reigate, then follow signs for Reigate and the M25 on the A240 and A217. After 3½ miles, they can rejoin the M25 at junction 8.



Drivers using the signed diversion route will not incur any Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) charges that may usually apply in London. However, over-height vehicles must follow a different diversion route to avoid a low bridge.

The Highways Authority also announced plans for three more weekend closures of the M25 this year, with no closures scheduled for June. The remaining closures will occur between July and the end of 2024, with dates to be announced following the May closure.

Plan your local Epsom and Ewell lunch dates with relatives accordingly...

Related reports:

M25 diversion cost me £12.50 ULEZ charge

Going South this weekend?

---

## Epsom's Earth health doctor checks GMC

**Epsom** residents led by Dr. **Kristine Damberg** converged Thursday 18th April on the General Medical Council (GMC) headquarters in Central London, decrying what they perceive as the regulator's lackluster response to the urgent health risks posed by climate change. The demonstration, organized by the **Planetary Health Coalition**, aimed to spotlight the pressing need for action on climate-related health issues affecting the community.



Dr Damberg protesting outside General Medical Council.

Dr. **Kristine Damberg**, Senior Simulation Practitioner and ESTH Sustainability Champion based at **Epsom Hospital**, voiced concerns about the immediate health impacts of climate change in the area. She lamented the rise in climate-related ailments among patients, including heat-related illnesses during the 2022 heatwave. Dr. Damberg emphasized the gravity of the situation, citing staggering statistics: "In the UK, 29-43,000 people die unnecessarily every year because of air pollution."

Adding: "Even in a relatively affluent area like Epsom we are seeing these impacts on patients presenting to GP surgeries and hospitals. In the 2022 heatwave there were 3000 excess deaths in the UK and on the wards at Epsom Hospital the temperature was consistently above 30 degrees. It was extremely challenging for staff to work and keep already vulnerable patients safe at these extreme temperatures."

She stressed the imperative for proactive measures, echoing The Lancet's designation of climate change as the most significant global health threat of the 21st century. "We need to act now to protect our community."



However, the GMC's recent efforts to incorporate sustainability into medical ethics guidelines have fallen short, according to Dr. **Ramina Yassaie**, a medic and ethicist. She criticized the optional nature of these additions, stating, "Practising climate-conscious medicine should be a clear duty of a doctor." She called for more robust guidance from the regulator to address the climate crisis head-on.

Epsom resident **Warren Bunce** echoed these sentiments, expressing disappointment in the GMC's perceived inaction. "The General Medical Council's silence on climate change is a betrayal of public health," he asserted. He called for stronger support for healthcare professionals in Epsom and beyond to confront the health consequences of a warming planet.

Protestors also raised concerns about the GMC's financial ties to fossil fuel industries. Dr. Christelle Blunden, a GP from Southampton, highlighted the disconnect between the GMC's ethical standards and its investments. "Doctors want their money out of ecologically destructive industries," Dr. Blunden stated. She emphasized the need for regulatory bodies to lead by example in addressing the climate crisis.

The protest occurred amidst growing legal restrictions on climate activism, with the recent conviction of Dr. Sarah Benn, a GP from Birmingham, serving as a stark reminder of the risks faced by healthcare workers advocating for environmental causes. Dr. Benn's case underscored broader concerns about the erosion of protest rights in the UK, prompting calls for greater protection for activists.

Related reports:

Climate Justice. A generation thing?

---

## Surrey Uni works on self-drive safety

As the UK prepares to introduce legislation that paves the way for self-driving vehicles later this year, scientists and experts led by the University of Surrey have launched a new network to ensure that this new technology is safely implemented.

The MASSDRIVE (Methods for Assurance of Self-Driving Vehicles) project has been funded by Innovate UK to help the country and industry develop robust methods of approving and certifying self-driving cars as they become available.

Professor Saber Fallah, co-investigator on the project and the Director of Connected Autonomous Vehicles Research Lab (CAV-Lab) at the University of Surrey, said:

"MASSDRIVE is all about bringing together industry, scientists, regulators, and the public to begin a conversation about how we can make self-driving cars safe for our roads.

"Our main goal is to make sure these vehicles are safe. We want to create strong connections between car makers, people who set the rules, academics, government groups and local communities. By having regular discussions, workshops and meetings, we're creating a space where everyone can share ideas and good ways of doing things, focusing particularly on making sure the AI in cars is trustworthy."

MASSDRIVE is a collaboration between the universities of Surrey, the West of England and Bristol.

If you want to know more about MASSDRIVE or if you are interested in shaping methods for the safety of self-driving vehicles, please contact Professor Saber Fallah.

Image: Creator: eschenzweig Common License 4.0