

Unstable world, religious discrimination, the Local Plan and trains

28 March 2024



We live, sadly, in an increasingly unstable world. The situation in Israel and Gaza has been and continues to be horrendous. There is a huge international diplomatic effort, involving the UK and other European countries, the US and countries across the Middle East, working to try to find a way of bringing both a short and long term resolution to the conflict. I really hope it succeeds.

At the same time the situation in Ukraine seems increasingly difficult, with Russia starting to make ground again in the conflict. In the short term at least there seems little prospect of peace - and my heart goes out to all of the Ukrainian families here in Epsom as they fear for their friends and relatives there.

But at Easter time I would also like to remember another group facing violence and persecution around the world. Every week I receive a newsletter from a member of one of our local Churches about what seems to be an endless stream of violence against Christian communities around the world. In Nigeria and Pakistan in particular attacks on Churches and Christian homes happen all too regularly, and in Nigeria thousands of Christians have been killed or kidnapped by extremists in recent years.

Christian communities are not alone. Ahmadiyya Muslims, a minority group in the Muslim faith, are another example of a group which faces persecution around the world.

In Epsom where different faiths live side by side, and where Church communities are strong and free to worship, we should never forget how fortunate we are compared to many in the world.

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As I enter my last few months in Parliament, so the debate over the local plan in Epsom is beginning to heat up again. I will no longer be MP by the time it is finalised, but as a local resident as well I have a very strong interest in making sure it is done in the right way.

At the same time we can be in no doubt that we need new homes to be built. We cannot continue with a situation where so many people are struggling to get into a home of their own.

That's why I have always argued that we need substantial smart development in this area, making best use of existing developed land, and mixing commercial and residential buildings in a way that is carefully and thoughtfully designed.

What this area does not need is more substantial family homes built on green belt land away from existing public transport. We need starter homes and affordable homes close to local centres.

I hope that even at this late stage the Residents Association councillors who control the Borough Council will change tack and look at the very real opportunities for smart brownfield development in the area. We can build substantial numbers of new homes without creating a new urban sprawl on the farm land to the East and West of Epsom.

With development, it is always much easier just to build on a green field. But the easy option is not always the best one. And in Epsom and Ewell it is certainly not.

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If you travel by train into London, you have probably seen the new trains for our network lined up in sidings at Clapham Junction. They have been there for some time. And not in service.

There are a variety of reasons why our line is suffering from worsening overcrowding at the moment - and I am pushing South Western Railway very hard on this. Last year I got some extra semi-fast trains added to the evening peak timetable. Now I am working to do the same at other times of day.

But a lot of the problems would be solved if the new 10 coach trains were coming on stream. But it seems pretty clear that the main reason they are still parked in the sidings is because the unions are still dragging their feet on allowing them to be used. The reason - they are new, modern trains which work in a different way to the old ones. And the changes are still being resisted.

Perhaps one day the union leadership will put the passenger first. I am not optimistic.

Gina Miller Urges Ecocide Criminalization

28 March 2024



Gina Miller, the leader of the True & Fair Party, and her Party's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for **Epsom and Ewell**, has called for the criminalization of ecocide, highlighting concerns over the UK's environmental stance post-Brexit and its widening gap with the European Union (EU).

The True & Fair Party has become the first UK political entity to incorporate an ecocide pledge into its manifesto for the next general election.

Miller's argues that Brexit has not only hindered environmental progress but also left the UK trailing behind the EU in environmental protection measures. The proposed legislation aims to define ecocide as a criminal offence, targeting deliberate acts leading to significant and lasting harm to ecosystems.

Gina Miller said: "We were once called the poor man of Europe. Unless our politicians seriously address the need for robust, pragmatic rules and regulations to safeguard our nation against the negative effects of climate change, we will be the dirty, ill, poor man of Europe.

"The WMO is sounding the alarm that climate change is closely intertwined with the inequality crisis. That extreme weather conditions, worsened by lack of action, are leading to food security and population displacement - unfairly impacting vulnerable populations.

"By enacting a law against ecocide, we will be taking decisive action to limit the reckless destruction.

Under her proposed law, major polluters could face severe penalties, including up to ten years in prison or fines of up to £3.85 million. This initiative aligns with efforts in other countries; France has already implemented similar regulations, while the EU is in the process of ratifying an ecocide law.

Recent analyses by the Institute for European Environmental Policy suggest a concerning trend in the UK's environmental policies post-Brexit, indicating a weakening of regulations on crucial fronts like water treatment, air quality, and industrial emissions.

Miller emphasizes the need for international recognition, advocating for ecocide to be classified as a crime under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, alongside other serious offenses.

The urgency of such measures is underscored by warnings from the World Meteorological Organization about the escalating climate crisis. Miller warns that failure to address ecocide not only undermines environmental sustainability but also exacerbates inequalities and threatens future generations' well-being.

Chris Packham, environmental campaigner, said: "It's a bold, brave and exciting move by the True & Fair Party, to campaign to have ecocide written into law, in the midst of our climate and biodiversity crises. Congratulations!"

Georgia Elliott-Smith, Director of Fighting Dirty, and former UNESCO Special Junior Envoy for Youth & Environment, said: "Embracing ecocide as an international crime is a beautifully simple solution. It ensures the polluters pay for the harm they cause and can be punished as such."

Miller's call to action reflects a growing consensus among environmentalists and policymakers: addressing ecocide is imperative for safeguarding the planet's future. As the UK navigates its environmental challenges, decisive legislative action could pave the way towards a more sustainable and equitable future.

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Mixed reaction to Hunt's budget in Surrey

28 March 2024



In a significant development outlined in today's Spring Budget, Surrey MP and Chancellor **Jeremy Hunt** confirmed the **Surrey County Deal** agreement, heralding a new era of devolution for Surrey County Council. This agreement, initially hinted at during last year's Autumn Statement, has been the focus of collaborative efforts between Surrey County Council officials and the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Outlined within this agreement are several key provisions aimed at empowering local governance within Surrey:

- Devolution of the Adult Education Budget and funding for Free Courses for Jobs.
- Integration of Local Enterprise Partnership functions.
- Transfer of new land assembly and compulsory purchase power to the Council.
- Strategic oversight for the delivery of future rounds of UKSPF.

Furthermore, the agreement signifies an intent for further devolution from central government to Surrey, allowing for the deepening of devolution arrangements over time, subject to Government agreement. Notably, this agreement does not mandate any structural reform of local government or unitarisation, preserving the sovereignty of the 12 Councils, including 11 District and Borough Councils alongside the County Council.

"Local government and our local communities are best placed to deliver what Surrey needs. I'm pleased that the government is recognising that, with hopefully further devolved powers to local government in due course," said **Tim Oliver**, (Conservative) Leader of Surrey County Council, expressing optimism regarding the devolution deal.

"This is a positive step to enable ambitious plans for Surrey's residents by devolving control to Local government and our local communities, that are best placed to deliver what Surrey needs. Working with our Partners we can maximise opportunities across a wide spectrum of residents' priorities," said Surrey County and Epsom and Ewell Borough Councillor **Bernie Muir** (Conservative - Horton).

Dr. **Jonathan Carr-West**, Chief Executive of the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU), offered insights into the broader context of today's Budget announcements. "Our latest research found half of councils believe they could face bankruptcy within the next parliament. Council taxpayers are paying ever higher rates for fewer services...The Chancellor recognised market failures in children's residential care and SEND support but councils will not feel that this is enough to counteract the cost increases they have faced in those areas," Dr. Carr-West remarked, urging for a productive debate on potential solutions to the funding crisis.

Paul Lavercombe, tax partner at BDO in the South East, provided a business perspective on the Budget, noting the limited measures for businesses but highlighting certain provisions that may benefit taxpayers and stimulate investment, particularly in regional growth businesses. He said "The Chancellor was under pressure to deliver tax cuts and while this wasn't forthcoming for businesses with some hoping there would be a reduction to corporation tax signposted, taxpayers will welcome the national insurance cuts announced. Despite being pitched as a Budget for long-term growth, there was very little for business. The only obvious winner being the creative industries."

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[Epsom's leader welcomes more power for Surrey County Council](#)

Surrey's Tory MPs exiting the County

28 March 2024



Kwasi Kwarteng the Conservative MP for Spelthorne has just joined four other of his Party's Surrey colleagues in announcing he will not stand at the upcoming General Election. Surrey has 11 constituencies and all are held by Conservatives.

With Paul Beresford MP for Mole Valley, Dominic Raab MP for Esher and Walton, Crispin Blunt MP for Reigate and Banstead and our own **Chris Grayling** MP for **Epsom and Ewell**, all having confirmed they are not going to run, this leaves 6 Surrey Conservative MPs still standing.

One can expect Michael Gove MP for Surrey Heath and Jeremy Hunt MP for South-West Surrey, who serve in the Cabinet, to seek re-election. Leaving Jonathan Lord MP for Woking, Ben Spencer MP for Runnymede and Weybridge, Angela Richardson MP for Guildford and Claire Coutinho MP for East Surrey assumed to be still up for the fight.

Epsom and Ewell Conservatives have already put in place their new prospective Parliamentary Candidate, **Mhairi Fraser**, an anti-corruption lawyer.

She will be challenged by **Helen Maguire** of the Liberal Democrats, **Gina Miller** of the True and Fair Party and **Steve Mckenna** of the Green Party. Labour has yet to select its Prospective Parliamentary Candidate.

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LibDems in the market for power in Epsom and Ewell?

28 March 2024



In a surprising turn of events in Epsom & Ewell, Liberal Democrat Leader **Sir Ed Davey MP** made a noteworthy appearance in Epsom Market last Saturday, marking the launch of Parliamentary Candidate **Helen Maguire's** 2024 election campaign. Maguire has emerged as the first candidate from the major political parties to kick-start her campaign in the constituency, which is currently under the Conservative stronghold of **Chris Grayling** MP.

The upcoming election, however, presents a unique scenario. With Grayling stepping down, the Conservatives facing a decline in national polls, boundary changes, and a revitalized local Liberal Democrat party, the battle for the next **Epsom & Ewell** MP is shaping up to be a two-horse race.

A recent YouGov poll, commissioned by the Daily Telegraph, surveyed 14,000 voters nationwide and has added a new layer of intrigue to the contest. The poll indicated that the Lib Dems in Epsom & Ewell are marginally ahead of the Conservatives for the first time in many years, leaving Conservative MPs with a gloomy outlook and fueling speculation of a potential general election defeat.

Helen Maguire, a former Captain in the Royal Military Police with service in Bosnia and Iraq, is also known for her charity fundraising consultancy, which has raised over £1 million for charities across the UK. She recently earned the British Empire Medal for her work and management of the project to rebuild the Claygate Pavilion after a destructive fire.

Maguire's campaign is centered around key issues such as the cost-of-living crisis, environmental concerns arising from sewage dumping in the Mole and Hogsmill rivers, and support for the Epsom & St Helier Health Trust's efforts to construct a new critical emergency hospital.

At the campaign launch in Epsom Market, Ed Davey expressed confidence, stating, "I'm here because I think we can win this seat. I think the people of Epsom & Ewell, indeed people across the country, want to get rid of the Conservatives for they have failed our country. Whether it's the cost of living or the health service, they're not listening to people. They are so out of touch, and I think people want change."

Maguire emphasized the Liberal Democrats' 'Fair Deal' promise, advocating for a fair, prosperous, and innovative economy that promotes opportunity and well-being. She envisions a strong economy as the solution to the cost-of-living crisis and a means to provide quality public services for Epsom & Ewell.

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Conservatives adopt new contender for Parliament

28 March 2024



Epsom & Ewell Conservative Association has announced that **Mhairi Fraser** has been selected as the Conservative Parliamentary Candidate for Epsom & Ewell to fight the upcoming General Election, with current MP, **Chris Grayling** standing down.

Mhairi is an anti-corruption lawyer at an international law firm in the City, specialising in bribery, fraud, money laundering and sanctions, and also undertakes a range of pro-bono work, including representing a Nobel Peace Prize winner facing persecution from a foreign government. Prior to starting her legal career, she spent several years working in Parliament for the Conservatives, and stood as the Conservative candidate in Epsom West in the Surrey County Council elections in 2013. She has previously lived and worked in various other countries, including Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates, and Sweden.



Local Conservatives celebrate adoption of Mhairi Fraser as their Epsom and Ewell Parliamentary candidate

Mhairi has been local to Epsom and Ewell since 2007, with her three siblings attending Glyn and Epsom College. While at university, she worked part-time at Leatherhead Food Research and the Marquis of Granby, and has also volunteered for the radio station at Epsom Hospital.

Mhairi is passionate about tackling the mental health crisis and has undertaken various physical challenges - including an 80km non-stop walk across the North and South Downs - to raise money for mental health charities.

On the selection of Mhairi, Chris Grayling MP added "I'm really pleased that my successor has got such local connections and is committed to the area that I have proudly represented for the last 23 years. Mhairi is a very impressive and determined woman and I think if elected, will make an excellent constituency MP".

Epsom and Ewell MP's Christmas message

28 March 2024



This has been a particularly challenging year for many people locally, and so in my Christmas message I want to pay particular tribute to all of those working for local voluntary groups who do so much to help those who are struggling. We are very fortunate to have so many people locally who are willing to give up their time to help the multitude of local charities and other groups who make such a difference.

You may remember last year that I worked with Citizens Advice and the Good Company, which runs the local foodbank, to provide extra support for people struggling with high energy bills. Thanks to the generosity of local people we raised around £50,000 to help those who needed it. The Epsom and Ewell Energy Support Scheme provided help to local families who were struggling with energy bills to make their homes more energy efficient. In total so far the scheme has helped nearly a thousand people with short term financial help, energy advice and the purchase of low energy appliances. This is what some of those who took part said afterwards.

- *“I found the workshop very helpful and really enjoyed talking to the other participants, sharing tips on how to save energy. The takeaway tips are also very informative. Thank you so much for your kindness and giving me really useful information about the cost of energy and how to reduce usage and keep warm and safe this winter, which like many people has been scaring the life out of me.”* (Denise, group workshop)
- *“The scheme is very helpful and opened my eyes to certain areas of wasted electricity in my home. I certainly think more about what appliances are on and what we don’t need to use.... Have already used air fryer and not had oven on for a few days. Great help, thank you.”* (Tim, 1-to-1 consultation)
- *“I found the consultation very helpful – definitely more conscious of how you can save money... Because of my mental health, I find phone calls to these big companies very daunting, and they kindly offered to sign me up to a friendlier way of getting through with a specialist team if I need to get in touch... Thank you also for the top up and offer of appliances to help me save on my bill. So grateful for the opportunity.”* (Michele, 1-to-1 consultation)

We are running the scheme again this winter, and would be very grateful for contributions, however small. Details of the scheme and how to contribute are at www.justgiving.com/campaign/epsomewellenergysupportscheme

This will be my last Christmas message as your local MP, as I am not standing again at the election. But I will be there doing what I can to help with local issues right through to the election as always.

In the meantime, though, I hope that you and your family have a good Christmas and that 2024 proves to be a good year for everyone.

With best wishes

Chris Grayling

Sunak in Surrey

28 March 2024



The **University of Surrey** welcomed Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and **Guildford MP Angela Richardson** to campus on Thursday (30 November).

Epsom and Ewell Times notes the Guildford Parliamentary Constituency is rather marginal. The 2019 General Election result was:

Conservative Angela Richardson 26,317
Liberal Democrats Zöe Franklin 22,980
Labour Anne Rouse 4,515
Independent Anne Milton 4,356
Peace John Morris 483

During their visit, the Prime Minister and Ms Richardson met nursing students and staff from the School of Health Sciences, where they observed practical lessons taking place. They also toured Surrey's world-class facilities, including a unique immersive simulation suite which digitally replicates different healthcare settings. The Prime Minister also took the time to personally speak to Surrey's students to learn more about their journey in becoming nurses and why they chose to pursue the profession.

Professor **G Q Max Lu**, President and Vice-Chancellor, of the University of Surrey, said:

"I am honoured to welcome the Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak and Angela Richardson MP to the University of Surrey campus. Our reputation for training highly skilled and inspiring health care professionals precedes us. The strength of our excellence in teaching and student support makes Surrey an exceptional place to study. We are delighted to have this opportunity to showcase some of our state-of-the art facilities to our distinguished visitor.

"As part of our commitment to producing the sought-after health professionals for the future, we are pleased to be welcoming our first cohort of medical students in 2024. Combined with the innovative biomedical and healthy living research undertaken at Surrey, we are steadfast in our contribution and support to the NHS and our communities."

The School of Health Sciences, which sits within the Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, at the University of Surrey continues to go from strength to strength. The calibre of nursing programmes at the school are both nationally and internationally recognised, being ranked seventh in the QS World University Subject Rankings and eight in the UK (The Times / Sunday Times Good University Guide 2024). This builds on an established history of the school, which recently celebrated 40 years of educating nurses at Surrey.

Professor **Paul Townsend**, Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean of the Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences at the University of Surrey, said:

"It is an enormous privilege to have the Prime Minister and our local MP visit us.

"Surrey is not only the home to cutting edge research but is a world leader in educating health professionals of the future. Our team of dedicated teaching staff work hard to ensure that our students have the knowledge and skills needed to care for patients and that they embody the culture and values of the NHS. It is a great honour to be a part of the Surrey family and to witness our students succeed in their studies."

Jackie McBride, Associate Professor, Head of Department: Professional Preparatory Programmes at the School of Health Sciences at the University of Surrey, said:

"I am delighted that the Prime Minister has met some of our future healthcare professionals here at the University of Surrey. I am beyond proud of our students and of everything they have and continue to achieve. Nursing is more than a job, it requires dedication, empathy, knowledge, and skills, and I know the Prime Minister will have seen today all these attributes in our students."

Surrey University Press Office

Finance lessons for Parliament from Surrey Boroughs

28 March 2024



Surrey Heath Borough Council is burning through its reserves and eyeing up serious cuts to services, the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee was told. The Monday, November 13, cross-party panel of MPs heard from experts including from the National Audit Office, the Institute of Fiscal Studies, and chief financial officers of local councils as it delved into the 'financial distress in local authorities'.

Among the group giving evidence were Paul Dossett, from Grant Thornton the forensic accountants deep-diving into Woking Borough Council, Jonathan Carr-West, of the Local Government Information Unit, and Surrey Heath's chief finance officer Bob Watson.

The committee was also told a lack of professional accountability among senior officers - across all councils - has been a driving factor behind local authorities running into financial trouble - and has been made worse with many scared to stand up against councillors for fear of losing their jobs.

Mr Watson said: “ (Surrey Heath) is not in immediate financial distress, it is like many other councils, predicting a use of reserves over the medium finance period and the burn rate on those reserves is unsustainable into the medium and long term future.”

He told the meeting of the “challenging budget process” the council was going through, including looking at cutting non-essential services. He said: “We have over the past two and a half years embarked on a number of efficiency measures where we’ve taken costs out of the organisation without cutting services to the residents and business in Surrey Heath. It is potentially now likely we will have to look at some of the discretionary services. We also have over the past built levels of ear-marled reserves for very such cases where we’ve started to see some of these higher interest rates coming through. We plan to use those reserves to smooth the gap over the four years. Sufficient reserves to take us through the four years but it is challenging.”

Part of the reason, the committee heard, for councils struggling to balance the books has been a 61 per cent cut in funding, which has had the knock on effect of increasing demand for services - notably in housing and homelessness.

Mr Watson told the committee that the cost of living crisis has impacted on people paying private rent and who were now presenting as homeless. He said: “We in our borough haven’t seen it quite the same (levels of homelessness) as some of the other Surrey boroughs but we’re starting to see that increase. Last month’s statistics of people presenting to our council offices actually doubled- again driven by cost of living pressures on individuals. We have the cost prices going up with hotels, we have the cost of hotels going up driven by demand going through and were now starting to see some of the hotels closed by central government these people now presenting to the local authority as homeless.” He added that it was not just a refugee crisis as people have been struggling to find affordable homes for years.

Earlier in the session the committee heard from Grant Thornton’s Paul Dossett. Grant Thornton works with about half the councils in the UK and is completing a deep dive into how Woking Borough Council went bankrupt with debts approaching £2.6billion. Mr Dossett told the committee that local government financing “just bumbles along with no attempt to fix it” and when councils do go bust its the most vulnerable, the ones who rely on council services the most, who are impacted.

He said: “Some of the things that have gone wrong, what we have seen with some of those people responsible from an officer side, in those key roles, the golden triangle of chief executive, monitoring officer and section 151 officer, there hasn’t really been professional accountability. There may have been job accountability in that the person has moved on to a different place but the sort of professional accountability of someone not doing their job to the right professional standard we don’t really see that in any meaningful way. Alongside that there needs to be better job protection for statutory officers to enable those statutory functions to speak very clearly to members to say ‘you can not do this’

“That is either breaking the law, or involves a degree of financial risk that the Section 151 officer is not comfortable with, and should be able to say that without any fear that there will be comeback against you in that role.”

How Surrey MPs voted on ceasefire

28 March 2024



No Surrey MPs voted in Parliament for a ceasefire between Israel and Gaza. The vote took place on Wednesday (November 15) on an amendment to the King’s Speech that was put forward by Scottish National Party MPs.

The amendment called for government to “uphold international law and protect all civilians in Israel and Palestine”, to “condemn the horrific killings by Hamas and the taking of hostages” and to “reaffirm that there must be an end to the collective punishment of the Palestinian people”.

It also called for the “urgent release of all hostages and an end to the siege of Gaza to allow vital supplies of food, fuel, medicine and water to reach the civilian population”.

Of Surrey’s 11 MPs, six voted against the amendment, and the other five had no vote recorded.

The decades-long conflict in Israel and Gaza escalated and gained further international scrutiny on October 7 after a Hamas attack on Israel.

The Red Cross Red Crescent Movement remains on the ground supporting those affected and said there were more than 1.5million people displaced in Gaza, with more than 240 Israeli hostages being held.

The situation there was described by the charity as “deeply alarming and worsening every day”.

The King’s speech sets out the priorities for the coming Parliamentary session, and was delivered by King Charles for the

first time as monarch on November 7.

The amendment calling for an immediate ceasefire was lost by 293 votes to 125.

The Labour Party saw eight shadow ministers and two parliamentary private secretaries leave their roles after going against leader Sir Keir Starmer's order not to vote for the amendment.

Surrey's MPs were all elected to represent the Conservative Party in Parliament.

Sir Paul Beresford, Chris Grayling and Dominic Raab have announced they will not be standing in the next general election, due to be held before January 2025.

Reigate MP Crispin Blunt confirmed he was the MP arrested on suspicion of rape and the possession of controlled substances on October 26. He was suspended by the Conservative Party and has been released by Surrey Police on conditional bail.

All the Surrey MP votes are listed in full below:

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) - No
Crispin Blunt (Reigate) - No vote recorded
Claire Coutinho MP (East Surrey) - No
Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) - No
Chris Grayling MP (Epsom & Ewell) - No
Jeremy Hunt MP (South West Surrey) - No vote recorded
Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) - No vote recorded
Jonathan Lord (Woking) - No vote recorded
Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) - No vote recorded
Angela Richardson (Guildford) - No
Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) - No