

# Two horse race coming to Epsom?

10 May 2024



The Liberal Democrats continue to tighten their grip on Epsom & Ewell’s southern flank in Mole Valley, as the Party cements its position in Leatherhead. With two out of three seats in Leatherhead South now in the hands of the Lib Dems, the Conservatives are now down to just two seats in the whole of the Mole Valley district.

According to the Lib Dem PPC the general election stage in the wider Epsom & Ewell constituency is now set for a two horse race between the Liberal Democrat’s **Helen Maguire** and the Conservative **Mhairi Fraser**.

Commenting on the recent Mole Valley Council elections results Helen Maguire said, “Each month we are knocking on 1000s of doors and hearing from residents who are understandably upset with the way this government is running this country. They are looking for a change. With the boundary changes, Labour declaring the seat a non-battleground seat and the Liberal Democrats now having more councillors than the Conservatives across the country, we know there is a good chance of change here in Epsom, Ewell, Ashted & Leatherhead.”

**Mhairi Fraser**, the Conservative Prospective Parliamentary Candidate responded: “Although the results were not what we had hoped or worked hard for, I am incredibly proud of the integrity our local Conservative candidates showed. We ran an honest campaign focusing on what the Conservatives will continue to fight for on behalf of local residents, without resorting to attacking our individual opponents on the doorsteps or in our literature. I wish the new and re-elected councillors well in the term ahead, but the Conservatives will continue to be the loudest voice against the Liberal Democrats’ plans to forever destroy our Green Belt, and to plaster tower blocks over the green spaces in our towns.”

**Mark Todd**, Chair of the Epsom and Ewell Labour Party said: “As a rule of thumb, Epsom town centre and the north of Epsom and Ewell are strong for Labour, as you move South the areas become more Conservative. We were very heartened therefore by the results in Leatherhead at the local elections. It was the first year Leatherhead has been part of the Epsom and Ewell Constituency and we fielded fantastic local candidates who live and work in the area. We got really good feedback on the doorstep and the Labour vote across Leatherhead increased by 73%. A similar swing will see us win the Epsom and Ewell constituency in the upcoming General Election.”

The Labour Party is yet to select a Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for the constituency. Epsom and Ewell Times has been informed that National Labour Party managers are conducting due diligence on all prospective MPs. Once they have completed this, they will give the Epsom and Ewell Labour Party a shortlist for local member’s consideration.

Local Council elections in Mole Valley in Leatherhead, which will be within the recently changed boundaries of the Parliamentary Constituency of Epsom and Ewell, produced two Liberal Democrat victories on 2nd May. In Leatherhead North **Benjamin Wear** secured 671 votes with the Conservative candidate **Alan Gibbs** trailing with 327 votes. In Leatherhead South **Gareth Parsons** gained 970 votes against Conservative **Tim Hall** getting 714 votes.

Wards in Ashted also went to the polls and returned independent candidates with healthy majorities.

2019 General Election result:

Party	Candidate	Votes	%
 Conservative	<b>Chris Grayling</b>	<b>31,819</b>	<b>53.5</b>
 Liberal Democrats	Stephen Gee	13,946	23.5
 Labour	Ed Mayne	10,226	17.2
 Green	Janice Baker	2,047	3.4
 Independent	Clive Woodbridge	1,413	2.4
	<b>Majority</b>	<b>17,873</b>	<b>30.0</b>
	<b>Turnout</b>	<b>59,451</b>	<b>73.3</b>

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## Green signals from prospective parliamentary candidate

10 May 2024



The most important General Election for 40 years is rapidly approaching and as your prospective Member of Parliament for the Green Party I would like to introduce myself.

I joined the party in 2011, out of disgust for the mainstream parties. The Parliamentary expenses scandals and greed of well-off MPs during the 2008 financial crash, epitomised the gulf between the governors and the governed. The brazen double standards posed a threat to democracy and switched people off politics. I have always advocated that democratic values of fairness and equity should be front and centre of our politics, and it vital that we carry these values forward in tackling the related environmental and cost of living crises.

Its also always been a key issue for me that nature is not just respected but also restored as ultimately this is our life support system. The Green Party was the first to propose legislation against “ecocide” in 2017 for instance and this is now not only contained in our full policy but is increasingly adopted internationally.

I grew up in West London, in a street where all sorts of families lived alongside each other, in a balanced community where all types of occupations were present including teachers and doctors, builders and craftsmen and other workers on average pay. We believed in the value of education - my father was a train driver who studied and later became a college lecturer and author. In those days everything seemed possible, and in particular homes were affordable in my street for everyone.

Sadly those times have gone and today it would be impossible for a young family to buy a home there. I became a professional Chartered Surveyor and Planner after studying Town and Country Planning at Manchester University and have practised my profession in the public and private sectors for over 30 years.

Epsom and Ewell is a very special place, with its unique and ancient history and really important community and cultural assets that I appreciate which remind me in many ways of the place I grew up in. I know now that these assets cannot be taken for granted. Many of the psychiatric hospitals in the Borough were closed under the Care in the Community legislation years ago and redeveloped for housing. A lot of the precious spaces were lost forever, impacting Epsom’s green character.

Throughout my career, even where it was sometimes difficult to do so, I have championed environmental, educational and community development in my work, protecting heritage, parks and countryside, biodiversity and other assets. I have also worked at several universities designing and delivering post graduate and degree apprenticeship courses as a visiting lecturer and acting as an external examiner. Following the pandemic we now recognise to a much greater extent the value to our mental and physical health of enjoying nature and outdoor recreation as well as that of Lifelong Learning.

I worked hard campaigning to become a Borough Councillor and in 2016 I was elected to the Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, one of three elected Greens at that time. Since then we have built up our numbers across the Borough so with eleven councillors, we are now the official opposition on the Borough Council. We successfully saved substantial Green Belt from unnecessary development in and around Redhill and many of the issues we dealt with are similar to those in Epsom and Ewell.

My commitment to you and local priorities : If elected as your Member of Parliament as well as continuing to seek the best outcomes for protecting the constituency from the aforementioned pressures I would also focus on other local priorities, including investing in the NHS, social care and new apprenticeships, ensuring young people can get skills, good wages and a step onto the housing ladder, meeting safety and security concerns for all ages with more policing.

I would work to strengthen the vitality and viability of our High Streets and village centres, including reform of business rates so monies raised could be reinvested in the area, helping small businesses and maintaining a retail banking presence not just pushing everyone into online services. I would also support measures to help the farming community through targeted grants schemes, with more emphasis on horticulture and organics, including taxes on some imports.

The climate and cost of living crises demand parallel responses, so for example, retrofitting old homes for energy

efficiency not only saves money but also creates green jobs, a win-win for both people and the planet. It is time to acknowledge that achieving net-zero emissions doesn't jeopardize our economy; it revitalizes it.

Politically Greens are making great strides up and down the country, taking control of or acting in coalition to administer some 39 District Councils and have over 700 plus councillors nationally. Our programme is to do the same in Parliament where we need Green MPs to hold the Government to account just as we are doing on local councils. We want to make a real contribution to changing people's lives and with new Green MPs we can do just that.

Money for change exists: The old chestnut of there being no funds in the coffer is selectively applied by those with vested interests. In the 1950s, despite economic turmoil and the country being on the verge of bankruptcy, governments forged ahead, creating the NHS, and building circa 150,000 Council homes every year as part of a new social contract. We are a wealthy country that can generate significant funds for the right priorities.

The Epsom and Ewell Constituency is a prosperous community, yet this success brings with it development pressure which threatens to encroach on the remaining areas of Green Belt and countryside not just in the Borough but also the other constituency areas, Ashted and Leatherhead.

Home ownership, once a tangible hope, has slipped from the grasp of many. Essential public services are faltering whether this is in the NHS, social care, education or policing. Without action our younger residents will be forced to move away to find cheaper places, we will lose our identity as places experience overdevelopment, leading to a loss of crucial biodiversity and a consequent increase in adverse effects such as traffic congestion in what was once a relatively tranquil district.

My vision is one where these cherished places are protected so our children can enjoy living and working in the area.

Due to the shortage of social housing locally, Epsom and Ewell Council spends a staggering £2m per year on emergency accommodation, with ratepayers footing the bill. The extraordinary high cost of housing is having a corrosive effect on our neighbourhoods, with the elderly unable to afford more suitable accommodation and, as a professional surveyor with a specialist background in urban planning, I know that building expensive unaffordable homes in the wrong place is not addressing need or fixing our broken housing market.

Apart from protecting the Green Belt from unnecessary speculative housing, I have also argued against houses with large gardens being redeveloped since this impacts the character of local towns. We need a balanced community to sustain the whole of this vibrant constituency and to avoid it becoming a run down retirement village with reduced access to a range of public services, boarded-up high streets and where younger people are forced to move away.

Ensuring a positive future for Epsom and Ewell : Local communities are rightly proud of the towns and villages of this constituency and I respect every ounce of hard work that has gone into their creation and upkeep. I want to complement this effort. Greens work with communities across Surrey, and our party is seen as more trustworthy based on the work we do and the increasing support we are getting from voters. We are working tirelessly to deliver Green councillors in Ashted and Leatherhead now and in Epsom and Ewell.

I believe there are a growing number of voters in Epsom and Ewell who feel taken advantage of and ignored, and I would greatly value the opportunity to champion their causes. While we don't have proportional representation in this country this election still represents a one-off opportunity to change the political landscape. The usual certainties no longer apply as many voters are dissatisfied with the two main parties and, with so many candidates standing in Epsom and Ewell, a surprise result is entirely possible.

If you have concerns or are dissatisfied about how you have been represented in Parliament, can I ask that you trust me with your vote? It would be an honour and a privilege to become your Member of Parliament for Epsom and Ewell. I will bring fresh thinking not repackaged stale old ideas passed around between the main parties. I want to make a difference, I need your help, your vote most definitely counts.

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## PM confident of success in Woking

10 May 2024



Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said he was "confident" that Conservatives will hold onto Woking in the upcoming local and general elections, when he was grilled about why people should vote for a party that allowed the local council to go bankrupt.

The PM was at Woking Community Hospital April 11th where he was grilled about the fate of the Conservative party by reporters.

The PM pointed to the UK economy in response to questions about why Woking residents should vote for a party that allowed the local council to go bankrupt.

Woking Council declared bankruptcy in June 2023 after it admitted a risky investment spree into hotels and skyscrapers by its former Conservative administration.

Calling Woking's investments a "cross-party" decision, Rishi said local councils are "in control of their own finances", and urged they run their budgets "in a sensible manner to deliver to their residents".

Citing the national picture, Rishi said inflation has "more than halved" to 3.4% in February 2024, wages have increased ahead of inflation, taxes have been cut and free childcare has been expanded to working families.

He added: "While we have been through a tough few years as a country, that's been difficult for families in Surrey, I do believe that the start of this year we have turned a corner and we're now heading in the right direction.

"Our plan is working, if we stick to our plan we can give everyone in Surrey and Woking the peace of mind that there is a brighter future for them and their family."

Woking is set to go to the polls on May 2 to vote for a third of the council (10 seats) in the local elections. Since news first emerged about the borough's financial crisis, his party lost control of the council, and saw its share of councillors drop to four (from 17 in 2016).

MP Jonathan Lord won 48.9% of the vote in the 2019 election, with Liberal Democrat candidate Will Forster coming second at 30.8%. One poll from Electoral Calculus predicts Jonathan will win a narrow victory of just 30.8%, with Lib Dem and Labour closely at its heels with 27.6% and 23.6% respectively.

Although the Woking MP was present during the media pool, he made no further comment.

The PM argued central government has put more funding into councils, claiming local councils have on average 7.5% more funding than 2023. A further £600m has also been put into local authorities for 2024-25.

He said: "Central government is doing its bit to support [local councils] with considerably more funding." Despite the added funding Woking Council said it has to make £8.4m savings for year one of its five-year financial strategy. Closing most public toilets, ending grants to voluntary and community groups, reducing dial-a-ride services and losing up to 60 staff are some of the cuts the council has made to make ends meet.

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## Unstable world, religious discrimination, the Local Plan and trains

10 May 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.

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## Gina Miller Urges Ecocide Criminalization

10 May 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

10 May 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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## Surrey's Tory MPs exiting the County

10 May 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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