EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

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Surrey boost for mental health includes Epsom

6 February 2024



Surrey County Council has announced a significant investment of £3.6 million from the Mental Health Investment Fund (MHIF) into 13 innovative, community-focused projects. This allocation follows a previous grant of £530,000 in 2023 to 9 projects. The overarching goal of these initiatives is to bolster emotional well-being, with a dual focus on preventing poor mental health and providing support for those already grappling with mental health challenges.

The MHIF operates in collaboration with Surrey Heartlands Health and Care Partnership.

The 2019 Surrey Health and Wellbeing Strategy guides the allocation of MHIF funds, emphasizing the reduction of health inequalities and targeting specific groups and neighbourhoods. The MHIF focuses on prevention, dismantling barriers, and empowering individuals to proactively improve their emotional health and well-being.

Mark Nuti, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for Health, expressed delight in the diverse allocation of the second round of funding. Spread across all 11 districts and boroughs of Surrey, the funds support a range of organizations employing innovative, community-focused approaches to address mental health challenges.

In the table summarizing mental health projects in Surrey, here are the projects targeting Epsom and Ewell and frequently the Court Ward area in Epsom in particular, among other areas in Surrey.

Emerge Advocacy

Supports people aged 10-25 who are in A&E because of self-harm, a suicide attempt or emotional crisis, 7pm – 11pm when many other services are closed, and hospital staff are very busy. The MHIF funding will allow Emerge to expand their post hospital follow up support so that young people and their families do not have to endure long waits for support during their most vulnerable moments. Emerge Advocacy runs Emerge projects in the Royal Surrey, Epsom, Frimley and East Surrey hospitals.

Other projects involving Epsom and Ewell include:

Barnardo’s Paediatric Parenting Service

- **Target District:** Court in Epsom
- **Description:** Barnardo’s will provide support to parents/carers of children under 6 years old, diagnosed with autism and/or ADHD, in key neighbourhoods, including Court.
- **Funding:** £409,609
- **Duration:** 2.5 years

PAPYRUS: Prevention of Young Suicide

- **Target District:**
  - Year 1: Court in Epsom
- **Description:** PAPYRUS aims to expand its impact in Surrey schools through various initiatives, including direct intervention in specific neighbourhoods.
- **Funding:** £139,834
- **Duration:** 2 years

YMCA: Step Forward

- **Target District:**
  - Epsom and Ewell
  - Hooley, Merstham, Netherne, Tattenham Corner, Preston, Horley Central and South, Redhill West, Wray Common
- **Description:** Step Forward addresses the gap in service provision for young adults with poor mental health, including those in Epsom and Ewell and surrounding districts.
- **Duration:** Not specified in the provided information

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These projects aim to provide various forms of support, from inclusive wellbeing coaching to parenting services, suicide prevention, and support for young adults, specifically in the mentioned districts of Epsom, Ewell, and Epsom Court.

Epsom dig deep to beat Gravesend

6 February 2024



Sutton & Epsom RFC 21 Gravesend 19. Saturday 3rd February.

It has reached the business end of the campaign and for all clubs a studious look at the table and the remaining fixtures will determine their aspirations. For Sutton & Epsom and Gravesend it was a fixture that would relieve relegation fears for the victor but increase anxiety for the defeated. When the clubs met earlier this season on the Rectory Field it was a match rather ruined by the referee's penchant for puritanical pedantry as the crowd endured an endless stream of penalties. Gravesend triumphed 36-29 with their clinical lineout securing multiple tries. On Saturday, with great credit to referee Kasey Allen, those present enjoyed a rousing contest unimpeded by the whistle as the Black & Whites secured their first win after a quartet of losses.

On a cloudy but mild afternoon on an excellent surface Gravesend kicked off playing towards the clubhouse. The temptation to watch England play Italy was too great for many and a rather Spartan gathering assembled. As England's plight increased so did the crowd watching the local contest. The opening five minutes of high tempo rugby with both sides attacking with gusto set the tone before the first scrummage interrupted the entertainment. The backs probed, the defences demonstrated thunderous tackling and the kickers sparred for territorial advantage. If Sutton were not wary of the Gravesend pack before the start they had an unpleasant reminder on the quarter hour mark. A penalty was conceded and the ball kicked into the corner. The lineout ball was taken cleaning. The initial surge was halted but slickly the ball was spun to the blindside where Brendan Kelly was in splendid isolation and had the easiest task to score in the corner. Fortune favoured S&E as Josh Smith's finely struck conversion came back off the upright. Gravesend led 5-0 with Sutton left to ponder discipline and penalty counts.

Any anxiety in the ranks of the Sutton supporters was instantly assuaged. The visitors cleared the restart but Gareth O'Brien and Ellis Rudder combined to run it back into the Gravesend 22 to win a penalty. It was the hosts' turn to kick into the corner for the attacking lineout. The first assault saw Freddie Bunting close to glory but an earlier infringement meant the home team had a second chance. As it has been for over a decade the go-to man was Matt Whitaker and he delivered. Perhaps conscious of his veteran status he arrived clean-shaven this week, though it only took days off his appearance it had not diminished his strength and footwork near the line as he powered over. Freddy Bunting's conversion put Sutton & Epsom ahead 7-5.

It was now that Gravesend winger Andrew Cooke entered the fray. His first run was rather lateral but evaded too many defenders before the ball was marshalled into touch. That was merely an appetiser to his next contribution. He gathered a clearance in his 22 in the middle of the pitch and ran the ball straight back into the Sutton 22 before being denied a sensational try. Perhaps it needed that fright to ignite the hosts. S&E now put together their best phases of the match as forwards and backs in unison swept down the pitch recycling the ball at pace. The attack ended with a penalty for a high tackle. Yet again the crowd waited to see if a 5-metre lineout would be converted into points. Once more with clinical efficiency the forwards controlled the ball and advanced to the line for lock Josh Glanville to score. Captain Bunting bisected the uprights to extend Sutton's advantage to 14-5.

The remainder of the first period was played out without further addition to the scoreboard. The indication of the first half was that this match was evenly poised with Gravesend not only dangerous through their powerful pack but carrying significantly more attacking threat in their back division than was seen in the October meeting. For S&E the lineout was functioning superbly, the set scrum had manfully met the challenge and they were playing with pace and precision. The sides turned around with all to play for with Sutton holding the upper hand 14-5.

The Rugby Lane crowd nearly had the perfect start to the second half. Centre Lawrence Elliott went from the sublime to the ridiculous. He picked the perfect angle to break the line and strode purposefully into the Gravesend 22 with a try looking probable he then threw out a pass that could generously be described as unforgiving as the bemused winger, Ellis Rudder, watched the ball

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speed towards the advertising hoardings. Though Sutton stole the lineout ball they could not manufacture another opening. Soon the Rugby Lane XV was to be on the defensive. A penalty in the Black & White 22 saw the visitors opt for a scrummage and as they went wide a kick through rolled against the corner flag as Sutton scrambled in defence. This started a period of relentless pressure. The hosts did not aid their cause by failing to find touch with a clearance. The Kent men were now playing their best rugby and it seemed to be a question of when rather than if they would score.

However, it was now that possibly the key factor of the fixture was becoming evident. The Sutton defence was obdurate in the extreme, to a man they tackled tenaciously and got on their feet eager to put in another hit. Almost miraculously the line held as Gravesend were frustrated time and again as they were held up over the line. Eventually the visitors scored and it took exceptional work from winger Matthew Brady twisting and turning to score in the corner with multiple tacklers in attendance. Josh Smith converted exquisitely from the touchline as they made it a two-point deficit, 12-14. Significantly it had taken ten minutes of siege warfare for the try which must have emboldened the resolve of the hosts whilst equally left the visitors asking what do we need to do to score. From the restart Gravesend were hampered by a yellow card as an instinctive outstretched arm, with no malice intended, caught Kyren Ghumra's head. The winger had to be replaced by Matt Symonds but Sutton had ten minutes to play against 14 men.

Reacting to the numerical superiority with great urgency the home team went in search of points to extend their lead beyond a solitary score. Soon they were given an opportunity. Despite being awarded a penalty very much within the capabilities of the prolific Bunting boot the captain chose to go for the corner. His bravery was rewarded as the lineout was secured and the pack advanced to the line for Chris Farrell to score. The vital conversion was added by Freddy Bunting and the 21-12 lead meant that Gravesend would have to score twice in the final quarter of an hour.

If Sutton had been under siege before their third try they now endured an all out assault from Gravesend. It was the type of rugby that has every spectator on the edge of their seat living every carry and every tackle. The previous fortitude had transformed to cussed resilience and was on the way to heroic defence. Gravesend opted for scrums but the Sutton pack refused to yield. When the ball went wide the visiting backs opted for solo glory rather than swift passing and were met by scything tackles. The longer the line held the more desperate were the attacks. If the Kent men picked the wrong options to their great credit they did not offer up the knock-ons or penalties to assist the Sutton cause. Eventually centre Chris Brady crossed the whitewash and Josh Smith made it a two-point game once more as Sutton led 21-19. Crucially Sutton had eaten away significantly at the clock and only a couple of minutes were left.

It was now a test of game management and S&E controlled possession with admirable skill advance to the 22. On the attack they put through a speculative kick to the try line. Though it did not result in a score and gave Gravesend the ball it left the visitors with the Herculean labour of scoring from the length of the pitch. Moments later the final whistle blew and Sutton had won a victory of great significance. The manner of the success built on passion, team spirit and determination should hold them in great stead for the remainder of the campaign. For Gravesend they earned a bonus point but they put in a performance vastly superior to the earlier encounter and they certainly have all the assets required to navigate their way to safety.

There is no game next Saturday but the league continues on 17 th February with a trip to Crescent Farm to play the improving Sidcup who like S&E are on 38 points in the league but a place higher on points' difference.

Sutton & Epsom: Gareth O'Brien, Kyren Ghumra, Lawrence Elliott, Freddy Bunting ©, Ellis Rudder, Tom Lennard, Steve Munford, Alex Mount, Chris Farrell, Callum Gibson, Josh Glanville, Ewan McTaggart, George London, Rob Hegarty & Matt Whitaker.
Replacements: Tom Boaden, Tariq Al Khaldi & Matt Symonds.

Gravesend: Jamie Fautley, Andrew Cooke, Chris Brady, Josh Smith, Matt Brady, George Bruce, Ben Kite, Brendan Kelly, Terry Papworth, Jamie Forsythe, Tom Bird, Harry Brooker, Matt Hewitt, Samraj Chahal & Connor Murphy.
Replacements: Stan Dadson, Ben Reeve & Harvey Dean

Image – Robin Kennedy

Robot puts study at home pupil in the classroom

6 February 2024

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One pupil at a Surrey primary school has been utilising virtual technology to help her keep-up with learning by sending a robot into class.

The robot is controlled by the pupil, and gives her the opportunity to be with her friends and classmates even though she cannot be in school physically.

Cuddington Croft Primary enlisted some cutting-edge technology when a Year 5 pupil was forced to take several months off school due to serious illness.

To enable Alexia to continue her studies remotely, the school arranged for an AV1 robot to attend lessons in her place, allowing the youngster to join her classmates virtually.

“The robot was on a table at school, and when Alexia was on, it would ‘come to life’, and its head could rotate to see the classroom,” said **Mike Skelton**, Head Teacher at Cuddington Croft, part of the GLF Schools Multi Academies Trust.

“The aim of the AV1 was to help the pupil to attend lessons while they were unable to be there in person,” explained Alexia’s teacher, April Riley. “It’s been brilliant at making that connection between the pupil and the class. It’s mainly for them to join in, listen to the lessons, and still feel part of the class.

“The first few times the pupil came online it was very exciting, and the other children were interested to see how it moved and when the eyes changed et cetera. However, it didn’t take much time before it started to feel normal.”

“What’s great is that they can log on and show off their learning and their work,” she continued. “That made them feel like they had done their part, and I think that sense of achievement was really important.

“We had a great example of this in our last English unit where everyone had to read a speech. The pupil came online and read their speech through the AV1, and everyone cheered afterwards.”

The portable robot was provided with the help of the **Surrey County Council** Access to Education Team.

“I really love my robot, as I can join in with the lessons in class with my friends and my teacher, and interact with them,” said Alexia, who is currently making a phased return to school. “It also makes me feel like I am in the classroom with everyone and lets me see everyone without being seen, as sometimes I don’t feel well.

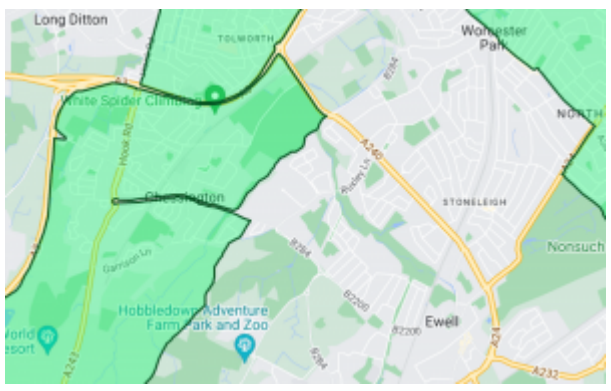
“It allows me to answer questions and to change the colour if I don’t feel well but still want to listen into the lesson. Then my teacher knows I am there but might not ‘put up my hand’ to answer questions.

“I prefer to be in class, but sometimes that’s not possible because I am not well, but it still helps me to feel included in the class.”

“This technology allowed a child to feel included within her class during the toughest period of her and her family’s lives,” added Mr Skelton. “It added a sense of normality and togetherness that could not have been achieved through sending work home.”

M25 diversion cost me £12.50 ULEZ charge

6 February 2024



Driven to despair and a £12.50 charge, Dorset pensioner complains to Transport for London for inadequate signs before the ULEZ charging A243 at the Hook Junction with the A3. She thanks Epsom and Ewell Times for a better explanation of the zone than provided by TfL.

In fact the TfL explanation has some clarity:

“Rushett Lane is outside the ULEZ. At the junction with the A243, the A243 going north is inside the zone, while going south it is outside the zone. Fairoak Lane is outside the zone.”

Moreover, Surrey County Council, as an Highway Authority, has indicated an unwillingness to cooperate with the warning signage.

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Here is her story of woe:

Dear Editor,

I found clearer information from your on-line newspaper than I could from the TfL website.

It's probably a waste of breath on my part but if there is a local battle in the Epsom area to have this phallic extension of the Ulez zone sticking out into Surrey, then count me in. I presume it's to clobber all the tourists going to Chessington Zoo!

On Saturday February 3rd I paid the Ulez congestion charge because I believe my husband and I accidentally drove into the Ulez zone at Hook Junction on the A3 in Surrey without realising it. We had driven up from Dorset on Friday to East Molesey which is outside the Ulez Zone. Then on Saturday morning I took the train from Hampton Court to Vauxhall to pick up my younger son's dog. However there was chaos on the railway in that area due to trespassers on the line and after several hours of delays I finally got a train back to Esher (instead of Hampton Court) where my husband picked me up. We don't normally travel into East Molesey via Esher but was assured by my son that it was outside the Ulez Zone. At the Scilly Isles Roundabout we became confused by signs telling us to follow M25 diversion and joined the Kingston By Pass for a short distance which swept us into the Hook Junction interchange. We did not see any Ulez signs en route so just followed the M25 diversion signs which led us down the A243 past Chessington Zoo and eventually to the M25. We later discovered this was to help motorists avoid extreme traffic congestion at Junction 10 on the M25/A3.

When we got home I checked the Ulez map on my computer because we had heard about an extension of the Ulez zone into Surrey from the Surbiton area and while the online maps lack detail it seemed to me that a short length of the A243 Hook Road running south i.e. away from London has been placed inside the Ulez zone, and by following the diversion signs we had accidentally entered the zone for a mile or so.

I have had no choice but to pay the congestion charge or risk being fined, but I do think it is unfair to place M25 diversion signs on major roundabouts without warning that the diversion can take you through a section of the Ulez zone that isn't even in Greater London.

Out of London visiting pensioners like ourselves, still driving government recommended diesel cars, rely on clear road signs, not trying to read an almost illegible Ulez on-line map on an iPhone.

Yours.

Mrs Geraldine Osment

Related reports:

Signs of Surrey resistance to ULEZ continue

London Mayor confirms drive of ULEZ to Epsom border. ULEZ explainer.

High Court gives ULEZ the green light to Epsom's borders

ULEZ court challenge begins

Epsom youth show a taste for cooking

6 February 2024



On Saturday, 3rd February, three candidates from Epsom participated in the District Young Chef Competition held at Merton College for Rotary Young Chef, along with approximately 14 others from areas including Kingston, Redhill, and Morden.

While negative messages about the state of young people, crime, and issues are often heard, witnessing what took place gives us hope that there are many young, decent individuals who will grow up to become assets to our community. Let's sing their praises!

The participants in the competition had two hours to prepare a healthy two-course meal. The quality of the food by all the young people was amazing, ambitious, tasty, and demonstrated a passion for food.

The day was made even more special by Emma from Rosebery School, who also took part in the local competition recently and was awarded first place for her outstanding salmon dish.

Emma will now move on to the regional round in Hampshire to cook once more. We, of course, congratulate Emma on her outstanding achievement and wish her the best of luck in the next competition.

Thanks also go to Joe from Epsom Rotary, who organized the local competition and is supporting our candidate through to

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the next round.

Epsom Rotary.

Twice led, thrice beaten….

6 February 2024

Sheerwater 4-3 Epsom & Ewell FC. Combined Counties League – Premier Division. Saturday 3rd February.

One of the most concerning afternoons in recent club history took place on Saturday as we made our very first visit to Sheerwater's Eastwood Leisure Centre for a massive League match between the two clubs. Yet, despite the importance of the fixture, we led twice and threw the game away in the final minutes, marking the third match in a row where we have now done this as the home side claimed a 4-3 victory to record their fifth straight win against us.

For the three previous match reports between 16th and 30 January 2024 CLICK here for reports brought to us by Nathan Lambert.

We went into the match with news breaking over the previous 24 hours that we had lost regular players Jaan Stanley and Ollie Thompson who had decided to move on and I found out during the afternoon that over the last week we had also lost George Owusu, Ade Batula and Tommy Williams too. The club hasn't bothered to advise its supporters of any of these departures, or even acknowledge their contributions, leaving long suffering fans to figure things out for themselves; not for the first time as secrecy and paranoia continue to reign at our club. One glance at the FA Full Time site was enough to tell me that we have had no new registered players joining the club since Steve Springett resigned and we took the field with just four substitutes named for this hugely important contest.

In terms of personnel Harvey Keogh came back in for Toby Colwell who was one of the four subs, but this was the only change to the line up from our narrow loss to Jersey Bulls four days earlier.

Despite the backdrop to this match, we actually started very well. There were only 91 seconds on the clock when a good move down the left was laid back for Ethan Nelson-Roberts to deliver the ball into the danger area where Carl Oblitey stretched to guide the ball past Joe Hill from close range in the Sheerwater goal. This was a terrific way to start and whilst Louis McGrave headed over unmarked from a corner soon after our goal, the home threat would prove to be fairly limited in the final third in this opening period.

Oblitey was causing problems and it looks like Springett's final signing will be pivotal to our plight if we are to stay up. He had another chance in the seventh minute after Tijani Eshilokun intercepted a poor defensive pass and set him up, only for our striker to snatch at the ball, puling it wide from just inside the area when he had more time than he realised.

The home side had as much possession in the first half as we did and around the twenty minute mark they sent two balls fizzing straight across our six yard area in opposite directions with no one there to get the vital touch, but we looked likely to increase our lead whenever we went forward and a Nick Wilson free kick was parried by Hill with Nick Inwugwu just millimetres away from getting a touch to the ball first. Oblitey then struck wide from another Eshilokun pass before we extended our lead in the 40th minute. Luke Miller did well down the right and sent in a deep cross that had Hill scrambling. He just managed to reach the ball to claw it away, but only as far as Oblitey and although his chance was blocked, the loose ball reached Lewis Pearch who scooped the ball over the line, off a defender's leg and up into the roof of the net from inside the six yard box. There were shouts for handball from the home side, but I didn't see one, although handballs would go on to play an enormous part in the second half story.

But at the half we went in, fully deserving of the two goal lead and unaware of the disastrous second half that would follow. The hosts clearly changed things and Michael Milne and George Sellick began to cause us real difficulty. An early strike from distance wasn't an issue for Keogh, but a low shot from the right wing caused him to make a good block at the near post, only for the loose ball to be struck against the arm of Reece Tierney with a penalty being awarded. Milne tucked away the penalty in the 51st minute and the home side were on the board.

Tierney was the man penalised for the penalty against Jersey Bulls four days previously, but this one, although it did hit him on the arm, looked a bit harsh and it's not clear exactly how we could have been expected to get out of the way. Having now seen a video of the incident, I don't believe that the arm was in an unnatural position either. Either way though it was now 2-1, but not for long as a low shot in came back off our far post and as it rebounded back into play Frazier Osunkoya reacted first to knock the ball into the net from around six yards. This happened in the 53rd minute and our two goal lead had suddenly evaporated into thin air.

We responded to the setback fairly well though and Oblitey set Pearch up for a low shot that was kept out by the feet of

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Hill before we went ahead again on the hour mark after Miller's cross was blocked by an arm and Wilson stepped up to send the keeper the wrong way from the spot. It was another one of those decisions where in the old days the appeal would have been rejected as it was clearly ball to hand, but with these new interpretations, I don't believe anyone is completely sure of what actually constitutes a handball any more. All you could say I suppose is that the referee was consistent in his approach to both penalties and we were 3-2 up again.

Despite being given this lifeline though, we started to be pushed back with Sellick in particular giving our defenders a very difficult examination and asking the question about why he was causing so much trouble after being fairly anonymous in the opening forty-five. However, Keogh was alert to block his low shot before Sellick got through again, winning a corner after a defender got across to block his shot. A free kick was then headed over from one of his crosses while we picked up three yellow cards, one of which for Wilson, saw the home player flying up in the air as a result. Maybe it looked worse than it was, but this is the fourth match in a row with a yellow card for our Captain and he is better than that.

Sellick drilled a shot across goal before delivering another ball deep to the far post which was headed back into the danger area, only for another handball to be given against Tierney. Again, this looked harsh, but Milne put the spot kick to Keogh's right for the second time in the match and it was 3-3.

In response, Ethan Nelson-Roberts benefitted from a good "no-look" pass from Pearch but chose to shoot from an angle with Miller waiting in the middle and Hill parried the ball to safety, but for the third match in a row we conceded in the closing seconds after Milne wasn't closed down and his shot from around the edge of the area crept into the corner in the 91st minute to complete his hat trick and give Sheerwater a 4-3 lead that they wouldn't have time to relinquish.

There was still time for Milne to fall to the ground in the middle of the field, whereupon he picked up a second yellow card for apparent simulation. It was a bizarre decision from a referee who had become a little too trigger happy and incensed the home side to the extent that one of their Management was shown a red card in the "discussions" that followed the final whistle. We were no angels either as the referee was also pursued at the final whistle by our Vice-Chairman Barry Gartell, claiming vociferously that the referee didn't understand the handball law. He may well have had a point, although I'm aware that the guidelines are often changing in this respect, but it wasn't a very good look for our club.

Our new Management team now have some significant work to do in bringing in some new players ahead of a brutal run of fixtures coming up throughout the month of February, but the manner of this defeat will also need to be questioned, along with our game Management ability as this is now three points dropped in the last three matches that may well prove costly in a relegation battle that Sheerwater showed more likelihood of escaping than we do right now.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Ethan Brazier, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Nick Inwugwu, Reece Tierney, Nick Wilson (c), Luke Miller, Thompson Adeyemi, Carl Oblitey, Tijani Eshilokun, Lewis Pearch

Subs: Sirak Negassi for Pearch (88)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Red, blue and orange go Green in belt protest

6 February 2024



Epsom High Street Saturday 3rd February witnessed political parties unite against housing development on the Borough's Green Belt. The Labour Party, Conservative Party, Liberal Democrat Party, Gina Miller's True and Fair Party and the Green Party assembled outside the Metro Bank.

Carrying banners and making speeches, the protestors rallied against the Council's apparent rejection of previous demands to remove Green Belt land from the list of potential housing development sites in the draft Local Plan.

Amid controversy surrounding claims of confidential briefings and secret legal opinions influencing Councillors the protestors called for full transparency.

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Gina Miller leader and Parliamentary candidate for True and Fair Party said: “The plan being progressed by the Council to build on precious greenbelt is not based on truthful data, facts, housing requirements, environmental or full brownfield audits.

Once greenbelt is gone, it’s gone forever. People across all wards that make up the Epsom and Ewell constituency deserve 100% transparency and honesty and to be assured that decision-making that affects their lives, homes and area are not tainted by conflicts of interest, incompetence or shortermism”

Conservative Parliamentary hopfeul **Mhairi Fraser** said: “I will fight to the end to save Epsom’s Green Belt, just as your Conservative councillors Bernie Muir and Kieran Persand have tirelessly done alongside Chris Grayling MP – and that is in addition to the thousands of residents who have signed petitions, written to their councillors, and protested in public to make their voices heard. Once the Green Belt is gone, it is gone forever; that would be an absolute travesty, given our entire actual housing need can be met by building on brownfield sites. Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is there to serve *us*, and it is unacceptable that they are ignoring the very clear will of residents, operating in secret, and threatening to irreversibly destroy the place all of us have chosen to make our home.”

Mark Todd, Chair of Epsom and Ewell Constituency Labour Party said “Over eighty per cent of local residents responded to the recent Council survey saying that they want Epsom and Ewell’s green belt preserved. I have talked to thousands of residents over the past eight years on the street and on the doorsteps of Epsom and Ewell and I believe that figure is accurate.

I have looked in great detail at Council documents and plans including all the brownfield sites currently available, enough for 3,700 homes. Another 150 can be added by redeveloping West Park Hospital giving us an extra 3,850 homes in the borough. Then there are the Longmead and Kiln Lane industrial estates that can also be redeveloped. These areas could become a mix of residential, retail and office space, generating many more jobs and homes per square foot.

I believe there is a clear path to preserving Epsom and Ewell’s green belt and building lots of social and truly affordable homes for residents and key workers on these brownfield sites. By truly affordable I mean apartments of varying sizes costing £200-£400,000 rather than houses typically costing £600,000 to £1 Million in Epsom and Ewell that never can be truly affordable.”

Helen Maguire, Prospective Parliamentary Candidate in Epsom and Ewell for the Liberal Democrats said: “Local Liberal Democrat councillors have consistently argued that old ONS data is being used to determine the number of houses required but this is falling on the deaf ears of this Conservative Government. If up to date data was used, fewer houses would need to be built in Epsom & Ewell. Not only is Epsom & Ewell Borough Council being forced to use old data, but we know that despite Conservative government promises to allow local Councils to decide what is best for their area and to exclude the Greenbelt if they wish, this is simply not the case!

Local authorities are being forced to build on the Greenbelt because of successive and cynical conservative policies. In neighbouring Mole Valley (where Ashtead and Leatherhead form part of the new constituency), the Liberal Democrat run council have managed to save 99.3% of the Greenbelt. Last week Mole Valley Liberal Democrat councillors were faced with a stark choice between either continuing with the Local Plan as it is with 0.7% in the Greenbelt or to remove the Greenbelt sites which could put the local plan back another year and expose more Greenbelt sites to planning applications from developers.

Simultaneously the Conservative housing minister Lee Rowley sent them a letter informing them they must not withdraw

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the plan or delay further. An impossible decision! The Conservatives are deaf to local communities and their housing needs. It's time for them to go!"

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When a meeting is not a meeting, in brief.

Mystery Local Plan critic revealed

Councillors belted-up on Green Belt?

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"Audit and Scrutiny" under scrutiny

6 February 2024



Every day the **Epsom and Ewell Times** brings you a fresh chess puzzle to solve. Harder to solve than any chess puzzle run so far is what, if anything, at a meeting in the Epsom and Ewell Town Hall Chamber on 1st February of the Audit and Scrutiny committee, was actually resolved on the question of how to get items on the agenda.

We don't want to get in the way of today's puzzle, contained in the following transcript of a Council debate, but in fairness to our readers, we should first give a few clues.

Opposition Councillors **Lawrence** and **Ames** had both advance requested items to be on the agenda of the meeting. Both requests were refused. One of the rejected items requested was the question "how to get an item on the agenda?" (!)

That issue then in fact became the matter discussed after a question was asked by Cllr Lawrence on the committee's annual work programme that had come up for debate.

Cllr. Ames disagreed with Cllr. **Leach** (the Committee's Vice-Chair) on the latter's statement that the rules were contradictory and needed re-writing. Cllr. Ames said the rules were clear and an item should go on an agenda if requested by any councillor. Cllr. Leach stated he agreed with Cllr Ames. And that is where things are a bit puzzling.

The Council officer implied that a request for a matter to be on the agenda might be rejected if to deal with it would take up too much officers' time preparing for the meeting. Cllr. Leach said the point of the committee was, for example, to investigate whether Council practices could be improved and money saved. If that cannot occur because of the resources that would be taken up by such enquiries it follows that the committee may be a waste of money itself.

Over to you to solve this puzzle.

Submit your answers on our online contact form or by email to admin@epsomandewelltimes.com

The TRANSCRIPT:

Audit and Scrutiny Committee 1st February 2024:

Bridger = Cllr Steve Bridger (RA Stamford Ward and Audit and Scrutiny Committee Chair). Leach = Cllr Robert Leach (RA Nonsuch Ward). Lawrence = Cllr James Lawrence (LibDem College Ward). Ames = Cllr Chris Ames (Labour Court Ward). Bercher = Andrew Bercher (Interim Director of Corporate Services).

Bridger:

Move on to item 8, which is the work programme.

Bercher:

Thank you, Chair. Yes, this is the committee's annual work programme, and again, it has the planned activities for the next few months. This is detailed, and any changes feature in the footnotes at the bottom of each page. So again, happy for any comments on this one.

Bridger:

Do we have any questions at all for it?

Lawrence:

Thank you, Chair. I'm just going to carry on from an email that I was raising about this. So, I was wanting to have an agenda item—maybe there's more proof for a work plan on how councillors add scrutiny items or agenda items to this committee because I know at some parts in the constitution, we get given a right to add an agenda item, but I was also told it was at the chair's discretion. So, I just wanted to check, do councillors, as, for example, as members of the committee, do we have the right to add them, or is it a qualified right with the chair's permission? Thank you.

Bridger:

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It is. As long as you submit a written request, yes, we can put things onto the agenda. But it has to be within the correct time frame; obviously, things have got to be added, etc. No problem. Okay.

Lawrence:

Thanks, yeah, because I did send an email—I can't remember the exact date it was, but it was a while ago. It was about asking for an agenda item. About December. It was asking for an agenda item for the committee on how we have a scrutiny action or some discussion or to say note to the steps for it. So, I remember other committees asking about it, and it wasn't very clear to me how that process works. I just wanted to check if that's something that's possible to add to the work plan. Thank you.

Bercher:

Thank you, Councillor. I think there's an element of it that depends on this: because if there is a big piece of scrutiny work that the committee wants to carry out, then that needs to be resourced. And it needs to be resourced not only by officers but potentially by members who are going to then form a separate group to go and look into whatever particular issue it might be. And when I've worked with these things in the past typically there's been a little working group that's been set up, and members have met over a number of weeks, possibly months, in order to look into things and have worked alongside officers in order to gather data, analyse data, assess, produce a report, and then bring a report back to committee.

So that kind of scrutiny activity can be quite resource-intensive. And currently, unless it's on the work programme and is resourced, then we won't have the capacity to do it. But it depends on what it is. If someone says, I'd like to hear at the next committee something about X, and that's a relatively important thing but it's an update from a particular piece of work which is already in hand. I don't know; I'm surmising here. Then that might be relatively easy to do. So in the way that with the chair, we've said that we need a report every time we meet on complaints and ICO and something like that that wasn't previously programmed, but it's something that we've been able to accommodate, and very, very happy to do that. So I think it's with your discretion as well, chairs, to what gets on the agenda.

Leach:

I think I can take the matter a little further. I had a meeting with the legal officer. It was on a ward issue, but the conversation strayed into this area. Mr. Bercher, is quite correct in saying that a scrutiny report can be very work-intensive. Yes, it can. It can also be not intensive at all. It could be something where a person could just sit down there on the spot and probably write out a report. A scrutiny really should be, as I understand it, limited to an area of the council's work where we believe that work could be done better, it could be done more quickly and for less cost, or easily. And it is possible that having done the work, we might well conclude that we are doing it as well as it can be done, no changes needed.

I think what Councillor Lawrence is suggesting is there are areas of concern. That's not really a scrutiny issue, but I think it's an area where if you have a concern, and I see this committee as being totally non-partisan. So a Liberal Democrat or a Labour member has exactly the same rights as an RA member to have their concerns dealt with. It could be that just an informal conversation behind the scenes which would then be relayed back to you might be a better way than actually trying to go through a whole scrutiny procedure.

Lawrence:

Thank you both. That makes sense. I understand why you want to have a discussion first before coming to a full meeting. I have some other different agenda items, but I'll see if anyone else wants to ask questions. Thank you.

Ames:

I remain a little bit unclear. I'm trying to reconcile the answer that you gave, Chair, just now about putting an item on the agenda with the response that Councillor Lawrence got when he ironically requested that this issue be placed on the agenda. We're talking about the very issue of getting an issue on the agenda, and that was refused. And it was reported to Councillor Lawrence that this was your view, that this didn't need to be placed on the agenda. I'm trying to reconcile the various responses about this being a subjective decision with the very clear statement in the operating procedure that sets out an unfettered right for councillors to request that an issue be put on the agenda for this committee, any councillor, not just a member of this committee. And that should happen.

What the framework says: Any councillor who wishes to have an item included on the agenda of this committee should give written notice of the item to the scrutiny officer. If the scrutiny officer receives such a notification, he will, in consultation with the committee chair and vice-chair, include it on the first available agenda of the committee for consideration by the committee. I don't see the chair having a veto in that procedure or making a subjective decision.

This provision puts into the council's constitution something that would be in statute for a council that didn't work on the cabinet system. I don't see it as being something that the chair is entitled to reject. There's obviously a discussion about what would be the first available agenda, but I can't see this committee operating its scrutiny role effectively if it's within the gift of the committee chair and the vice-chair, who are both from the ruling party of this administration, to veto requests for something to be brought to the attention of this committee.

It simply isn't possible to reconcile the explanations that we've been given with a very clear statement in the operating framework that there is an unfettered right for councillors to place an item on the agenda of this committee. These are not subjective decisions that are being taken, judgments being taken by the chair, it's to be included on the first available agenda. It is quite clear in the operating framework, and both Councillor Lawrence and myself have had requests for something to be placed on the first available agenda rebuffed. This committee, in this sense, is not operating in line with the constitution and the operating framework. It couldn't be clearer in the operating framework that there is an unfettered right. Things go wrong in local authorities when people are trying to bring this to the attention of a scrutiny committee, and those items are not able to be discussed. So, it's a matter of great concern that this is happening.

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Leach:

I'm not aware of the two issues that you refer to, but if you could tell me either publicly now or perhaps privately we'd certainly look into them. The constitution on how you get an item onto this agenda is actually contradictory, as you know. We have no less than 18 versions of the constitution in the last five and a half years, and the result of it is that we have now improved a constitution to the level where it is poor. We still have further to go. I mean, it is a badly drafted document, and in fact, the constitution contradicts itself. I've had a conversation with a view to drafting it into something which is more coherent, which will be the best plan. All this is just basically an idea I've had and a conversation I've had with the legal officer. It's got no further than that, but it is a matter that I certainly would like to take forward to make it clearer.

Ames:

I think we're a little bit going around in circles. What Councillor Lawrence has asked for is for this very issue to be placed on the agenda for this meeting, and that request was rebuffed. That's a very clear explanation about what was requested.

If you feel that this item in the framework, which I've read, is in any way unclear, we clearly need to have a discussion on that because it's fundamental to how this committee operates.

If members of this committee, or indeed any other councillor, Councillor Coley, for example, is not able to place an item on the agenda for this committee, as is their clear right here, and somebody says that it's because there's some kind of anomaly in the constitution, we need to have that discussion. This committee cannot operate as it's set out and intended to in the constitution and operating framework if the committee chair has a veto over what can be placed on the agenda. It's simply not what it says in the constitution and the operating framework.

Leach:

You're absolutely correct. That's why I believe that part of the constitution needs to be rewritten. And my idea, and this is purely my idea, it's not an RA group's, it's not even the chairman's view, but my view is if someone puts forward a motion or requests something to go onto the agenda, there should be, first of all, the consideration as to whether it is acceptable. I'm sure your request would be perfectly reasonable, but we have to allow for the fact that you could have people putting vexatious or malicious matters onto the agenda, and I believe there needs to be a filter process there whereby you could turn around and say this is not acceptable.

As for the constitution, if the member is dissatisfied, then that decision will come to this committee as to whether we would be prepared to do a scrutiny. Now that's my suggestion that I'm happy to forward and will be putting forward. I believe that it's necessary to have a filter to stop somebody just filling up the agenda with all sorts of things that aren't scrutiny items while still protecting the rights of members. I stress that's my personal opinion. It's not necessarily something that's going to be happening.

Lawrence:

All right, thank you, Vice-Chair. I understand there needs to be some sort of filter in what comes onto committee or agenda items. I know I'd certainly feel that way if I was the chair of a committee. Just for clarification on what I was also asking for the agenda item, it was what I was just talking about previously to Councillor Ames. It was about this committee, for example, noting the process of how a scrutiny operation would work, certainly would be useful for me, for example, because being a new councillor, I haven't seen a scrutiny operation. I haven't seen what can be added to a committee agenda. I haven't seen what can be a scrutiny item or how the process works or how that filters back to the committee. So, that was the point. That was what I'd requested to go on the agenda item. That's just for a bit of clarification and thank you.

Bridger:

Any further questions?

Thank you,

Ames.

Thank you. I'm just making one very brief comment, and I'll leave it there because we're not getting anywhere. I'm quite shocked by Councillor Leach's comments. We have to have this committee operate as it is set out in the operating framework and not as Councillor Leach would like it to be. I think that's a fairly fundamental process of how a council operates under its constitution and operating framework. We have to follow the constitution and not some version of the constitution that's in the head of a vice-chair that would be like that if he had his way. And we're not following the process, and we really need to follow the constitution. Otherwise, the whole idea of having a council that operates constitutionally is out the window. Thank you.

Leach:

Sorry, can I say, I again, I agree with you. I outlined how I believe the constitutional issue could be sorted out. Until that has been implemented, that's been put to the council and been voted and supported. That is not part of the constitution. I did it as a courtesy to this committee to sort of give you forward notice as to a change that I hope to be able to make to the constitution to resolve it. But Councillor Ames, until that change has been made, if it ever does get made, yes, we have to operate under the constitution as it is. I think your criticism of me was a little unfair.

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Petition to reclaim Horton Cemetery from property speculator

6 February 2024



The trustees of the Epsom charity **The Friends of Horton Cemetery** have appealed to the public to sign an **online petition** on **change.org** that calls for Europe's largest asylum cemetery to be returned to the community. In a bizarre decision in 1983 the Epsom five acre resting place of 9000 patients was transferred by the NHS to a property speculator. Norman Fowler was the Conservative Secretary of State for Health at the time. The property speculator was a darling of the privatisation movement having been the first to obtain and "rejuvenate" Council tower-blocks. A former local Councillor serving Epsom and Ewell at the time recalls no efforts to transfer the Cemetery to the Council, despite it being in law the "burial authority".

It has been neglected ever since with no planning application ever being submitted by the owner. Why he holds on to it is a mystery to the trustees of the Charity. According to Lionel Blackman, the Charity's secretary and local solicitor: "Mr Heighes, who owns Marque Securities, has never replied to any of our correspondence seeking a dialogue about the future of the Cemetery. In my opinion only a special Act of Parliament could allow the Cemetery to be used for any purpose other than a Cemetery. Even using it as "amenity woodland" would be a breach of its recognised planning status."

The Charity's volunteers continue to research and publish on the **Charity's website** the lives of those buried in the Cemetery.

Image: Horton Cemetery in 1952. Well maintained like this until sold in 1983

Complementing this work are the initiatives of the Surrey History Centre (SHC):

Glass slides of patients at the Manor Hospital, Epsom
Did you know that SHC holds a sizeable collection of glass plate negatives, yet to be identified, of male and female patients at The Manor Hospital, Epsom.

A project is currently underway to digitise, identify and catalogue the loose negatives of male and female patients in 6317/3/- that date from the 1890s to the 1910s. They are a fascinating and moving portrait of the men and women who were admitted to the Manor Hospital, and a valuable resource for anyone researching individual patients or generally interested in the history of mental health treatment in the late 19th to early 20th century.

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The first stage has now been completed, comprising 79 high resolution digital photographs of male patients, and thumbnail images have been added to the online catalogue (6317/3/-), see http://tinyurl.com/55sasppx.

As well as identifying the patient name and hospital number, importantly the catalogue entries include a cross-reference to the relevant case book in Surrey History Centre reference 6282/14/-. The case book entries, which provide a detailed account of the patient's illness and treatment, also include a photograph of the patient, and this has enabled us to match and identify the glass negatives.

For the next stage, there is one more box of slides of male patients to complete, and we'll then continue with the larger collection of female patient slides.

For more on the history of Manor Hospital, see the Exploring Surrey's Past website.

Was your ancestor in an asylum? This talk traces the history of the care of people living with mental illness or learning disability from the 18th century through to the 1990s. Using the records of Surrey's earliest private asylums, county institutions at Springfield, Brookwood and Netherne, charitable foundations like Royal Earlswood and Holloway Sanatorium and the 'Epsom Cluster' of Horton, Long Grove, The Manor, St Ebba's and West Park, it traces the history of mental health care in Surrey, and uses medical records to uncover the hidden stories of individual patients, including some from Hampshire. It draws on photographs and other records rescued when these vast hospitals finally closed to explore daily life in a psychiatric institution over the course of three centuries.

Tracing the History and Experiences of Our Asylum Ancestors, 1700-c1990

26 February 2024, 6pm to 7pm Online
A talk by Julian Pooley for Hampshire Archives & Local Studies

This talk will take place online, 6.00 to 7.00pm Tickets £6.00. For further information and to book visit:
Hampshire County Council (hants.gov.uk)

Thames Water's reputation going down the drain

6 February 2024

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Bottled water station at Artington Park & Ride

Thames Water's spending on infrastructure is "woefully inadequate", its behaviour a "disgrace", and direct lines of communications to MPs "unhelpful" – a meeting into the "largest ever" water outages in "recent history" heard.

Last November tens of thousands of homes in and around Guildford and Godalming were left without water when the utility company failed to deal with the impact of Storm Ciarán. Some 20,346 homes were cut off for more than three hours, and 14,520 for 12 hours or more hours – including hospitals and schools.

So far Thames Water has paid out £1.7million pounds in compensation to those impacted.

The outage led to chaotic scenes as people became increasingly angry with the privately owned water company, with reports of staff and volunteers being verbally abused and spat at.

Addressing the Tuesday, January 31, meeting of Guildford Borough Council's overview and scrutiny committee was Thames Water's Paul Wetton. He said it was "By far the largest ever we've had to manage in recent history".

The utility company, which reported an 11 per cent increase in its underlying revenue in its interim 2023/24 accounts to £1.2 billion, needed up to 16 tankers to prop up the network in order to feed water directly to cut off hospitals during the outage. It also delivered 750,000 litres of bottled water to customers described as "priority".

Thames Water's Tess Fayers acknowledged the huge disruption and apologised for all the impacted homes, businesses and other critical operators such as hospitals and schools that were cut off. She said: "I'm also aware that there is also a sense of heightened unease about the water supply with a number of issues being raised to us recently which can't be very helpful to the community. We are here because we are committed to putting things right. We want to make sure we do the right thing by the community and provide you with a constant supply of water."

Guildford is prone to water problems. All the water available to residents is on a closed network. So if there are problems, extra resources cannot be brought in. Most of the water that goes into the network comes from the ground with the remaining 40 per cent drawn from rivers before being treated for human use. Daily demand sits at around 50 megalitres, the equivalent of 50 million bottles of water. The system essentially runs at maximum capacity with new water being drawn in to replace what is going out. When the power at the processing plants went down during Storm Ciarán, that process stopped and the water ran dry.

People on the tops of hills were impacted first and the last to be restored. Capacity in Guildford is so tightly packed that it's difficult to find the capacity to enable the investment, the meeting heard.

Tess Fayers said: "Communications were bland, lacked technical information that we should be more bold putting forward." She added: "Not telling our customers does not help and leaves more people in the dark. Another thing we learned, in all honesty, it's sometimes unhelpful to have a line of communications running between ourselves and potentially a member of parliament – which doesn't always allow us to manage the message in the best possible way."

To improve matters, the meeting heard, an "enhanced" leadership team has been put in place and investment is being made, although capacity issues complicates the matter.

Councillor Danielle Newson (LD, Tillingbourne) said: " "Your infrastructure spending is woeful completely inadequate. Telling us you can't actually tell us what you know is just disgraceful when we are paying your bills and your bonuses."

Deputy leader of the council, Cllr Tom Hunt, said: "I just wonder how many residents in Guildford or Waverley would choose Thames Water today."

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NESCOT Saturday academies for the young

6 February 2024

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Got a young person passionate about animals, cookery, e-sports, film making or another hands-on potential career? Our next Saturday Academy starts 24 Feb 2024 – book now!

The next set of Saturday academies for young people starts soon and places are filling fast. The academies are a popular set of 4-week Saturday courses which offer: Practical, enjoyable, hands-on learning. A taste of a subject for possible a career or further study. A chance to develop a leisure interest. Places in all subjects cost £95 for four three-hour sessions **Click here to book**

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We hold Saturday Academies for young people at Nescot in Ewell, near Epsom. The Academies are fun and instructive Saturday courses that last four weeks. They start at 10am and finish at 1pm on consecutive Saturdays. The Academies will all start on Saturday 24th Feb 2024. **The total cost for all four Saturdays in any Academy is £95. Click on the link below for full details.**

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When a meeting is not a meeting, in brief.

6 February 2024



The vexed issue of whether a “members’ briefing” is a “meeting” or not has received some attention of late. Anxiety was aroused by fears that a “confidential” meeting of **Epsom and Ewell** Councillors might effectively determine whether Green Belt land would remain in the Local Plan as potential sites for housing development. The “meeting” on 10th January was “met” by a small group of protestors who had caught wind of the event.

According to Cllr. **Alison Kelly** (LibDem Stamford) “I did tell a friend that I was going to a member’s briefing. I didn’t realize that I was not to disclose that. I just gave that out because a friend asked me why I can’t come out. I don’t understand why they cannot be publicly declared as meetings.”

She revealed this at the meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee of 25th January. This *was* a meeting and the press and public were allowed in as usual. During a debate about the Council’s new “Communication Strategy” Cllr Kelly also said: “we’ve recently faced accusations over secrecy with response to the Local Plan Green Belt members briefings and some legal guidance; we’ve also been asked to remain silent on some matters including the existence of a briefing meeting and we seem to have had quite a lot of part two sessions *[sections of Council meetings that are closed to the press and public]*. How does this strategy help us to address the issue of secrecy levelled at us by the residents?”

In response RA leader Cllr **Hannah Dalton** (Stoneleigh) said: “The purpose of member briefings is for members *[i.e., councillors]* to be informed and in a safe and confidential space to ask questions, to understand information, to obtain data from officers, whether from our council or other councils or the LGA *[Local Government Association]* or whomever. To

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then provide a steer to… what then comes to committee."

The Council's law officer advised: "I don't think there's problem actually saying that you're coming to a council briefing. If you went further to say I'm coming to a council briefing on xxx subject then that is disclosing at times confidential information."

Cllr **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley Vale) told the Epsom and Ewell Times 15th January: that the 10th January "members' briefing", "…was not a secret meeting; it just wasn't a public meeting. I stated publicly at the September LPPC Committee and extraordinary full Council on 24 October 2023 that Member briefings regarding the Local Plan would be taking place during this time period assuming the local plan was unpaused by full council, which it was."

Epsom and Ewell's Member of Parliament **Chris Grayling** has weighed in and on 31st January told constituents: "The Council has now decided to press ahead with its plans, and while details of the updated proposals remain confidential, I understand from Councillors in the ruling group that they continue to include substantial green belt development in the area. This is despite the fact that existing brownfield sites can deliver most of what is needed."

He urged residents to make their views known to the Council.

Related reports:

Councillors belted-up on Green Belt?

Mystery Local Plan critic revealed

Image: Cllr Alison Kelly at the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting

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Chalking up a victory for the Hogsmill

6 February 2024



The **South East Rivers Trust** (SERT) has completed the construction of a 2,000m 2 pollution filter which will bring major benefits to Epsom and Ewell's **Hogsmill** chalk stream.

When planting takes place in the spring, the newly constructed Chamber Mead wetland will protect and improve 5km of river downstream, filtering pollutants and becoming a haven for wildlife.

The project has been carried out in partnership with **Epsom & Ewell Borough Council**, which owns and manages the **Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve**, a popular greenspace which will now benefit from this new community asset.

The wetland is a crucial project for the Hogsmill, which suffers adversely from pollution such as urban road runoff, raw sewage discharges and misconnected plumbing that sends drain water directly into the river. Water from the Green Lanes Stream has been diverted through a sediment trap and two wetlands, with filtered, cleaner water reconnected to the Hogsmill downstream of the famous Stepping Stones.

News about the wetland's completion comes in the week of **World Wetlands Day**, on Friday 2nd February. Dr **Bella Davies**, Co-CEO of SERT, said: "We are delighted that the construction phase of this important wetlands project has now been completed. It is destined to become a jewel in the crown of the Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve. The public has shown great enthusiasm for this project, and we will soon be calling on volunteers and community groups to add the plants that will really make the wetlands flourish as a magnet for wildlife. The water quality improvements that will result from the wetlands are designed to help the river become a healthier place for all, especially wildlife that thrive in a chalk stream, such as brown trout."

Councillor **John Beckett**, (RA Auriol) Chair of the Environment Committee at Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, said: "The council is committed to protecting and enhancing biodiversity in our borough, as per our Biodiversity Action Plan 2020-30. This partnership project with the South East Rivers Trust will help to ensure that the Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve is a place where nature can thrive; from woodpeckers, hedgehogs and bats – to species whose numbers have dwindled such as water voles, fish and eels. We know our residents cherish this Local Nature Reserve and I hope that many can join the community planting days, which are a unique opportunity to be part of this fantastic project."

SERT is now preparing a series of community planting days, to take place in the Spring. These will give residents the chance to plant the vegetation to help the wetlands counter pollutants.

Schools, community groups and residents will be given opportunities to install plants that have been specifically selected to filter pollution, trap sediments and attract a variety of wildlife. Plants selected include yellow flag iris, ragged robin, purple loosestrife and brooklime.

In time, SERT will also offer guided walks and outdoor education sessions for school children. A nature trail is planned for families to interact with the wetlands as they develop, alongside information boards which will detail the reasons why the wetlands were needed and the types of wildlife that should be attracted.

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Supported by the Hogsmill Catchment Partnership, the project has received funding from The Coca-Cola Foundation, Natural England (through the Species Recovery Programme), the Environment Agency, Surrey County Council, the Rivers Trust, the Zoological Society of London, Garfield Weston Foundation and Thames Water, with in-kind support from the landowner Epsom & Ewell Borough Council. The new wetlands are part of the wider Replenish programme in partnership with the Coca-Cola Foundation and the Rivers Trust. The aim of Replenish is to restore millions of litres of water in this and other local catchments, in turn improving biodiversity.

The construction of the wetland is expected to cost £1 million. We are proud to have a good mix of funding for this project, including private funding from Coca Cola, Thames Water and charitable grants, as well as public funding from the Environment Agency, Natural England and Surrey County Council.

It is estimated there are 200 chalk streams across the world, with about 160 of them in England, mostly in the south.

Related reports:

Voles let loose on the Hogsmill

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Local sewage uploaded

“Garden of Eden” coming to West Ewell as Wetlands Plan is approved. Will this stop pollution?

Minister gets heavy on a Local Plan delay

6 February 2024



A Surrey borough where the house prices are “amongst the highest in England” has been ordered not to delay its home building programme. The Epsom and Ewell neighbour borough of **Mole Valley District Council** was ready to pull the plug on its planning bible – which sets out the development it would allow to meet its housing targets.

The council was to debate informing the planning inspector of its decision to withdraw its draft local plan but a last minute intervention by the Department of Levelling up, Housing and Communities has ruled this out. Instead the council agreed to continue working to set out clear guidelines for developers.

In a letter to the council outlining his decision, **Lee Rowley, Minister of State for Housing**, Planning and Building Safety, said: “I am writing to you over concerns that Mole Valley District Council may withdraw the emerging local plan from examination. The Government is clear that local plans are at the heart of the planning system, and it is essential that up-to-date plans are in place and are kept up to date.”

He said: “Each local planning authority must identify the strategic priorities for the development and use of land in the authority’s area, and policies to address those priorities must be set out in the local planning authority’s development plan documents such as the local plan.”

The last time the council had an up-to-date plan was in 2009 and work on its replacement has begun in earnest. Withdrawing now, Mr Rowley said would extend the council’s time in limbo. He said: “Withdrawing the plan from examination would be a clear failure by the council.”

Since Mole Valley District Council’s last masterplan, more than 90 per cent of all English local authority plans have been updated – pulling out now would leave the borough with “one of the oldest adopted local plans in the country”. It has left the council operating under out-of-date policies, given the amount of change in the 14 years since it was adopted.

Mr Rowley added: “Housing affordability is a significant problem in Mole Valley and the ratio of average house prices to average wages is amongst the highest in England. I can therefore conclude that there is higher housing pressure. Considering the average time taken to prepare a local plan is seven years and we are approaching the phased introduction of a new planning system, withdrawing the plan at this stage could only lead to significant further delay whilst a new plan is prepared. Intervening would therefore accelerate plan production given the current plan is submitted and at examination.”

The order to proceed with the plan will remain in force until formally withdrawn by the secretary of state.

Councillor **Margaret Cooksey**, Cabinet Member for Planning said: “The Minister of State for Housing, Planning and Building Safety has today [January 25] issued Mole Valley District Council with a direction not to withdraw its local plan from the examination-in-public at the Council meeting tonight. Previous to the new direction, three options had been available to MVDC: Withdrawal of the plan; continuation of the plan, as submitted (including Green Belt sites); request that the planning Inspector change the plan to remove all Green Belt sites.

“This new direction takes option A away from us and requires Mole Valley District Council to report monthly to the

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Minister’s officials on the progress of the examination. It will remain in force until the examination concludes with the Inspector’s report.”

How far will £500m go for Surrey Councils?

6 February 2024



Additional government funding for local councils will “go some way” towards easing the pain felt by local authorities struggling to balance their books – although calls remain for greater reform.

Communities Secretary Michael Gove announced that English councils would get a share of £500m for their social care grant, and a share of £100m increase in core spending power.

It comes amid a backdrop of councils facing difficult financial times, with Woking declaring itself effectively bankrupt, Runnymede being served a Best Value Notice, and Surrey County Council admitting it would need to make serious cuts and increase tax by the maximum allowable in order to have a legal budget.

Further pressure has come after a letter from MPs pushed for the extra cash ahead of this year’s general election. In a written statement on Wednesday, January 24, Mr Gove said the extra money would enable councils to provide “crucial social care services for their local communities, particularly children”.

Councils have also been told their funding guarantee, the minimum annual increase available to all authorities would increase by a percentage point, from 3 per cent to 4 per cent, something Mr Gove described as a “key ask” from district councils. He said: “We have listened to councils across England about the pressures they’re facing and have always stood ready to help those in need. This additional £600 million support package illustrates our commitment to local government. We are in their corner, and we support the incredible and often unsung work they do day-to-day to support people across the country.”

Surrey County Council leader, Councillor **Tim Oliver** (Conservative), is also the chair of the network of county councils. He said the announcement would “go some way to easing the pressures and in particular address the escalating demand and costs of delivering social care and home to school transport. Whilst this extra funding will undoubtedly help us protect valued frontline services, councils, of course, still face difficult decisions when setting their budgets for 2024/25.”

He called for the reformation of local government finance and to how services were provided adding: “Councils require a long-term financial settlement to enable us to plan for, and meet, the demand from our growing elderly populations and the more complex needs of residents requiring social care. This must be coupled with a comprehensive reform programme to bring in line the funding envelope available to enable us to deliver effectively our statutory responsibilities.”

The majority of the funding is ringfenced for social care – this is a service usually provided by top-tier local authorities – in this area it is provided by Surrey County Council.

The £500 million pounds announced by Government is to cover all top tier local authorities in England.
According to Surrey County Council’s most recent set of accounts, it alone spent £727m on Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture, and a further £680 million for adult social care.

For smaller local authorities such as Woking Borough Council, which has debts of about £2 billion, the extra funding from central government works out to be about £152,000 a year, the Local Democracy Reporting Service understands.

Additionally, the four percent announced increase is below the current rate of inflation which at the time of writing was 4.2 per cent – meaning the offer, while better than before, is still a net loss for local authorities.

Deputy Leader of Woking Borough Council, Will Forster said: “We welcome this additional financial support announced by the Government yesterday. This goes some way to filling the funding gap in local government. The majority of this funding will go towards meeting the increasing cost of delivering adult social care by county and unitary councils, whilst we expect the remaining funding to go towards district and borough councils, like ourselves, to alleviate the impact of rising inflation and increased demand on our core services.”

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Image: Tim Oliver credit Surrey Live

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