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For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

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Epsom centre brings hope to youth who need support

20 January 2024



With one of three Surrey centres based in **Epsom** the multi-agency **Hope Service** gets a glowing **Ofsted report**. Published last month the report finds that the Hope Service, provided by Surrey County Council and Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Trust, 'continues to be an outstanding school' following its previous 'Outstanding' inspection outcome in 2018.

The Hope Service, which is registered as a Pupil Referral Unit, offers a 'Day Programme' with a curriculum comprising education, therapies and activities. This is part of the broader multi-agency **Hope Service offer in Surrey** which supports young people age 11-18 who are experiencing complex mental health, emotional, social and behavioural challenges which cannot be met by one agency alone. The Hope Service works with the young person, their family and wider network to offer support to try and prevent placement breakdown or the need for a psychiatric hospital admission.

In a glowing report, Ofsted inspectors note that 'pupils flourish at this inspirational school' due to the 'nurturing relationships they form with staff as soon as they join'. Inspectors also found that young people receive 'highly specialist support, in every aspect of learning and development' helping them to grow in confidence and in turn 'realise their full potential and aspire to a bright future when they leave school'.

The report also highlights that 'staff take careful steps to construct an ambitious curriculum for every pupil', with pupil voice central to this and pupils' views captured 'at each stage when planning individual curriculum programmes'.

Inspectors found that the school has a 'palpable air of serenity', empowering individuals to have a 'clear sense of self-identity and autonomy' and readying them for adulthood. The school also offers a significant amount of expert advice and support to the wider community via their outreach work and parent and carer support and information sessions, with parents and carers crediting the school for 'giving their child hope for a positive and healthy future'.

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning, said;

"I'm thrilled to see that this incredible school continues to be recognised as Outstanding by Ofsted. One of the priorities in the Surrey Health and Wellbeing Strategy is to support children and young people with their mental health, including focusing on access to early, appropriate support to prevent further escalation of need, and supporting the emotional wellbeing of parents and care givers.

"The outcomes the Hope Service achieves for Surrey children are remarkable, with staff being able to provide the support young people need to meet their emotional and mental health needs, while at the same time providing a top quality education delivered with high levels of personalisation, kindness and belief in each young person.

"Young people and their families come into contact with this service at a challenging time in their lives, and its vital that we and partners are able to provide a high quality service upon which they can rely."

The full inspection report can be found on the Ofsted website: **50234890 (ofsted.gov.uk).**

You can read more about the Hope Service, including the school offer, assessment and out of hours 'Extended Hope' crisis service, and free fortnightly online parent and carer support sessions on a range of topics on the **Hope Service** website.

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Mystery Local Plan critic revealed

20 January 2024



Epsom and Ewell Times reported in full the speech from a member of the public at the Licensing, Planning and Policy Committee (LPPC) of 22nd November 2023. He addressed Councillors forcefully on a response to the Government's revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). See report here.

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Undeterred the gentleman appeared again at the Thursday 18th January meeting of the LPPC. Cllr. **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) asked Chair Cllr **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley Vale) to identify the speaker. As far as we could tell his name is John Seaston or Seaton.

Following the private "members' briefing" of 10th January about the Local Plan, reported in the Epsom and Ewell Times HERE, there was anticipation that something would be said in public about that meeting on Thursday. Nothing was said.

The only contribution about the Local Plan was the three minutes Mr Season/Seaton was permitted. Again, our transcript of his address is published in full. Epsom and Ewell Times invites corrections and responses to his opinions.

"Last year, this Council voted to pause the Local Plan process. In order to buy time to base its regulation 19 Local Plan on Government's revised NPPF. The great news is that this pause strategy worked. The critical thing now is to take full advantage of the opportunity that you have created. To do this, you need to be very clear about the changes to NPPF that Government has made.

There are two very important points that you must fully understand. First point: Government has clearly stated that the standard method calculation just gives an advisory starting point. When I spoke to you at the start of your last meeting, I emphasized how Government has used its standard method to set a negotiation anchor. Government has now admitted that its anchor is not credible. So it has rebranded it as an advisory starting point. It is critical that all councillors and officers involved in a Local Plan process fully understand that there is nothing binding about the standard method number.

You do not need to meet this target in full. You do not even need to meet half this target. You do not have to meet any specific proportion of this target. You just need to meet the actual needs of our borough.

Second point: Paragraph 145 of the new NPPF states there is no requirement for Green Belt boundaries to be reviewed or changed when plans are being prepared or updated. That was a direct quote from NPPF.

Could government have been any clearer? In case you missed it, there is no requirement for Green Belt boundaries to be reviewed or changed. I have highlighted during previous LPPC meetings that this Borough can fully meet its actual housing need over the plan period using only brownfield sites and previously developed land within the Green Belt.

In the Regulation 18 Local Plan, Council used the brownfield sites shortfall versus government's anchor to declare the exceptional circumstances required to alter Green Belt boundaries. The two changes to NPPF that I have just highlighted together with the quantum of brownfield and previously developed sites available in the Borough make this declaration of exceptional circumstances and resulting changes of Green Belt boundaries unjustifiable.

It would not be consistent with achieving a balanced Local Plan which meets Council's legal duty to achieve biodiversity net gain and a credible local nature. Any proposals to change Green Belt boundaries in the regulation 19 Local Plan would expose Council to legal challenge. And the associated cost and programme overruns as well as angering the residents you are supposed to serve."

Related reports:

Local Plan costs eat into Council reserves

Local Plan to move forward after passionate debate

Local Plan (2022-2040) Un-Pause Recommended

Cllr Persand intervenes ahead of Local Plan debate

and many many more. Search "local plan" in search function above.

Image: Clockwise from Chair: Cllrs – Steven McCormick (RA), Peter O'Donovan (RA), public speaker (Seaston / Seaton), Keiran Persand (Con), Julie Morris (LibDem), Clive Woodbridge (RA), Phil Neale (RA), Steve Bridge (RA), Council officers.

Council's contribution to our safety

20 January 2024



Epsom and Ewell's Crime and Disorder Committee met Wednesday 17th January to endorse an updated Community Safety Action Plan for 2024-25.

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This followed a period of consultation in which **Chris Grayling** MP called for more attention to be paid to prevent local parks being used for drug dealing, one resident's request for slimy leaves being swept up being disregarded as not relevant to the Plan, the **Liberal Democrats** calling for more action on minor crime such as theft from cars and a citizen asking for the Stones Road tunnel under the railway line to be closed because of drug-dealing.

The plan was adopted unanimously and a summary follows:

In an effort to maintain its reputation as a safe haven amidst changing crime patterns, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has rolled out a comprehensive Community Safety Action Plan for the upcoming year. The plan addresses emerging challenges, emphasizing the protection of vulnerable individuals and enhancing community engagement.

The borough aims to tackle crime at its roots by prioritizing the most vulnerable and those at risk. The implementation of Community Harm and Risk Reduction Meetings (CHaRMM) is a cornerstone of this strategy. These multi-agency gatherings plan interventions for both victims and perpetrators, with approximately 65 cases managed each year.

Key initiatives include attending monthly CHaRMM meetings, ensuring proper resourcing for Domestic Homicide Reviews, and conducting Antisocial Behaviour Case Reviews. These actions aim to provide a voice for victims, address hidden crimes, and enhance overall community safety.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council are determined to be on the frontline against serious organized crime. Staff, including the Environmental Enforcement team and Environmental Health Team, will undergo awareness sessions. The council also plans to report intelligence via appropriate channels, using its unique position as landowners, event organizers, and chairing Safety Advisory Groups to contribute to counter-terrorism efforts.

The rollout of ACT Awareness (Action Counter Terrorism) training and the establishment of Serious Organized Crime Joint Action Groups demonstrate the borough's commitment to staying vigilant and proactive in the fight against criminal networks.

Beyond addressing vulnerable populations, the plan includes joint initiatives such as Joint Action Groups (JAGs), which focus on targeted interventions in specific geographical areas. The move towards a standing JAG arrangement ensures a continuous forum for partner agencies to collectively address area-based issues.

Additionally, a thorough review of town centre data will be conducted, utilizing available tools to identify trends and behaviours that require attention.

To foster a safer community, the borough will continue joint initiatives with other enforcement agencies, including "Meet the Beat" and "Violence Against Women And Girls" day of action. Social media will also play a pivotal role in keeping residents informed and engaged.

The Council pledges to amplify partner messages on social media, ensuring targeted and informative content that showcases the results of their community safety efforts.

The meeting lasted 2 minutes 37 seconds.

Council wants to prevent suicides

20 January 2024



Tuesday 16th January Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Community and Well-Being Committee considered local suicides.

In 2019, the Borough Council launched its Health & Wellbeing Strategy (HWBS), recognizing a concerning suicide rate of 10.4 per 100,000 residents from 2016-2018—higher than the Southeast's 9.2. A total of 21 lives were tragically lost. To address this, mental and emotional wellbeing became a priority in the borough's HWBS and subsequent action plan. However, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the plan's execution.

Since the HWBS approval in late 2019, the borough has witnessed a spike in suicide rates, reaching 14 per 100,000 residents between 2018-2020—claiming 29 lives, with 19 being male. The Southeast's rate during this period was 10.1 per 100,000. To counteract this alarming trend, the Council proposes an assertive response in the form of a revised Suicide Prevention Action Plan.

The increase in suicides is reminiscent of a previous increase observed from 2009 to 2013 during a period of significant financial hardship. Recent changes in the standard of proof used by coroners, shifting from 'beyond reasonable doubt' to 'on the balance of probability,' might impact the recorded number of suicides.

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In March 2023, the Council's Health Liaisons Panel supported the development of a Suicide Prevention Action Plan (SPAP). This plan aligns with Surrey County Council's Suicide Prevention Strategy 2023-2026, emphasizing six priorities for suicide prevention.

The Council's SPAP, rooted in Surrey's broader strategy, aims to:

– Enhance the response to individuals in crisis with suicidal thoughts.

– Foster collaboration with Public Health Surrey County Council, statutory partners, and the community & voluntary sector.

– Collaborate with Public Health Surrey County Council to utilize real-time surveillance data for meaningful and effective SPAPs.

Specifically referencing the Alison Todd Protocol, an assessment tool identifying areas of practice and growth, the SPAP demonstrates the Council's commitment to suicide prevention. The plan, to be led by the Council's Community Development Team, spans from January 2024 to January 2025 before undergoing review.

Cllr Kate Chinn (Labour Court ward) was concerned about Council staff who might not assess the risk of suicide correctly and the effect on them if a resident subsequently died. She was assured that training would be given and support for staff provided in that situation.

The committee adopted the plan unanimously.

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Local Co-Vid volunteers rewarded with Council support

20 January 2024



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's financial support for five key local voluntary organisations came up for review 16th January at the meeting of the Environment and Well-Being Committee.

Age Concern Epsom & Ewell:

- Focus: Providing support and services for older people in the community.
- Activities: Offering a range of services such as social activities, information, and advice to enhance the well-being of older individuals.

Citizens Advice Bureau Epsom & Ewell:

- Focus: Providing free, confidential advice and support to the local community.
- Activities: Offering assistance on a wide range of issues, including legal, financial, and personal matters, to help individuals navigate challenges they may face.

Central Surrey Voluntary Action:

- Focus: Supporting and promoting voluntary and community work in the area.
- Activities: Facilitating connections between volunteers and local organizations, offering resources and training, and fostering collaboration within the voluntary sector.

RELATE Mid Surrey:

- Focus: Providing relationship support and counseling services.
- Activities: Offering counseling for individuals, couples, and families to improve and strengthen relationships. Addressing a variety of relationship issues through professional guidance.

The Sunnybank Trust:

- Focus: Supporting individuals with learning disabilities.

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- Activities: Offering a range of services and activities to enhance the quality of life for people with learning disabilities. This may include social events, skill-building programs, and support for independent living.

Introducing a report to the Councillors the Community Development Officer said: “I have to say that during the COVID crisis, we would not have been able to cope unless we had the support of our voluntary organizations who stepped up and were absolutely amazing in getting volunteers to come forward and help the Council give the service and help the residents in what was a particularly difficult time. This report, I think, reflects the fact that we appreciate that support and that we wish to continue supporting those organizations in what they do on behalf of our residents.”

The support, approved by the committee, is summarised in the table below.

	Current and Proposed Support for Voluntary Organisations 2024/25 £s											
	Age Concern Epsom		Citizens Advice Bureau Epsom &		Central Surrey Voluntary Action		RELATE Mid Surrey		The Sunnybank Trust		Total	
	2023/24	2024/25	2023/24	2024/25	2023/24	2024/25	2023/24	2024/25	2023/24	2024/25	2023/24	2024/25
Direct Grant Funding	0	0	74115	74115	7989	7989	0	0	0	0	82104	82104
Licence / Rent - Notional Grant	14,616	14,615	28,686	28,686	7,344	7,344	14,910	14,910	0	0	65,556	65,555
Service Charge - Notional Grant	15,639	12,764	30,694	25,052	7,858	6,414	4,800	4,800	0	0	58,991	49,030
Rent paid to EEBC	-2,936	-2,936	0	0	0	0	-1,294	-1,294	-3,420	-3,470		
Grant for Volunteer Parking	100	100	1920	1920	0	0	0	0	0	0	2020	2020
Subsidy for Staff Parking Permits	1,920	2720	3,840	4080	0	0	0	0	453	680	6,213	7480
Subsidy for volunteer Parking	0	0	7600	8000	0	0	0	0	0	0	7600	8000
Totals do not include rent paid to EEBC	32275	30199	146855	141853	23191	21747	19710	19710	453	680	222484	214189

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Relative relief about Epsom and Ewell’s debt?

20 January 2024



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council‘s debt is about average with all 381 United Kingdom local authorities. UK councils owe a combined **£97.8bn** to lenders, equivalent to **£1,455** per resident, as of September 2023. Epsom and Ewell’s debt per person is £**795**. From highest debt per person to lowest Epsom and Ewell ranks 195 out of 381.

In the national league table of debt shame other Surrey Boroughs occupy the leading positions: Woking is first with debt of £18,756 per resident followed by Spelthorne in second place at £10,415. Guildford is 5th.

Taking into account all types of local authorities, such as police and crime commissioners and combined authorities, the debt pile rises to **£122bn**.

The 11 boroughs of Surrey are ranked in the table below. Highest debt per resident to lowest.

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Standing in Surrey	Borough	Population	Total amassed debt 2023-24 Q2 (£)	Debt per person 2023-24 Q2 (£)	National standing out of **381**
1	Woking	103,889	1,948,583,000	18,756	1
2	Spelthorne	102,995	1,072,698,000	10,415	2
3	Runnymede	87,739	637,900,000	7,270	5
4	Guildford	143,929	178,826,000	1,242	132
5	Mole Valley	87,608	102,850,000	1,174	147
6	Waverley	128,878	149,771,000	1,162	151
7	Tandridge	88,143	99,415,000	1,128	156
8	Surrey Heath	90,645	98,695,000	1,089	162
9	**Epsom and Ewell**	**80,998**	**64,427,000**	**795**	**195**
10	Elmbridge	139,369	50,358,000	361	276
11	Reigate and Banstead	151,423	0	0	37 others

Dame **Meg Hillier**, the chair of the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, said some examples of debt were “staggering”.

But council leaders say years of under-funding mean they have been forced to take out loans and invest in commercial properties just to keep services running.

In recent years, various commentators have warned that the debts held by councils – which must balance their budgets every year – are unsustainable. In 2020, chair of the Public Accounts Committee Dame Meg Hillier said the Government was “blind to the extreme risks” of council borrowing levels.

Since then, six more councils have had to issue section 114 notices declaring themselves effectively bankrupt: Croydon, Slough, Thurrock, Birmingham, Woking and Nottingham.

In the case of Croydon, Slough, Thurrock, Woking and Nottingham – those effective bankruptcies could be directly linked to failed investments and spiralling debts. Thurrock’s £469m funding black hole, for example, was caused by a series of failed investments in solar farms.

Dame Hillier added: “Small district councils have very little room for manoeuvre when finances are squeezed, relying on charges (such as parking fees) for a lot of their income. Unitary authorities are facing the demographic pressures on social services, social care and special educational needs.

“But beyond these day to day pressures, the PAC warned in 2020 that some councils had not only pursued strategies of commercial investment exposing them to high levels of risk, but normalised behaviour and optimistically believed that there was little downside to commercial activity. Add to this the delay in public sector audits and many councillors and taxpayers were blind to the risk.”

Cllr **Julie Morris**, (College Ward) Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group on Epsom and Ewell Borough Council said “There is no evidence that central government is likely to assist with the broader financial issues affecting local authorities, so we need to budget carefully and 2025/26 is likely to be crunch time. We need a complete review of both mandatory services and those which are discretionary. And central government needs to wake up to what is facing government at local level.”

Cllr **Neil Dallen,** (RA Town) Chair of Strategy & Resources Committee said: “As a council, Epsom & Ewell’s investments are performing as planned. The debts are considered sustainable, with sums set aside each year to ensure they can be repaid at maturity. Through taking a proactive approach to our finances, we have a strong track record of meeting the considerable financial challenges the past decade has brought for local government through reduced central government funding, and we are looking ahead to 2024/25 and beyond to ensure that we remain a financially sustainable council.”

The other parties have also been invited to comment.

Conservatives adopt new contender for Parliament

20 January 2024

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

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



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

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

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

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

Surrey’s £1/4 m fines for failing children

20 January 2024



The failings of Surrey County Council’s children services has meant the under-fire authority paid more than £250,000 in fines, compensation, and redress payments to families it let down last year. The settlements are published by the social care ombudsman and last week it upheld three more complaints.
The education watchdog found Surrey County Council continues to miss deadlines, and create needless delays for children waiting for psychological assessments and GP advice.

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The latest rulings meant the authority had to payout a further £1,700 to families with an ongoing £100 a month to one – as an acknowledgement of the "ongoing uncertainty and distress" until a final care plan is issued.

The total paid to families for 2023/24 will likely be published from April but the most recent full year figures showed the county council could have saved itself thousands of pounds – had it got things right.
The council sets itself a target of responding to 80 per cent of initial complaints within 10 working days – though this can be extended to 20 days with its children's, families and lifelong learning department.
In children's services only 59.4 per cent were within timescale.

The figures are even worse for education and home-to-school transport at just 44 per cent and 56 per cent respectively.

The Annual Complaints Performance report read: "Where fault is found following a complaints investigation, financial redress can be recommended where appropriate. All financial awards are approved by the relevant head of service and, if greater than £1,000, in consultation with the relevant cabinet member.

"The Ombudsman can also recommend financial redress if they find fault following an investigation.
"During 2022/23 there has been a significant increase in both the number of complaints attracting a financial remedy and the total amount paid of £258,730.53. This equates to an increase of £166,032.51 when compared to 2021/22."

Of the payments, the council said, £87,445.65 was paid in symbolic financial remedies to recognise the impact of the fault identified, for example distress and anxiety and time and trouble taken in pursuing the complaint. The balance of £171,284.88 was primarily reimbursed costs to address missed provision which it says were "essentially funds that the council would have needed to spend to meet assessed needs irrespective of a complaint being made."

Councillor Clare Curran, Surrey County Council cabinet member for children, families and lifelong Learning: "We are not able to comment on any individual children specifically, however we take the findings from the Ombudsman very seriously and apologise for the distress these families experienced.
"I am aware that the Council has not always got things right and that the support and service that some children with additional needs and disabilities and their families receive is not always of the standard that we would expect, and I am sorry about that. We are working hard to improve services, and a recent Local Area SEND Inspection noted progress is underway.

"Despite national pressures we regret all delays and are working hard to reduce any backlogs, and ultimately to reduce spend on fines, which we know is higher than it should be. We have taken several actions to address this including securing an additional £15m of funding to increase the capacity of key teams, extending the use of locum and associate educational psychologists, commissioning external providers for support, and increasing advertising to fill positions.

"A multi-agency recovery plan is also in place with short-term and long-term goals, which Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspectors noted had identified areas that need improving and that actions by the local area partnership to address these are starting to make a difference. We know that communication with parents and carers is an area in need of focus and plans are being developed to address this as a standalone priority workstream within the refreshed Surrey inclusion and additional needs -partnership strategy.

"We are constantly reviewing how we support young people who are unable to attend school, and are implementing our £180million capital programme that is increasing the availability of, and access to specialist provision. We also recognise the significant issues that confront the SEND system nationally. We have seen a 64 per cent increase in education, health and care needs assessment requests across Surrey since 2020, at a time of a national shortage of Educational Psychologists (EPs).

"We are doing our utmost to recruit more to meet this demand, and we are filling this gap as best we can. We have already been able to halve the backlog of EP advices through the steps we've taken locally, but we hope to see the national shortage in trained EPs and other issues addressed soon through the government's improvement plan.

"We remain committed to improving our services and outcomes for children and young people with additional needs and disabilities so that they are happy, healthy, safe and confident about their future."

Surrey team addicted to changing futures

20 January 2024



A former aircraft engineer has spoken out about how his alcohol addiction threatened to wreck his life.

Steve Saunders, 66, from Pyrford, Woking says that what started as social drinking turned into an all-consuming addiction, which saw both his marriage and career end.

Now he is using his experience to help others and to send out a clear message, that there is always support in Surrey for

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those with a drug or alcohol addiction.

Steve works with Surrey County Council's Changing Futures programme on their Bridge the Gap scheme which supports people facing a range of issues including alcohol and drug addiction, domestic abuse and mental health challenges.

"*Like most other people I started drinking in my late teens and 20s socially but it was in my 50s when it started to become a big problem*," said Steve, who is a proud father of two grown-up sons.

"*I now know that I have an addictive personality and that affects how I see alcohol, and one drink is never enough. My behaviour changed and I was awful to those around me – it ended up ruining my second marriage and saw me retire from my job as an aircraft engineer aged just 53-years-old.*

"*At my worst I was drinking a bottle of spirits a day, often in secret. You kid yourself that people don't know what's going on, but it was out of control. I kept losing my driving licence and I was lucky not to be in prison. When I left my job I nearly drank myself to death*."

The turning point for Steve was when he decided to be honest with his doctor about his drinking, and he went into rehabilitation.

"*Going through rehabilitation changed everything*," said Steve. "*I decided I wanted to help others who are facing similar problems and so I became involved in Bridge the Gap to offer my insights into the systems that support people and also to run SMART recovery meetings which are both face-to-face and online.*

"*A huge range of people access the service – business owners, housewives and professional people such as doctors and teachers. All of them have one thing in common – they are looking for help, and we make sure they receive it.*"

Until now Bridge the Gap has been run as a pilot scheme by Surrey County Council, funded by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the National Lottery – but now a fundraising drive is being launched to raise the £1.4 million which will be needed for it to continue supporting vulnerable people in Surrey.

Eleven local charities are backing Bridge the Gap and these are Catalyst, Guildford Action, The Hope Hub, Oakleaf, Richmond Fellowship, Rentstart, Your Sanctuary, North Surrey Domestic Abuse Service, South West Surrey Domestic Abuse Outreach Service, East Surrey Domestic Abuse Services and Surrey Domestic Abuse Partnership.

Steve said: "*As well as helping others I also get something from the SMART meetings because it reminds me to be grateful for where I am. Anyone facing a drug or alcohol problem needs to know that there is help out there, and we will support them in turning their life around*."

Keely Glithero , service manager at Catalyst, said Steve's input into the Bridge the Gap programme is invaluable.

Keely said: "*Steve's rich lived and learned experience in addiction brings a valuable perspective and contribution to how we deliver services. I am truly inspired by his relentless energy for supporting people, and I'm so glad to support and work alongside Steve as a volunteer for Catalyst in the Changing Futures programme*."

A conference is taking place in Surrey later this month when people, like Steve, will use their lived experience to support others, challenge prejudice and empower themselves. The Power of Lived Experience event takes place on Wednesday, January 31 from 10am to 4pm at Dorking Halls. For more information and to reserve your place contact colette.lane@sabp.nhs.uk

Further information:

Changing Futures Bridge the Gap programme **Changing Futures – Bridge the Gap | Healthy Surrey**

Drug and alcohol support in Surrey – **Drugs and alcohol | Healthy Surrey**

Grate find in Epsom's Millennium Green

20 January 2024



The Woodcote Millennium Green is unique in Surrey. It comprises of an area of 7 acres, bounded by Woodcote Green Road to the north and the Woodcote Estate to the south and is located at the rear of Epsom General Hospital.

The land forming The Woodcote Millennium Green has passed through the ownership of monks, lords and developers over the last thousand years and now flourishes under the stewardship of a Trust whose members are passionate to retain the character of this landscape gem.

The land was originally part of the estate of the Manor of Horton, owned by Chertsey Abbey until the dissolution of the lesser monasteries in 1536-7. After passing through several owners, the Manor passed to the sister-in-law of John Evelyn,

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the 17th Century diarist. Woodcote House was re-built at this period, on a site which is now just south of the Millennium Green.

Woodcote House was acquired by Sir Edward Northey (1652-1723) in the late 17th Century and became the family seat to the Northey family for 250 years. The present house dates mainly from the early 19th Century. Photographs of the area show an open wooded landscape with cattle grazing by the pond. The pond is shown on the earliest Ordnance Survey maps of Epsom and surroundings and must pre-date the mid 19th Century.

In the late 1930s, Woodcote House and the surrounding land was sold to Earnest Harwood, whose building company developed most of the land for housing, forming The Woodcote Estate. Woodcote House itself was subdivided into flats and has undergone a major refurbishment.

In 1999, the Harwood family donated a large portion of the remaining woodland including the pond to be held in perpetuity by the Trustees of The Woodcote Millennium Green Trust. The Mayor of Epsom and Ewell officially opened The Woodcote Millennium Green in July 2000.

Whilst The Millennium Green was once a 7-acre site of overgrown brambles, it has been transformed by residents and volunteers into the attractive piece of managed natural woodland that it is today.

It was during one of my own walks through the woodland that I discovered a cast iron fire grate close to the rear of Woodcote House that had been unearthed by tree roots. Having obtained permission from one of the trustees of The Millennium Green to remove the fire grate, I contacted Bourne Hall Museum in Ewell and was later informed by one of the curator's contacts that the cast iron fire grate is likely to date to the 19th Century and was probably used inside a room of Woodcote House prior to being replaced and buried in the ground at the back of the building.



Four times a year The Woodcote Millennium Green Trust holds maintenance days to help with the upkeep of the green which can be found at the rear of Epsom General Hospital.

It is a great community experience open to all ages and abilities so if you would like to get involved, or make a donation to fund maintenance and improvements, please email:

info@woodcotemillenniumgreen.org.uk

Councillors belted-up on Green Belt?

20 January 2024

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For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

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In a recent closed-door meeting held at the Town Hall, local councillors in the Borough of Epsom and Ewell, convened to *apparently* deliberate on potential areas for housing development, with a particular focus on the contentious issue of Green Belt land. The meeting, held on January 10, has stirred controversy and prompted reactions from concerned citizens, leading to a series of letters and press releases. Councillors were greeted at the entrance by a small and polite protest group.

Yufan Si, a prominent Green Belt campaigner, has expressed alarm over the secrecy shrouding the meeting. The council's decision to discuss Green Belt development in a closed setting has raised questions about transparency and adherence to government policies.

Ms Si highlights the Council's statistics, indicating that 84% of residents opposed development on Green Belt land during a prior consultation. The campaigner argues that the government's planning policies offer a choice to protect Green Belt areas, questioning the need for a clandestine discussion.

She has raised concerns about the council's sale of Green Belt land to a local business owner three years before the Local Plan's development, potentially leading to significant financial gains. The campaigner emphasizes the availability of brownfield sites capable of accommodating over 3,700 new dwellings, surpassing the projected household growth from 2022 to 2040. In her letter Yufan Si has urged councillors to prioritize environmental preservation and fulfill residents' wishes by excluding Green Belt land from the development plans.

Councillor **Julie Morris** (LibDem College) has stated that she challenged the decision to keep the meeting private. While acknowledging the legal standing of the private meeting, Councillor Morris called for greater transparency and public engagement. She emphasizes the need for progress reports on the Local Plan to address residents' concerns and combat misinformation circulating in the public domain.

She said "The ruling Residents Association party would do well to engage directly with the public on this matter, or at the very least, to explain exactly why these meetings are being held, have to be in private, and why there is no public statement after each meeting to keep local residents informed as to how things are moving forward. Our residents deserve no less than this."

Letters from concerned citizens to Councillors echoed the sentiment against Green Belt development. **Stephen Neward**, a voluntary warden at the Priest Hill nature reserve, expressed hope that the revised National Planning Policy Framework would prevent the inclusion of Green Belt sites in the Local Plan. Another resident, **Lynn Munro**, urged councillors to prioritize brownfield sites over Green Belt, emphasizing the irreversible impact on the borough's open spaces.

Tim Murphy, representing the Council for the Protection of Rural England and the Epsom and Ewell Green Belt Group, shared the views of planning consultant Catriona Riddell. Riddell clarified that local authorities, including Epsom and Ewell, are not obligated to alter Green Belt boundaries to meet housing targets, challenging the notion that Green Belt sacrifice is necessary.

As controversy swirls around the closed meeting, residents, campaigners, and opposition councillors continue to press for transparency. The fate of Green Belt land in Epsom and Ewell remains a hot topic.

The meeting was not notified on the Council's calendar of meetings and therefore the press do not know if it was a formal or informal meeting nor whether any order was made about publicity. No part of the meeting, including any section excluding the public, has been uploaded to the Epsom and Ewell Borough Council YouTube channel.

Cllr **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley) Chair of the Licensing, Planning and Policy Committee has responded to Epsom and Ewell Times:

"This 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.

Further clarification was given at the special LPPC meeting held in November when the Local Development Scheme (LDS) was an agenda item. I have given a statement at every council meeting allowing questions from all members. All members have been encouraged to attend each LPPC meeting whether they're a committee member or not. All members have been fully involved and engaged in the development of our local plan.

It is normal and expected practice when a Local Plan is being developed for Members to be able to discuss items of detail outside of the public Committee Meetings. The information briefing for councillors held on 10 January 2024 was not a meeting of the Council or a committee and had no decision-making powers, and there was no right for public access under the Local Government Act 1972 or any other legislation.

There is currently a huge amount of work being done for our Local Plan, including considering the implications of the revised NPPF published in December 2023. Work will continue over the coming months before the next stage of public consultation (Regulation 19), which is due to commence in January 2025, if supported by LPPC in November 2024 and full council in December 2024."

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Local Plan costs eat into Council reserves

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Cllr Persand intervenes ahead of Local Plan debate

and many many more. Search “local plan” in search function above.

In the footsteps of the great man?

20 January 2024



The great orator **Sir Winston Churchill** was born in **Blenheim Palace** in 1874. 150 years later **Epsom**‘s own **Blenheim High School** became a nursery for the next generation of orators. Twenty-one students from four local schools took part in **Youth Speaks**: A Debate Competition on Thursday 11th January 2024 evening at the Longmead Road school. Many adults run shy of public speaking, so to see and hear students speaking with such confidence and assurance was wonderful.

This local heat of the national competition was once again organised jointly by the Rotary Clubs of Banstead, Epsom and Sutton Nonsuch. Teams from The Beacon School, St Philomena’s and Wilsons School took part in the Intermediate section (11 – 13 years old) with teams from Blenheim High School and Wilsons in the Senior (14 to 17) section. Each team consists of a Chairperson, a Proposer and an Opposer.

The team from The Beacon School got the Intermediate competition underway debating that ‘footballers’ income should be taxed at a higher rate’. St Philomena’s discussed whether ‘social media makes us less social’, an important topic that affects many of us today. The team from Wilsons gave us a lively discussion on ‘climate change being the most pressing issue facing us’. In her summary, chair of judges Ros Rokison said that the team were outstanding and they were adjudged the winners of the Intermediate competition.

In the senior section both teams provided the large audience, which included Epsom and Ewell Mayor Cllr **Robert Geleit** (Labour Court Ward), with lively debates. The proposal that ‘the extra-curriculum is more important than the standard curriculum’ was debated by an excellent team from Blenheim High School. The proposer of this motion was particularly persuasive.

Then the proposal ‘this house believes extremism is inevitable’ was debated by a team from Wilsons. Although they exceeded the time limit of fifteen minutes, all three students were outstanding for content and delivery and they won the senior competition.

The three Rotary clubs thanked the excellent judges Ros Rokison and Ken Rokison. Ros gave each of the twenty-one students useful constructive feedback.

Public speaking is a hard skill to master, but such a useful skill to acquire and Rotary is proud to have given these young people this opportunity.

John Chamberlain.

Local rugby team not blinded by Old Alley

20 January 2024



Sutton & Epsom RFC 15 – Old Alleynians 19. Saturday 13th January.

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On Dulwich Common at the start of the league campaign the Old Alleynians won an exhilarating encounter 29-25 with a Will Malins hat trick grabbing the headlines. Both sides were much changed for the return fixture at Rugby Lane. After the Battersea Ironsides defeat Sutton and Epsom had mixed blessings from the physio hut as Tom Lennard had recovered from his back injury to make his first start at 10 but Willem Ratu's knee failed the fitness test. History repeated itself at Rugby Lane as the OAs again triumphed by four points but this time they had to come from behind to win 19-15.

On a cold but thankfully wind free afternoon Freddy Bunting initiated proceedings. Alleynians put themselves under pressure from the kick off as a forward met the kick with a technique better served for volleyball than rugby union. The unforgiving ball was spiked backwards and snatched by the Black & White pack from the retreating visitors. Encouraged by this immediate success Sutton stormed into the opposition 22 in search of the opening score. Excellent work by the forwards saw Tom Boaden carry to within a couple of strides before the ball was knocked on a couple of phases later. However, the backpedalling defence of the visitors had incurred the wrath of the referee and Sutton had the bonus of a five-metre penalty. The simple kick at goal was declined and the attacking option was chosen. Matt Whitaker rewarded the faith of his captain with a vintage score as he stepped past the first defenders before his telescopic reach stretched for the line. Freddy Bunting's conversion drifted wide but Sutton led 5-0.

Alleynians went in search of an immediate reply and imitated the hosts by regaining the restart. The men from Dulwich eagerly went through their phases and quickly entered the 22 and looked likely to make amends for their early reverse. The determined defence of S&E managed to prevent an equalising score as the visitors spilled the ball in contact with the line at their mercy. Sutton failed to adequately clear their lines and moments later the OAs were attacking once more. Again the referee awarded a penalty to the attacking side but on this occasion the kick at goal was the more obvious option being some distance from the try-line. The attempt fell short and the Black & Whites were able to clear their lines.

Buoyed by their early success Sutton were playing with confidence and a high tempo with the halfback combination of Munford and Lennard orchestrating the attacks. The hosts were faster in thought and deed than the visitors who were struggling to find their familiar rhythm. S&E on the front foot were impressive as forwards and backs combined and they took advantage of a penalty awarded at a scrum to kick to the corner. The hosts failed to capitalise dropping the ball but a poor clearance from the subsequent scrum led to another S&E lineout on the 22. Excellent continuity was matched by robust defence lthat ed to Tom Lennard floating a kick to the corner where Ciaran Mohr under scrutiny just failed to catch the ball a metre from the line. Fortune favoured Sutton as they were awarded a free kick for foot up in the scrum. Matt Whitaker carried the ball to the line and Tom Boaden was rewarded for his support play to receive the ball and score. Freddy Bunting converted for a 121-0 lead at the end of the first quarter.

A vocal Old Alleynians XV huddled behind the posts and called upon a greater collective effort after the second try and urged the team to match the S&E team's pace at the breakdown. From the restart Number 8 Gillam Crouch caught the ball and advanced at pace into the Sutton half. From the next scrum they drove the Black & White pack off their ball. The OAs looked favourites to score but tremendous tackling not only denied them but won Sutton & Epsom a relieving penalty. The match ebbed and flowed as the clock entered time added on in the first period. OAs continued to press for a vital score and belatedly got on the scorebioard. They kicked a penalty to the corner and secured the ball at the lineout. Though the forwards were denied the ball went wide and Robert Outram chose the perfect line to carve through the defence to score. Josh Winduss added the extras as Alleynians trailed 7-14. All their good work was nearly undone as they failed to kick the ball to touch on the final play of the half and conceded a penalty for an accidental offside. Freddy Bunting failed to compound their misery as his penalty attempt went narrowly wide and Mr Richardson blew for half-time with Sutton leading 12-7.

Sutton & Epsom were the first to score in the second period. Ten minutes into the half they were awarded a penalty as the men from Dulwich strayed offside. Captain Bunting stepped up and bisected the uprights to extend Sutton's advantage to 15-7. Both sides looked threatening in attack but equally the well organised defences neutered the offensive play. As the match progressed it was Old Alleynians who began to have the majority of the possession and territory. As the match entered the final quarter S&E were indebted to Gareth O'Brien who made a superb mark in the corner that not only prevented a possible try but allowed the hosts to relieve the siege. Stubborn Sutton defence was frustrating the visitors who conceded a penalty in the hosts'

However, it was becoming one-way traffic and only a cover tackle from Ross Parsons averted a score. But the Black & Whites just could not find the comfort of the opposition half.

With ten minutes remaining after a rather scrappy sequence of rucks with each side turning over the ball Old Alleynians were awarded a scrum lees than 10 metres from the Sutton posts in a central position. From the perfect platform winger Rory Holford touched down and replacement Ollie Hobman added the conversion. S&E's lead was now by the narrowest of margins at 15-14. The visitors were in the ascendancy and pressed ahead in search of the victory. Under pressure the Rugby Lane men responded in style as they advanced to the opposition 22 with their best sequence of the half. Sadly for the home supporters, unlike the first period, they did not come away with points after their foray in the opposition 22. As the match entered time added on the

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Sutton defences were breached near halfway. The visitors swarmed through and Ollie Hobman scored the crucial try. Though the conversion never threatened the posts Old Alleynians had the lead for the first time in the match, 19-15, with precious few minutes remaining.

The Black & Whites played with desperation trying to attack from deep in their half and Ben Osuntokun charged down a clearance and was only thwarted by the depth of the in-goal area from adding a fourth try. If that had been the case not only would Alleynians have secured a bonus point it would have given them an opportunity to deny Sutton a losing bonus point. In so evenly contested a match it would have been unduly harsh if the hosts had been denied the solitary point for their endeavours. Moments later the referee blew the final whistle. A keenly contested match concluded with Old Alleynians victorious 19-15 in a fixture that could have gone either way.

If the first encounter in September was entertaining fare enlivened by an excessive error count by both teams Saturday's match was of a far higher standard reflecting the improved status of both clubs. Old Alleynians gained promotion with a solitary blemish on their 2022-23 league record and are thriving at the higher level rather than struggling to acclimatise as is the case with many an elevated side. Their set piece scrummage was dominant in the first period and arguably had the upper hand throughout. Their back division has pace and quality and from the first minute they looked to play 15-man rugby. Ben Osuntokun was formidable and his ubiquitous presence became more apparent the longer the game continued. For the Black & Whites there was greater fluency and tempo in the first quarter which created the early advantage. In addition the scrambling and committed defence in their 22 frustrated their opponents. It was a match that could have gone either way but OAs finished the stronger side and at the eleventh hour broke through the Black & Whites defences for the vital score.

For Sutton & Epsom next Saturday is a rest weekend before the league campaign resumes on January 27th with the charabanc taking the team to Priestfields. In the reverse fixture an impressive Medway ran away 33-15 victors at Rugby Lane but in this league prior success appears to be almost irrelevant as a guide to form. In contrast next Saturday the Old Boys have to play their postponed fixture against Cobham. The visitors took exception to the playing surface at Dulwich Common and headed back to the Memorial Ground whilst the hosts enjoyed the afternoon watching their 3 rd XV play on the unplayable surface.

Sutton & Epsom:
Gareth O'Brien, Kyren Ghumra, Ross Parsons, Freddy Bunting ©, Ciaran Mohr, Tom Lennard, Steve Munford, Alex Mount, Chris Farrell, Tom Boaden, Josh Glanville, Ewan McTaggart, Rob Hegarty, Josh Pulvirenti & Matt Whitaker.
Replacements: Callum Gibson, Ben Green & Matt Symonds.

Old Alleynians
Josh Winduss, Tom Williams, Robert Outram, Andrew Jones-Davies, Rory Holford, Henry Dewing, Tristram Holden, Jeremiah Manning, Charles Thompson, Tom Weightman, Will Hinchcliffe, James Mair, Ben Osuntokun, Hadley Eames & Gillam Crouch.
Replacements: Cameron Saunders, Brian Lennard & Ollie Hobman.

Photo credit: Robin Kennedy

Improving Surrey's rights of way

20 January 2024



Surrey County Council is seeking the views of residents on the county's Rights of Way to help drive improvements.

The county council is responsible for around 2,164 miles (3,482 km) of paths known as 'public rights of way' in both the countryside and urban areas. Accessing these paths is important for residents to enjoy and explore, travel to work or school and for health and wellbeing.

A public right of way is a path that anyone, by law, has the right to use. There are four types:

- Footpaths for walking, mobility scooters or powered wheelchairs
- Bridleways for walking, horse riding, cycling, mobility scooters or powered wheelchairs
- Restricted byways for walking, horse riding, cycling, mobility scooters or powered wheelchairs and horse-drawn carriages

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- Byways for all modes including motorised vehicles.

Marisa Heath, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for Environment said: *"This is a fantastic opportunity for residents to share their views and really shape how we manage and improve our rights of way both in rural and urban areas. Exploring the countryside and being close to nature is so important for our health and wellbeing and also to understand the benefits of the natural environment we are doing our upmost to protect, so we want to support everyone by improving our networks."*

Residents are invited to feedback their views on Surrey's Rights of Way network, sharing how they use them, their importance, what if anything may prevent residents from using them and how the council can support their needs. All views will help inform the new Rights of Way Improvement Plan which will be produced at the end of 2024.

The survey is open until 10 March 2024 and can be accessed on the **Surrey Says website**.

Image: newlandscorner jon hawkins surrey-hills-photography

Dancing for the Wells

20 January 2024



A sponsored "dancathon" took place on Saturday 6 January to help raise the funds needed to re-open the community centre.

Cllr **Bernie Muir** (Conservative – Horton Ward) danced for 5 hours, and **Neva Novaky** and **James Baird** danced for 10 hours on Saturday 6 January to help raise funds for the centre. It is still possible to make donations online – CLICK HERE

Speaking at the event, **Chris Grayling** MP said "I would like to congratulate the team who organised this successful event and on the valuable contribution they are making to this community hub. This community centre was rightly saved from being knocked down and it is great to see events like this that raise its profile."

Cllr Bernie Muir said "Community centres play a crucial role as hubs for opportunities to socialise, learn and access key services. They nurture the community spirit, help tackle loneliness and give the youth a positive outlet. Let's get The Wells community centre up and running again!"

Initially closed down by the Borough Council, the community centre was saved after local residents and Cllr Bernie Muir fought to save it. The **Epsom Wells Community Association** now have a long-term lease and are trying to raise the funds needed to help re-furnish it and have it fully functioning again.

A day of dance classes followed by a dance party in the evening, Dancing for the Wells saw classes of ballroom Latin, morris dancing, Jive and salsa. James who was previously a competitive ballroom and Latin dancer and danced with celebrities such as Jennifer Lopez, taught ballroom and Latin with Neva.

Morris dancing was taught by Thames Valley Morris, Jive by Surrey Jive and salsa was taught by Somos Caribe Academy.

"When I saw the two-floor community centre building with its own parking, I could understand why the community had fought so hard to save it and wanted to help re-open it. I would like to thank all those who have generously sponsored us and all those who supported the event on the day." said Neva.

The fundraiser was led by **Neva Novaky** and Cllr Bernie Muir and the team organising it included James Baird, Stuart Carroll, Ben White, Tanya Solomon and Richard Robinson in collaboration with the Epsom Wells Community Association led by Vanessa Merchant. Sponsor's included Lucy Demery, Tina Mountain, Ask Italia and Pari's Beauty Salon.

Related reports:

Epsom's Wells Plan has a hole in it

Wells Centre's Appeal

All's well that ends well for the Wells Centre

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