



County resists nimbies against children's home

Resident objections to a new children's home and apartments for care leavers have been labelled "petty" as councillors approved the plans.

The former Adult Education Centre in Dene Street, Dorking can now be converted to provide accommodation for young people in the home and in "trainer flats" which bridge the gap before young people move into independent housing.



Plans for new children's home in Dene Street, Dorking. From Design and Access Statement. Credit: SCC

A meeting of Surrey County Council's planning and regulatory committee on Wednesday (March 29) unanimously approved the plans, which will include the construction of a new two-storey building on part of the site. But the meeting also heard that of 48 letters received at the time of the meeting, 24 were objecting to the plans.

Three were in support, citing reasons such as the need for suitable accommodation in Surrey and being glad to see a vacant site used, while 21 letters were commenting on the application.

Councillor **Ernest Mallett** MBE (Residents' Association and Independent, West Molesey) described residents' objections as "petty" when he spoke on the application. He said: "I don't quite know what the population are thinking. They seem to be objecting as if this was some sort of prison for about 100 people. I can't really understand the objections."

Cllr Mallett added that on a site visit he thought the plans were "an excellent use of the building".

The development, which will be owned and run by Surrey County Council, raised concern among residents about rats being displaced and the need for pest control in neighbouring properties, and the authority being "poor at managing children's home".

These, along with concerns about the consultation carried out and the protection of the "well-being and mental health of existing residents" were put under the heading "other" by officers, stating in the report they were not material planning considerations for the application.

An officers' report said: "The majority of objections were concerning the need to protect and enhance the site's nesting swifts."

Officers confirmed ten "swift bricks", which allow birds to nest in them, would be added to the design, while the birds' current access to the roof of the building would be maintained during building work.

Along with the concerns about swifts, residents raised issues including the design being out of keeping with the residential area, worries about anti-social behaviour, noise and disturbance, and smells from "industrialist catering".

Cllr **Catherine Powell** (Farnham Residents, Farnham North), who sits on the council's corporate parenting board, said the new facilities were "absolutely necessary" and that she "100 per cent" supported the application.

She told the meeting: "Clearly the building is in a state of decay and it puts it back into a useful purpose."

Officers confirmed the work would be done in two phases, with the children's home and "no wrong door" facility being built first, followed by changes to the existing building to develop the trainer flats.

The Children's Home would be for a maximum of four residents and 2 staff, while the "no wrong door" facility, also in the new building, would accommodate two emergency residents and one member of staff.

Top image: Dorking Children's home approved in Dene Street, Dorking. Current view from Google Street View



Middling rate for Epsom and Ewell Council Tax

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is slap in the middle of the 11 Surrey boroughs table of band D council tax charges for 2023/2024. The difference between the highest and lowest is £78.20 per annum. As reported by The Epsom and Ewell Times it should be no surprise to find debt ridden Woking having the highest. Emily Coady-Stemp LDRS reports on the full Surrey County wide picture and Epsom and Ewell Times produces the table.

	Borough	D band Tax
1	Runnymede Borough Council	£2,170.57
2	Guildford Borough Council	£2,178.06
3	Mole Valley District Council	£2,184.84
4	Waverley Borough Council	£2,187.29
5	Spelthorne Borough Council	£2,201.79
6	Epsom and Ewell Borough Council	£2,205.25
7	Tandridge District Council	£2,223.53
8	Surrey Heath Borough Council	£2,226.30
9	Elmbridge	£2,229.00
10	Reigate and Banstead	£2,235.36
11	Woking Borough Council	£2,248.77.

Related reports:

Budget Report: More council tax for Epsom and Ewell

Epsom and Ewell Council raises tax 2.99%

2023/2024: average of £50 more to pay Surrey County Council

Council tax bills for Surrey residents will go up from April 1 after authorities confirmed their budgets for the coming financial year. Surrey County Council, the Police and Crime Commissioner, and each of the county's 11 districts and boroughs, confirmed their increases separately last month, with council tax bills and collection being the responsibility of the districts and boroughs.

The Police and Crime Commissioner, Lisa Townsend, confirmed a rise of £15 per year for residents amid an increase in Surrey Police's fuel bills of more than £500,000.

While Surrey County Council, which is responsible for adult social care as well as services including road repairs and schools, increased its share by £50 per year on Band D homes.



See below for a breakdown of the council tax bands in your area.

Elmbridge Borough Council

The average Band D property in Elmbridge will pay £2,229.00, except in the Claygate parish, where the bill for a Band D home will be £2,243.15.

Band A: £1,486.00
Band B: £1,733.66
Band C: £1,981.33
Band D: £2,229.00
Band E: £2,724.34
Band F: £3,219.67
Band G: £3,715.00
Band H: £4,458.00

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

Residents in Surrey's smallest borough will see council tax bills of £2205.25 from April, for the average Band D property.

Band A: £1,470.17
Band B: £1,715.19
Band C: £1,960.22
Band D: £2,205.25
Band E: £2,695.31
Band F: £3,185.36
Band G: £3,675.42
Band H: £4,410.50

Guildford Borough Council

The bill for Band D households in Guildford will be £2178.06, excluding parish and town councils. For Band D the parish share ranges from no extra charge in Wisley to £2291.71 for a Band D property in Normandy.

Band A: £1,452.04
Band B: £1,694.04
Band C: £1,936.05
Band D: £2,178.06
Band E: £2,662.07
Band F: £3,146.08
Band G: £3,630.1
Band H: £4,356.11

Mole Valley District Council

In Mole Valley, the average Band D property will pay £2,184.84, except where there are parish councils. In Charlwood, with the highest parish council precept, residents in a Band D property will pay £2,259.09.

Band A: £1456.56
Band B: £1699.32
Band C: £1,942.08
Band D: £2,184.84
Band E: £2,670.36
Band F: £3,155.88
Band G: £3,641.4
Band H: £4,369.68

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council

A Band D home in Reigate and Banstead will pay £2,235.36 from April, while residents in the Horley Town Council Area will pay £2,283.12 and in Salfords and Sidlow will pay £2,265.08.

Band A: £1,490.24
Band B: £1,738.61
Band C: £1,986.98
Band D: £2,235.36



Band E: £2,732.11
Band F: £3,228.85
Band G: £3,725.60
Band H: £4,470.72

Runnymede Borough Council

Runnymede residents in Band D property will pay £2,170.57.

Band A: £1,447.05
Band B: £1,688.22
Band C: £1,929.39
Band D: £2,170.57
Band E: £2,652.92
Band F: £3,135.27
Band G: £3,617.62
Band H: £4,341.14

Spelthorne Borough Council

Residents in a Band D property will pay £2,201.79 for their council tax in Spelthorne.

Band A: £1,467.86
Band B: £1,712.50
Band C: £1,957.14
Band D: £2,201.79
Band E: £2,691.08
Band F: £3,180.36
Band G: £3,669.65
Band H: £4,403.58

Surrey Heath Borough Council

Surrey Heath's amount for a Band D property is £2226.30, plus the amounts paid to parish councils throughout the borough. Bands listed below are for the most expensive parish, in Bisley.

Band A: £1,523.45
Band B: £1,777.35
Band C: £2,031.26
Band D: £2,285.17
Band E: £2,792.99
Band F: £3,300.8
Band G: £3,808.62
Band H: £4,570.6

Tandridge District Council

In Tandridge, a Band D property's council tax will be £2,223.53 2023/24. Parishes in the district range from no additional charge, to £2,311.97 in the most expensive, Crowhurst.

Band A: £1,482.36
Band B: £1,729.41
Band C: £1,976.47
Band D: £2,223.53
Band E: £2,717.65
Band F: £3,211.76
Band G: £3,705.89
Band H: £4,447.06

Waverley Borough Council

A Band D home, excluding parish council charges, is set at £2,187.29 in Waverley. The most expensive parish bills are in Godalming, and shown below.

Band A: £1,530.45
Band B: £1,785.52



Band C: £2,040.60
Band D: £2,295.67
Band E: £2,805.82
Band F: £3,315.97
Band G: £3,826.12
Band H: £4,591.34

Woking Borough Council

In Woking, residents in a Band D home will pay £2,248.77.

Band A: £1,499.18
Band B: £1,749.04
Band C: £1,998.90
Band D: £2,248.77
Band E: £2,748.50
Band F: £3,248.22
Band G: £3,747.95
Band H: £4,497.54

How to cut the County's cake?

A Surrey MP challenges the cuts the County makes to supporting children with special educational and disability needs (SEND), in a classic how to cut the County Council's cake dilemma. Chris Caulfield LDRS reports.

Surrey County Council "may be in breach" of statutory duties over its decision to cut respite breaks for parents of children with special educational needs. The county council redesigned its short breaks services and has been able to maintain its provision of overnight care but, with the budget frozen at 2017 levels, cuts had to be made elsewhere.

It wrote to care providers saying it was freezing payments from April this year and issued a statement saying it was only "able to fund two-thirds of the current capacity in community-based play and youth schemes for children with disabilities".

Parents left furious and on the brink as they struggled to find ways to balance full-time care needs and work have been given a glimmer of hope by Runnymede and Weybridge MP Ben Spencer.

Dr Ben Spencer, MP for Runnymede and Weybridge, has written to Surrey County Council. Credit SurreyLive/Grahame Larter.

In a letter to a constituent, he said: "I have now written to Surrey County Council regarding their new policy on short breaks. I share your concerns about the impact the new policy will have on families. I understand the importance of short breaks and am grateful for you taking the time to raise these issues with me.

"Since receiving the response from Surrey CC and doing some research I am concerned that Surrey CC's new policy may be in breach of their statutory duties. "These duties are set out in the Children Act of 1989 include specific references to breaks for carers."

A spokesperson for Surrey County Council said the decision to freeze - rather than cut- funding was an "important decision" given the "real challenge for public finances" and that the authority understood the importance of these services for children, young people and their families.

They said: "We have a statutory duty to deliver a balanced budget and this means we have not been able to increase the budget for short breaks services at this time, in line with inflation.

"We understand the concern this may cause families and we are pleased to announce that we have been successful in securing £907k of Short Breaks Innovation funding for 2023/24 from the Department for Education.

"This will enable us to deliver some enhanced short breaks services for children and families with more complex needs in 2023/24, which we believe will make a real difference. Whilst there will still be changes to services, we hope this additional funding will be welcome news to families.



"This funding will be allocated to services that meet the highest level of need. In particular, we are committed to maintaining current capacity of overnight respite services for children who have been assessed as needing them, so that we fulfil statutory commitments in children's care plans."

No photo - no vote!

You need photo ID to vote in person at the upcoming 4th May local elections. In an important announcement from Epsom and Ewell Borough Council the new Government rules are explained.

The UK Government has introduced a requirement for voters to show photo ID when voting at a polling station at elections. If you do not show ID then you will not be issued with a ballot paper. This new requirement will apply for the first time at the local elections on Thursday 4 May 2023.

You may already have a form of photo ID that is acceptable. These are some of the main ones you can use:

- passport
- photo driving licence (full or provisional)
- blue badge
- Older Person's Bus Pass, Disabled Person's Bus Pass, Oyster 60+ Card, Freedom Pass
- identity card with PASS hologram (Proof of Age Standards Scheme)
- biometric immigration document
- defence identity card
- national identity cards issued by an EEA state

You can use photo ID if it's out of date, as long as it looks like you.

The name on your ID should be the same name as you are registered to vote. If it is not then you should take along other proof of name change such as a marriage certificate or deed poll.

There will be more information on your poll card about other acceptable forms of photo ID or you can find out more on the Electoral Commission website <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/voter-id> or call their helpline on 0800 328 0280.

If you don't already have an accepted form of photo ID you can apply for a free voter ID document, known as a Voter Authority Certificate. You can apply for this online at the Voter Authority Certificate Service <https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-photo-id-voter-authority-certificate> or contact Electoral Services for a paper form.

The deadline to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate for elections on Thursday 4 May 2023 is by no later than 5pm on Tuesday 25 April 2023. You need to be registered to vote before you apply for a Voter Authority Certificate.

You do not need photo ID if you vote by post.

BOUNDARY CHANGES

The Local Government Boundary Commission completed its review of all Epsom & Ewell electoral wards in 2022 and the changes they made will apply at the elections on 4 May.

Poll cards for the elections on 4 May will be going out from 27 March and will contain information about which ward you are in and the location of your polling station. You should check your poll card when it arrives to see if you need to go to a different polling station since you last voted.

For more information about the election including all official election notices please visit <https://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/council/elections-and-voting>



Salts give Mullets taste for big victory

Arundel FC 5-1 Epsom & Ewell FC. Saturday 25th March.

Arundel, nicknamed the Mullets, secured their first ever competitive victory over us in comprehensive circumstances at Mill Road on Saturday afternoon with a 5-1 drubbing, and make no mistake, we could have no real complaints here.

Top of Southern Combination League Division One

We made some changes once again from our narrow but comfortable win over Montpelier Villa two weeks previously. Jaan Stanley and Athan Smith-Joseph were not available and originally Jaevon Dyer was listed as a substitute, due to a breakdown on route to the picturesque ground. Fortunately he arrived in time and was then added to the team sheet at the expense of Steve Springett who dropped to the bench. Alex Penfold also joined him there, while Lewis Pearch came in for his first start and we had another new centre back pairing of Dylan Merchant and Oliver Thompson with Kevin Moreno-Gomez also returning to the starting eleven alongside them.

On a blustery day we made an awful start and went behind in the eleventh minute as a harmless enough attack on the left suddenly turned dangerous with a ball across goal that was turned into the net by Carl Brown. Six minutes later Tom Theobald made a decent punch clear of a looping header and appeared to be fouled in the process, yet a corner was awarded and in the 18th minute the inswinging delivery caught Theobald out in the swirling wind and he dropped the ball over the line for Arundel's second goal.

We had created little to this point although Jamie Byatt fashioned a half chance a couple of minutes after the goal, only to see his shot blocked by a defender. Dyer then made decent progress down the right flank but his pull back was behind both Byatt and Pearch.

Regrettably we then went three nil down in the 33rd minute as a clever pass floated over the top of Moreno-Gomez where Brown was waiting to drill the ball into the net from an angle and it nearly got worse six minutes later when James Crane then hit the bar as we were carved open again. The half ended with the home side having another good chance from a corner but the unmarked Harry Russell headed over the bar.

This was a horrible first half to watch and whilst you always feel that a good start to the second half could spark some sort of comeback, it really looked as though the only win we were likely to celebrate at Arundel was when long-serving supporter John Bonner won a crate of lager in the club raffle!

The other item of note at the half time break was the sight of our entire Management team standing outside the dressing room as the players clearly had some sort of discussion without them. Whatever was said, it seemed to work for a while. We made two substitutions with Rory Edwards and Springett coming on for the limping Smith and Moreno-Gomez respectively and nearly scored straight away as a Springett corner was flicked just over the bar by Nick Wilson. Next up with a decent chance was Gavin Quintyne who tried his luck with his weaker foot and sliced the opportunity wide. However, he made amends in the 50th minute when he weaved his way across the edge of the penalty area before threading a pass through to Byatt, who guided the ball back across Oliver Howley in the Arundel goal from twelve yards which then crept in off the far post to get us back in the game.

Another Springett corner caused trouble as Merchant headed the delivery towards Thompson, whose header was just over the bar, but our only period of superiority in the match was about to end. Thompson limped off with an injured knee and whilst it was good to see Johnny "Sonic" Akoto returning after a few weeks out, his introduction required a defensive reshuffle. Whether this had a bearing on the next Arundel goal in the 63rd minute is hard to say, but a harmless ball in from the right was struck at goal by an unmarked player, and whilst Theobald made a good save from the first shot, Will Breden was also in acres of space and he drove the loose ball home from a few yards out with our defence absolutely nowhere in sight.

In the 72nd minute it got worse still as a low ball in from the right was tapped in at the far post for a fifth goal by Breden once again, and we were lucky not to concede more with Wilson being our latest sin-bin visitor around this time, while Byatt and Quintyne both picked up yellow cards for fouls to go with the first half issue to Smith. Our afternoon was then summed up when Dyer put substitute George Owusu through on goal ten minutes from time, only for him to tread on the ball in the act of shooting!

Now that ten man Shoreham's victory over East Preston has virtually guaranteed them the title, it is imperative we cling on to second place to guarantee the home playoff matches. The players kept trying in this contest, even at the end and I'm aware that some more new signings are likely as we approach the transfer deadline on 31st March, but if we don't get back to winning ways on Wednesday at Mile Oak, we could slip out of that position. We cannot make any more mistakes now.

This is not just about us though. We didn't play well but full credit should also go to Arundel who played with a lot of energy and just appeared to cover a lot more ground per player than we did and will no doubt chase Selsey all the way for that final playoff



spot, in which case we may well see them again before the end of the season. However, this is a massive reality check for us. Are we actually good enough to go up? We'll probably find out the answer to that question on Wednesday as we face a Mile Oak team that have also lost 5-1 this weekend.

Epsom & Ewell: Tom Theobald, Gideon Acheampong, Kevin Moreno-Gomez, Ryan Smith (c), Oliver Thompson, Dylan Merchant, Jaevon Dyer, Nick Wilson, Jamie Byatt, Gavin Quintyne, Lewis Pearch

Subs: Steve Springett for Moreno-Gomez, (HT), Rory Edwards for Smith (HT), Johnny Akoto for Thompson (58), George Owusu for Byatt (76)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Spelthorne's thorny property problems spelt out

Following the report on Woking's woes we have Emily Coady-Stemp from LDRS report on another sister Surrey borough's woes over property investments:

Spelthorne's former leader says "hand on heart" he still believes the borough council's commercial property investments were "utterly legal". The councillor said the authority had taken legal advice on the decision to purchase the buildings but raised concerns about other councils with high borrowing costs.

Image: Spelthorne Borough Council audit committee on March 23, 2023. Credit: Emily Coady-Stemp

Councillor Ian Harvey (United Spelthorne Group, Sunbury East), who was leader of Spelthorne Borough Council at the time three commercial properties were bought outside of the borough in 2017/18, was responding to a public interest report carried out by its auditors. He told a meeting of the borough council's audit committee on Thursday (March 23) his first question at the time the possibility of buying properties came up was: "Is it legal?"

He said the advice given at the time by the council's KC was that it was legal, and that the decision had "repeatedly been determined to be legal subsequently".

The report, publicly released in November, claimed the council had "acted unlawfully" in its decision to buy properties outside of the borough, and set out five recommendations for the authority.

At a December meeting of the council, councillors agreed the recommendations set out in the KPMG report, and Thursday's meeting was an update on the action plan to come about from that.

The current council leader, Cllr John Boughtflower (Conservative, Ashford East) said in December the council "should not have any difficulties" accepting the recommendations, because of changes to processes at the council and issues that had been addressed since the purchases.

Cllr Harvey asked auditors at Thursday's meeting, who were presenting their report into the 2017/18 accounts, if they had assessed the council's risks "compared to some other spectacularly investing local authorities for example, Slough, Croydon, Thurrock". He also asked about comparisons to Woking Borough Council, where the current administration has warned an effective bankruptcy may be declared, saying they had "borrowed more than we have without any surety of repayment".

Later in the meeting Cllr Harvey said: "I can say hand on heart that we were assured, and I still believe, it is utterly legal. And if what we did was illegal then what a lot of other councils have done, and spectacularly failed, at was far, far more illegal." He claimed the difference in legal opinions was because KPMG had "relied on a much more junior barrister within the same chambers who came up with a dissenting view".

Cllr Lawrence Nichols (Liberal Democrat, Halliford and Sunbury West) said though the advice was taken from a "very well qualified QC", it amounted to 19 words of legal advice for more than £200million of expenditure in 2017/18. He also questioned the diversity of the council's property portfolio and the advice sought from how to manage commercial properties. He told the meeting: "I do think we out to be more realistic about diversification. We are in the office business, whether it's an engineering company or a dental practice, that's not the issue. It's the office market we're in, so that's our diversification risk."

In response to an expected £60m of rental income dropping to £46m for next year, which Cllr Nichols said was a "massive change of direction", the council's chief accountant Paul Taylor said £7m rent guarantee income had been released and would be going into the council's revenue budget.



The meeting heard that a new group head of assets had recently started at the council and that a “fully worked up action plan” would come to the committee’s next meeting in July. Spelthorne’s chief executive, Daniel Mouawad, said the nearly half a decade turnaround in the audit report for 2017/18, the last stage of which was the public interest report, was “by any measure” a “remarkably poor turnaround”. But he added that nearly a year’s delay could be “directly attributed to the actions of one individual Spelthorne councillor” which was currently being investigated under the members code of conduct.

When asking a question on this individual, Cllr Harvey was cut off by the chair, his wife Cllr Helen Harvey (United Spelthorne Group, Sunbury East), though officers did confirm they would revert with a response on the cost of the delay caused by the councillor concerned.

KPMG representatives confirmed an “adverse conclusion” would be issued in relation to the “value for money arrangements” for the 2017/18 accounts, the same as in the 2016/17 accounts where recommendations and weaknesses raised were “still in place in the 2017/18 period”.

The meeting also heard that a review into the council’s borrowing carried out by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities should be coming to an end this week

In response to a public question on the review, the chair said the council was not “privy to the terms of reference or have any expectations to receive the final report within any given period”.

It was hoped this report would also come to the next committee meeting in July, though Terry Collier, the council’s deputy chief executive, said it had been hoped there may be a draft report available by Thursday’s meeting.

Waking to Woking’s woeful debt

Epsom and Ewell Times has followed the finances at this sister Surrey borough. We all should perhaps be concerned and learn lessons from a County borough that can get in such a mess. In contrast Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has been balancing its books for years. At the end of the day where will the money come from to save Woking? Local Democracy Reporter Chris Caulfield reports:

The dire financial future of Woking Borough Council was laid bare with senior figures warning of the “significant risk” of it effectively going bankrupt as its cash reserves run dry.

The council’s executive committee met on Thursday March 23 to hear an update on its financial strategy. It was told of the budgeted shortfall of £9.5m for the next financial year and the swingeing cuts coming as it moved to provide only the minimum levels of services – those it must provide by law.

Woking Borough Council’s financial disaster is the product of years of heavy borrowing to pay for a failing investment portfolio. The previous administration had hoped this would generate income but instead it has saddled the local authority with annual interest repayments of more than £60m a year while only generating £38.5m.

Councillor **Dale Roberts** is now the portfolio holder for finance on the council. He said it had gone to the government seeking to lower the minimum amount it can set aside to repay its loans and has been searching for further “restrictions on expenditure necessary to address the budgeted shortfall of £9.5m for 24/25. He added: “Both of which relate to the ongoing and significant risk of issuing a section 114 notice.”

Councils can not go bankrupt. Instead, they enter what is known as being under section 114 notice and means they cannot make new spending commitments.

He also said the council would seek to try to fund “transformational projects” through any capital receipts. Cllr **Ian Johnson** (Lib Dem, Mount Hermon) said: “It shows a stark issue, the deficit next year is £9.5million based on current numbers, and yet our services expenditure is just under £45m. So that’s a 20 per cent difference. So we need either cost savings or revenue generation to be able to cover that gap of 20 per cent. Because the £62million interest payments we are making at the minute could well go up given today’s interest rate rises.

“Its unaffordable at the present level. We know that DLUHC (the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities) have been in the office talking to us for the last couple of months. Until we get their report as well we won’t be able to be definitive in where we’re progressing with any of the business we’ve got including talking to the government about our debt levels and how



we might be assisted in reducing the interest payments we make.”

DLUHC was not expected to return any decision until the start of the new political year in May. Cllr Dale Roberts said: “The enormity of the task ahead of us for next year, the affordability of the borrowing, the degree that we have to find savings are deeply concerning.”

Cllr **Stephen Dorsett** (Con. Pyrford) asked about the possibility of future savings if council was already operating at “statutory spend only” – that is for services the council is legally obligated to provide. Cllr Roberts said: “Even costs savings cost”.

Leader of the council **Anne Marie Barker** said: “We’re having to put controls on day to day spend and just keep a very tight rein on everything. We’ve got our balanced budget for the year by using reserves but going forward that £9.5m next year, and more than that the following year, we do need to do a fundamental review of what were doing and how were doing it. It’s the only way we can make those budgets balance, the reserves aren’t going to last forever.”

Related reports:

Would you want to live in Woking?

Woking up to a very big debt problem

Legally Blonde at Epsom Playhouse

The Epsom Players performance at the Epsom Playhouse on Tuesday 21st March is reviewed by Nigel Dams for Sardines and reprinted with permission. It runs till Saturday. Tickets from Epsom Playhouse box office

Until I spoke with one of the cast members (the leading cast member actually, the glorious Lydia May Whiteside) after the show, I thought this was a professional production.

When the curtain went up, I thought, hang on, amateurs can’t afford a set like this. And then when the dancing began, I thought, hang on, amateurs can’t afford dancers like this. Same with the singing.

So I decided they must be pros, and settled back to be more and more entertained as the evening went on.

Let me get the minor niggles out of the way first. I couldn’t always make out the words the singers were putting across. This was sometimes because the band, especially the horns, were just a shade too loud, sometimes because the lead was not cutting through the chorus, and sometimes because the vocal frequencies blended too much with the band’s. But this was only in the beginning, really, and got better as the show progressed.



Also, when the stage crew flew in various bits of scenery, they sometimes hung suspended and swinging an inch above the



boards, which was pretty distracting. It seemed to me that another inch would have grounded them, and eliminated that.

But the rest was great, and kept getting better and better.

Right from the opening number I kept thinking how sharp the choreography was - kudos to Della Bhujoo - and how fit and well-drilled the dancers were. I have great respect for people who can do intense cardio and sing at the same time. They were singing very well too, all of them. Harmonies were crisp and close, high notes and belt notes all well struck, all very impressive. I must make special mention of the eye-popping opening number in Act 2. The entire troupe were skipping (sorry, jumping rope) in time to the music, with great vigour, while singing, led by Millie Shields as Brooke. Max respect. Especially because Ms Shields had to speak shortly afterward and you could barely tell she'd been working out.

It seems unfair to single anyone out from the cast, because they were all excellent, but I must mention Imogen Smart-Steele as Paulette (excellent accent, great singer), Akhil Gowrinath likewise and Ms Whiteside, who led the whole show, playing an enormous part with total confidence, swagger and beguiling blondness. Oh, and the two dogs who were obviously classmates at RADA.

A final special mention to the whole cast for the 'Gay or European?' number, which was perfect, and very funny.

I have to say again, I can hardly believe that this show was done by amateurs (am I allowed to use that word any more?) it was so slick, so tight, so well done. My humble and sincere congratulations to Director Chris Malone, Musical Director Dan Francis and the entire cast, band and crew. Superb.

Nigel Dams

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Surrey lands largest EV charging contract in UK

Surrey County Council and **Connected Kerb** have agreed a contract to support the rollout of thousands of electric vehicle chargepoints across the county in the coming years. The contract, the largest in the UK to date, will release up to £60million of investment for Connected Kerb to install public EV chargepoints across the county. The aim will be to install thousands over the next five years and Connected Kerb have been licensed to operate the chargepoints for 15 years from installation.

Image credit: Andy Hughes.

Increasing the number public chargepoints in Surrey will support residents who would like to switch to an electric vehicle (or already have done), but do not have a driveway to be able to install a chargepoint at their home. Through this contract, chargepoints will be installed at convenient on-street locations in residential areas and key locations in the community such as on high streets and public car parks.

Connected Kerb will install a mix of chargepoints, depending on location, to suit all needs. This will include slower 3kW and 7kW chargepoints, as well as fast 22kW chargepoints and, where suitable, rapid chargepoints. Their product range includes free-standing and wall-mounted chargepoints, which will cater to those with accessibility needs.

The partnership will see a rapid rollout of on-street charge points, with ambitious plans to install hundreds of charge points within the first year. It aims to make one in five of the EV charging bays more accessible to drivers with disabilities, in recognition of the need to make EV adoption a practical reality for the 2.35 million blue badge holders on UK roads [1].

The recent Net Zero Review, published by the Government's advisor Rt Hon Chris Skidmore **MP**, highlighted the opportunity for local authorities to take a leading role in the rollout of charging infrastructure. The partnership between Surrey County Council and Connected Kerb supports the delivery of ambitious EV charging infrastructure rollouts at the scale and pace needed to meet targets set by the government and to keep pace with rapidly growing EV adoption - up 40% in 2022 compared to 2021.

Throughout the contract, Connected Kerb will be identifying suitable on-street locations, using residents' suggestions made **through our online map**, and approaching public sector and community land owners across the county to identify other suitable locations for public EV chargepoints, including local car parks, NHS sites and educational establishments.

Marisa Heath, Cabinet Member for Environment, Surrey County Council, said: "We know that emissions from transport are a significant proportion of our carbon footprint in Surrey, so supporting residents to switch to an electric car is essential to helping us achieve our aim of being a net zero county by 2050.

"Many residents don't have access to driveways to charge EVs at home, so a comprehensive network of high-quality, reliable and



accessible EV chargepoints is essential to supporting the needs of our local communities.

"We've been working with Connected Kerb for almost a year, as part of our pilot phases that have seen us install over 100 chargepoints across Surrey over the last two years. We're delighted this contract will enable us to speed up the roll-out of further chargepoints and expand our network in the coming years."

Chris Pateman-Jones, CEO of Connected Kerb, said: *"If one local authority can deliver such a significant boost to the UK's charging network, just imagine what we could achieve by 2030 if every city, county, and combined authority was empowered to do the same. The recent Net Zero Review was clear – local authorities can become the driving force behind the rollout of charging infrastructure across the country, and our partnership with Surrey County Council is case and point."*

"If local authorities are the door to a clean transport future, then charging networks like Connected Kerb are the key, providing the tools and expertise needed to unlock the transition at the pace and scale required to reach net zero. Although the Government's estimate of 300,000 chargers by 2030 may feel ambitious, it's eminently possible – and necessary – to achieve; this deal proves it."

In addition to the EV chargepoints, the contract will deliver significant value to Surrey residents through Connected Kerb's social value projects. These will cover a range of initiatives including working with local educational centres to provide industry support to pupils interested in learning about EV chargepoints, providing employability support to vulnerable young people, as well as supporting a number of charities within the county.

- The contract enables up to £60million of investment to provide public EV chargepoints across Surrey
- Chargepoints will be installed at on-street locations as well as on other suitable public sector and community organisation managed car parks
- Partnership underlines findings of the recent Net Zero Review which highlighted local authorities as the key to reaching the UK Government's 300,000 chargepoint target

Planning or pantomime? Councillors press pause on Plan.

Epsom and Ewell council voted to "pause" its controversial Local Plan last night, with one Residents' Association (RA) councillor leaving the meeting after suggesting it was about "forthcoming elections rather than planning policy". The length of the "pause" has not been specified.

Local elections are due to take place on 4 May.

Councillor **Alex Coley** (Residents' Association, Ruxley Ward) told the council: "Considering this motion on its merits, I feel that a more appropriate location might be the Playhouse around Christmas time." "We seem to be debating the forthcoming elections rather than planning policy", he added, suggesting that the pause "ultimately changes very little". Cllr Coley then told the council: "I will leave you now to your debate."

The motion to pause the Local Plan was put forward by councillor **Eber Kington** (Residents' Association, Ewell Court Ward) and six other RA councillors. Cllr Kington said that a pause would acknowledge "the strength of public feeling" on the Plan, enable a reassessment of brownfield sites, and provide the opportunity to look at options that do not use Greenbelt land at all. He added: "We have to take notice of what residents are telling us, through whatever means they choose."

The public consultation on the Draft Local Plan ended on Sunday (19 March) with around 1,500 responses. A petition calling to "Keep Epsom and Ewell Greenbelt" has also reached 10,000 signatures, which is thought to be the greatest response to a petition in the borough's history.

Campaign group Epsom Greenbelt held a protest to "Welcome Councillors" outside of last night's meeting, and were calling for "Green not greed".

Councillor **Bernie Muir** (Conservative, Stamford Ward) said she had "no option" but to vote for the pause, despite believing that "nothing in this motion will actually stop this plan from going ahead in the end".



The pause was discussed in light of expected changes to government planning legislation, including updated guidance on Greenbelt development and how to calculate housing need.

One part of the motion states: “Under the existing legislation Local Planning Authorities are being required to draft Local Plans on the basis of out of date, 2014, data that does not reflect Epsom and Ewell’s housing need, as shown in more recently available 2018 data.”

Councillor **Peter O’Donovan** (Residents’ Association, Ewell Court Ward) said that pausing was not an option because the government had not given a timeframe for its legislative changes. He added that without an up-to-date Local Plan, there was a danger of inappropriate development, and said: “we need to continue on our current strategy, to protect the borough, to produce a plan that protects our Greenbelt.”

Councillor **Kate Chinn** (Labour, Court Ward) said that there was a huge need for housing in the borough, particularly social and affordable housing, but that there should be no development on the Greenbelt until every other option had been exhausted. She said that Labour councillors would be voting to pause the Plan.

Councillor **Julie Morris** (Liberal Democrats, College Ward) said: “There’s really quite a divide, isn’t there, amongst the ruling group?” She said: “We should have been much more clear about the direction that this document was going in, and that’s the problem you’ve got now – you are now having to do a U-turn because it was all kept secret for quite a long time and the public are not happy, understandably.”

Cllr Morris said that it was difficult to know whether to vote for the motion, especially when it did not include any endpoint for the pause, but said that it was the right thing to do on balance.

Councillor **Steven McCormick** (Residents’ Association, Woodcote Ward) had five minutes to respond to the points raised because, as chair of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee, he had led the development of the Local Plan. He said that the proposed pause was reliant on the idea that the government would publish changes to planning policy in May, but that some legislation change may not come until 2024.

Cllr McCormick added that the motion to pause the Plan would create “huge uncertainty” and said: “the best thing for protecting the Greenbelt is to progress”. Cllr McCormick voted against the pause.

The council voted to pause the Local Plan by a clear majority, with four councillors (RA Cllrs Dallen, O’Donovan, McCormick and Nash) voting against the pause and Cllr Williamson abstaining.

The text of the motion is [HERE](#).

See editorial.