



Neighbouring crematorium plan goes up in smoke.

Reigate and Banstead borough council has shelved its plans for the area's first crematorium despite having spent £350,000 on the project so far. The facility could have brought in more than £1.5million for the authority, but was rejected by councillors at a planning meeting in September 2021, despite the officer recommendation to approve it.

A decision then had to be taken whether to submit another application, proceed with a third party partner or appeal the decision, though it was then discovered the council could not appeal its own planning decision.

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council's commercial ventures executive sub-committee considered a report into "project baseball" on Thursday (November 17) which detailed the closure.

The project, first brought to committee in December 2019, would have provided the borough's first crematorium, and has been funded by the council through its reserves, or savings. Plans were refused at planning stage because of its location in the greenbelt, with more than 500 public objections to the application.

Council documents show the aim of the project was to provide a much needed and greatly improved level of service to the residents, while also bringing in income for the authority. More than 80 per cent of dead people were cremated in the UK as at 2021, and facilities in neighbouring boroughs were found to be operating beyond their capacity.

Documents said: "[They] were not considered to serve customers, and particularly local people, well at a difficult time of life, either in terms of service, cost, environment and location/accessibility." They went on to say the crematorium would aim to deliver "a higher quality facility and service" than the nearest competitors, closer to residents and those near the borough, and also bringing money in for the council.

Operating at full capacity, it was estimated the crematorium could have brought in more than £1.5m per year.

Wick burned at both ends

Wick FC 0-2 Epsom & Ewell FC. Saturday 19th November. Southern Combination League - Division One.

A goal towards the end of each half was sufficient for our boys to see off the challenge from second placed Wick at Crabtree Park on Saturday; a result which extends our lead at the top of the table to five points.

However, this result was more than just the win. Last Saturday we threw in an awful performance against Worthing United. So poor in fact that our football club chose to hide away from even releasing a report, although obviously there was still one on this site, as supporters will always be kept informed of what is going on here. In that report I wrote that if we were able to defeat Wick and Shoreham in our upcoming matches that we would be able to write off last week's aberration as a freak result, and we are now half way towards being able to do just that.

Despite the substantial amount of rain in midweek, the pitch passed the inspection and looked in fairly good condition from pitch side. We took the field with two changes from the starting eleven against the Mavericks seven days previously; Johnny "Sonic" Akoto came in at right back with Gideon Acheampong moving across to cover the absent Aaron Bogle, who had only played 45 minutes of that Worthing United match before being replaced. Further forward Jaevon Dyer came in for Gavin Quintyne, but found himself out on the wing with Jamie Byatt playing down the middle. Additionally, we would have three new Salts in this match as Kevin Moreno-Gomez (Horley Town, Burgess Hill), Ben Bauchop (Farnham Town) and Oliver Thompson (Colliers Wood United) would all see action off the bench.

The opening exchanges were fairly even, with a slight ascendancy in favour of the home team, although as the match progressed we began to hold a greater share of possession. Athan Smith-Joseph was giving a lot of trouble to the two defenders that were covering him, although the end product never found a team mate on this occasion. Balls in to the near post were cleared away by defenders, while deeper crosses just always seemed to elude Byatt in the middle.

Dyer was slightly quieter in the opening half, but actually appeared to carry more of a threat to goal when he had the ball. He was upended after quarter of an hour just outside the penalty area, and Ryan "Butch" Smith's shot was well saved low to his right by Keelan Belcher. Byatt put Josh Owen through on goal with a clever ball, but the defender did well and forced him away from goal. Then Smith-Joseph sent a shot just over the bar after he cut in from the left. Just after the half hour a Wick clearance hit a team mate and rebounded kindly for Byatt, but he chose to pass instead of shooting and probably instantly regretted it as his ball was too far ahead of Owen.



However, it was apparent that we were the ones pushing more and more for the opening goal and it came in the only minute of first half injury time. Akoto got away down the right wing and he pulled the ball back to Dyer, standing around fifteen yards out. His shot went across Belcher but was blocked by a defender on the goal line, although Byatt was alert as ever and nipped in to force the loose ball into the net from around half a yard out before the defender could reach it.

This was a fair half time score and heading towards the evocatively named Condemned Tree end in the second half we continued to push. Dyer was brought down, leading to a bit of a scuffle, although nothing came of it. The home side sent a looping header wide of our goal from a deep free kick, but we were back on the attack soon after and Dyer beat a number of men as he ran across the edge of the Wick penalty area before striking a shot back across Belcher, which went just beyond the far post with Byatt steaming in and unable to reach it. The only thing that ended up in the net was the covering defender!

The game took a serious turn in the 62nd minute when Tommy Farr made a good run on the right for Wick, only to stumble over just outside the box. It looked comical when it happened, but it was soon apparent that he was in a lot of pain and the game stopped for ten minutes while Farr received treatment for an injured knee before being stretchered off. The home team advised after the match that it didn't appear too serious, which was a relief to all.

The game restarted and was followed by the best chance of the match for the home team. They held some good possession down the right and as the ball came in, Aaron Tester appeared to almost flick at the ball with the outside of his foot from just inside the box and it cleared Kane Charles' bar by inches.

Our first substitute Josh Alder replaced Byatt with ten minutes of official normal time to play, although due to the earlier injury it would become almost twenty-five. The match then saw a solid challenge from Brad Peters that Johan Van Driel reacted to and he got up and pushed Peters over from behind. However, the ball was up at the other end of the field by then and none of the officials saw it conclusively. The referee chose to award just the yellow card, which was probably the correct decision, although we have certainly seen red cards issued before for similar infringements.

A few minutes later Wick tried a long range dipping shot that cleared our crossbar by inches, rippling the net as it landed and convincing a few excited supporters that their team had equalised. In response Alder broke through on the left but his shot was well kept out by Belcher's leg. However, he would get a second opportunity in the 96th minute as Wick pushed up and Zach Powell's long clearance cleared the defenders on the half way line and Alder was through again. This time he ran in and finished clinically with a low shot across Belcher which just clipped a glove, but still nestled in the far corner for our second goal.

Both teams had a final chance as the time ticked down. Dyer was denied in the act of shooting by a superb block challenge from Harry Williams, while at the other end Dave Crouch tried his luck from distance, but Charles was able to tip the ball onto the post and away for a corner that ultimately came to nothing. Finally, after around fifteen minutes of injury time the whistle blew to confirm that all three points were Epsom bound.

Overall, this was a vastly improved performance on the previous one. Instead of a porous defence that looked like it might concede to Worthing United at regular intervals, we kept Wick at arm's length for much of the match and restricted them mostly to long range efforts. Up front we created more opportunities, while in midfield we took charge of the match, which was something we had struggled to do in our previous contest. The only black mark on the day was a rather harsh booking for Nick Wilson who will now miss the important Shoreham match on Saturday through suspension. I'm not sure why the club chose to put this information in the public domain, but if we play as well next week as we did in this match, it shouldn't make any difference as we have decent strength in depth across the squad.

Epsom & Ewell: Kane Charles, Johnny "Sonic" Akoto, Zach Powell, Ryan 'Butch' Smith, Brad Peters (c), Gideon Acheampong, Athan Smith-Joseph, Nick Wilson, Jamie Byatt, Josh Owen, Jaevon Dyer

Subs: Josh Alder for Byatt (80), Kevin Moreno-Gomez for Smith-Joseph (91), Gavin Quintyne for Wilson (97), Ben Bauchop for Owen (100), Oliver Thompson for Powell (102)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Locally trained artist's Ewell exhibition closes



tomorrow

Ending Saturday 19th November your last chance to see selected works of the artist **John Whurr** at his solo exhibition in **Bourne Hall Gallery**. His work varies from pencil sketches of birds and animals to watercolour landscapes and detailed pen and wash of well known buildings in London and elsewhere. Also included is a large collection of portraits in ink and pencil - WG Grace is portrayed at Lords Cricket Ground - the pop artist Rod Stewart in his early days - groups of famous racing drivers and rugby players. His gift for depicting people is incredible. I particularly enjoyed the picture of the actor Leo Mckern playing the part of "Rumpole of The Bailey". In this one off incredible exhibition, colour paintings of classic cars, motorbikes and railway trains demonstrate John's wonderful skill in depicting shiny surfaces like metal and glass. Detailed pictures of buildings and cityscapes show his interest in architecture. A very modest and down to earth person - John has been awarded many accolades for his work but prefers to maintain a low profile.



John Whurr has always had an interest in drawing from an early age. He went to school in **Carshalton** and became chief draughtsman for Shell Coal and later worked for the BBC . He studied at **Sutton Art College** and spent time learning watercolour skills at the **Epsom Further Education Centre**. Over the years he has had several exhibitions alongside other artists at Bourne Hall and other places with many of his works going abroad from Australia to the USA and many European countries.



He was commissioned to provide five pictures for the cultural centre in Nagasaki, Japan. He loves sketching and his first love is



architectural/coastal subjects but his interest in landscape will get him reaching for the paint palette. For many years his drawing has extended to caricatures and more recently portraits. John is a member of the Society of All Artists & The Molesey Art Society. He's enjoyed being 'artist in residence' at the Brooklands Museum Weybridge.



Reporting by Audrey Ardern-Jones

The dreadful price of dangerous speeding

A Woodmansterne man is facing 2 years and 8 months behind bars after making a reckless decision to show off his car in front of his friends by driving at excessive speed which resulted in the tragic death of a 17-year-old girl.

Leanne Taylor, who was the back seat passenger at the time, was sadly killed in the collision which took place in Tupwood Scrubbs Road in Caterham on the evening of Saturday, 1 February 2020.



Leanne Taylor

Describing Leanne as “definitely one of a kind with a massive individual personality”, her family said today that Leanne’s “lasting legacy is giving a gift of life to four people”.

Her mother, **Mary Allison**, said: “Over the last two years and nine months, we as a family have waited for justice for our Leanne. How I wish my Leanne was alive and had the chance to live life to the full, it’s heartbreaking. We would like to thank all the emergency services who were there on the night, to the staff at St George’s treating our Leanne with dignity and respect. A massive thank you to the team from the Surrey and Sussex Police Serious Collision Investigation Unit for all the work they have done to build this case, for justice for our Leanne. A big thank you to our family liaison officer and all involved.”

The driver of the car involved in the collision, **Callum Hone**, 24, of Manor Way, Woodmansterne, was sentenced to 2 years and 8 months’ imprisonment when he appeared at Guildford Crown Court yesterday (17 November). He has also been disqualified from driving for 5 years, which will start when released from prison and if he was ever to reapply for his driving licence there would be the requirement to complete an extended re-test.



Callum Hone

Hone had pleaded guilty to causing death by dangerous driving on the first day of his trial at the same court on 10 October.

On the evening of the collision, Hone had picked Leanne and another friend up in his BMW 320 where they joined another group of friends at Caterham Viewpoint. They were sitting in their cars talking and listening to music when Hone made the fatal decision to do a drive-by. Hone set off, with Leanne and her friend still in the car, and was driving at speed when he failed to negotiate a left hand bend, resulting in the car colliding with a tree and overturning a number of times before landing on its roof.

Leanne's body was recovered from under the BMW and she was taken to hospital, where she sadly died five days later as a result of the catastrophic injuries she had suffered in the crash.

On sentencing, **Judge Black** said: "I have no doubt you were showing off to your friend. You were fully aware of the risk driving the way that you did with at least one passenger unrestrained within the car"

Investigating Officer, **Lauren Upton**, from the Serious Collision Investigation Unit, said: "Our thoughts are with Leanne's family and friends following her tragic and senseless death. I would like to thank Leanne's family for their patience and dignity throughout this investigation. Hone was estimated to have been driving at a speed of between 55 and 60mph at the time of the crash, a speed that was unsuitable for the road conditions. Leanne's death is a stark reminder of why all young drivers should think twice before they risk the lives of themselves and others by putting their foot down on the accelerator to show off and try to impress their friends. Sadly, this case is an example of the devastating consequences Hone's reckless and irresponsible actions can have. Speed kills - it is simply not worth the risk. We will continue to investigate serious collisions and bring to justice those who compromise the safety of themselves and others on our roads in Surrey."

Banding against Surrey's top value homes?

"Very expensive" houses on private estates in Surrey should be added to new council tax bands to make the collection process fairer, according to one councillor. As part of the Autumn Statement, **Jeremy Hunt** announced more "flexibilities" for local authorities to increase council tax by 5 per cent per year without a referendum from April next year. The rise could mean average council tax bills look increase to more than £2,000 for a Band D home as councils look to fill holes in their budgets.

Councillor **Nick Darby**, (The Dittons, Dittons and Weston Green Residents), the Residents' Association and Independent group leader on **Surrey County Council**, said legislation at central government level could make the system fairer. In what he said would be a "significant change" in the system, Cllr Darby said a threshold could be set on homes worth more than, for example £5million, and two new council tax bands created to get those homes to pay more "as a matter of principle". He added: "I don't mean your average three-bed semi. If you go into areas of Surrey, in the private estates in Esher, Weybridge you've got people with very expensive houses."

He asked if it was fair that those who have "those very, very expensive houses" pay the same council tax as someone in a house



with “very much less value”. But he said the plans should not impact on those who were “already struggling”. He said for people who were “asset rich and cash poor” the payments could be put off until the house was sold, rather than having to pay immediately or be forced to sell their home.

County council’s budget “already under considerable pressure”. The Surrey Liberal Democrats said people in Surrey were being asked to pay for Conservative errors to fix the economy and oil and gas giants were being “[let] off the hook”. **Will Forster** (Woking South), Leader of Surrey Lib Dems said: “We know that the county council’s budget is already under considerable pressure and today’s announcements will not make balancing the books any easier. It remains to be seen whether the Tory administration decides to use the extra flexibility they will have to set a much higher level of council tax, to help make up the shortfall. We need a fair deal, including support for people unable to afford skyrocketing mortgage bills and rents, and protecting funding for local health services. This could be paid for by reversing tax cuts for banks and a proper windfall tax, instead of imposing years of stealth taxes on ordinary families.”

Surrey County Council’s leader, **Tim Oliver** (Conservative, Weybridge) is chairman of the County Council’s Network, and praised the Chancellor’s decision to delay social care reforms until 2025 as a “brave” one. He said postponing these reforms and putting money into frontline care services was welcomed and would protect the most vulnerable also giving councils “vital time to stabilise the care system”.

The county council previously warned of concerns that without a delay, the authority could face bankruptcy. With his county council leader hat on, Cllr Oliver said there was much in the statement local government could be happy about. He said investment in schools, skills and research and development would allow Surrey residents to access new, higher-paid opportunities, a priority for the council.

Cllr Oliver added: “Businesses in Surrey will also be pleased to know that they will not see business rates going up next year, while central government will also be ensuring local authorities are not out of pocket as a result. “We were also pleased to see that capital budgets for the next two years will not be cut, meaning we can continue to develop the world-beating broadband and transport infrastructure companies need to grow and thrive.” He said the authority would work closely with government ahead of the local government finance settlement due in December and would continue with its own budget setting, soon to be published for public consultation.

Another councillor looking ahead to December’s finance settlement is the Guildford deputy leader, Cllr **Joss Bigmore** (Residents for Guildford and Villages.) He was concerned there was not enough support to help local authorities protect frontline services. With an increase of more than £1.5m in energy costs just at the borough’s Spectrum leisure centre, he said: “It’s all well and good being allowed to increase council tax but it’s nothing compared to inflationary pressures.”

End

Epsom and Ewell Times adds: **Tim Oliver** was interviewed on BBC Radio 4’s PM programme 18th November and said he hoped the Council would not have to raise Council tax by 5%. He said the position was ameliorated by the promise of central Government of £6 billion to finance adult social care. So, a rise in Council tax “probably not, possibly not...” In a Surrey County Council press release issued later in the day Mr Oliver has added:

“Today’s autumn statement contained much that local government can be happy about, helping us ensure no-one is left behind. I am pleased to see that government has listened to our calls for a postponement of the adult social care reforms and for further support for the service. It is also good that the government will be developing a workforce plan for the sector and the NHS, to ensure we have the capacity to deliver these vital services.

“Businesses in Surrey will also be pleased to know that they will not see business rates going up next year, while central government will also be ensuring local authorities are not out of pocket as a result. We were also pleased to see that capital budgets for the next two years will not be cut, meaning we can continue to develop the world-beating broadband and transport infrastructure companies need to grow and thrive.

“Finally, the new investment in our schools over the next two years, as well as other announcements about skills and research and development, will enable Surrey residents to access new, higher paid opportunities. This is a high priority for us, and will be a key driver to ensuring Surrey continues to lead the country as we seek the growth that will take us through the current economic uncertainty.

“We will be working closely with the government over the coming weeks, particularly as we approach the local government finance settlement due in December, to work out the details attached to these measures. In the meantime, we are also proceeding with our own budget-setting process, which we will be publishing for public consultation shortly.”



Epsom's Wells Plan has a hole in it

Re-opening of an Epsom community centre hits a 'surveyor-sized' funding hole. After its surprise closure in 2015, residents served by **The Wells Centre**, Epsom, began a pitched battle to save the community centre from demolition and redevelopment. In spring of 2022, after a seven-year tussle with Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (EEBC), the residents finally tasted victory as EEBC's Strategy & Resources committee voted unanimously to grant the residents - now formed into a registered charity, the **Epsom Wells Community Association** (EWCA) - a long term lease of the Wells Centre building and land. But now, seven months on, the work to re-open the centre faces a funding challenge.

More than a lick of paint

The centre has remained shuttered for much of the intervening time, and lack of use has not been kind to the building's infrastructure and surrounding land. To refurbish the centre to its former glory (or better, as EWCA hope) serious funding grants are being sought from the likes of Surrey County Council and The National Lottery. To access the six-figure funding to fully realise the site's potential and EWCA's ambitions, the funds require detailed surveyor and architectural plans. These plans don't come cheap, and thousands of pounds are still needed to allow EWCA to get the experts needed.

"It's a bitter irony that we need funding to get the funding to re-open" says **Vanessa Marchant**, EWCA's Chairperson. "Once we're open, the centre will start generating its own income, so the funding becomes less essential. But, to repair the building and put in place all we want to have - such as a welcoming cafe in the heart of Epsom Common - we need grants. And to get the grants, we need a surveyor and architect. And to get them, we need generous donations or a pro-bono offer of help. Re-opening is so tantalisingly close, but just out of reach unless we get help."

How you can help

As a charity, EWCA will always welcome donations of all sizes, but for the survey and plans large donations will be needed. Of even more value, would be the donation of time and expertise by local surveyors and architects. Any companies or individuals keen to help with this, should reach out to EWCA directly at contactewca@gmail.com.

History and unique location The Wells Community Centre is situated on The Wells Estate, a unique residential area within Epsom Common. Surrounded on all sides by woodland, the dwellings are only served by a corner shop and a single access road.

In the heart of the estate is the Wells Centre, a community building serving residents of Stamford Ward and beyond since 1997. A community hall had been on the site since WW2. The centre is just a stone's throw from the historic Epsom Well; site of the world-famous Epsom Salts and birthplace of the town.

A place for everyone

EWCA's ambitions are to run the centre for the community, by the community. A place where everyone in the Epsom & Ewell area (and beyond) can find something that will interest them, whether that's evening classes, a creche, hall space, or just dropping in for a cuppa after a long dog walk or cycle ride around one of the borough's most picturesque locations.

To find out more about EWCA's plans for the centre and story so far, at the EWCA website, on Facebook "Save The Wells Centre Epsom" or Twitter <https://twitter.com/SaveWells>

Organic growth for Epsom Jazz Club

Epsom Jazz Club - Tobie Carpenter Organ Trio - Tuesday 15th November 2022 .

The Tobie Carpenter Organ Trio delightfully entertained the Tuesday night audience with witty and inventive covers of standards including "I'm Gonna Sit Right Down (And Write Myself A Letter)", "When You're Smiling" and "Gee Baby, Ain't I Good To You", alongside a fabulously clever Beatles medley.

Guitarist **Tobie Carpenter** was on fine form leading the Trio throughout the evening, and **Jamie Safir** was just masterful on the organ and particularly strong during the opening number of the second set, "Night Train". Drummer **Tim Giles** was clearly relishing being sat between his bandmates as they all traded solos, and within several tunes effortlessly took command of the fluid tempo changes.



The Oaks Room on Church Street has now been established as the monthly go-to venue in Epsom for an evening of quality live jazz. At this Autumn finale concert, the first three lineups for 2023 were revealed.

The Spring season will feature EJC's first visiting jazz accordionist, one of the most exciting vocalists of her generation, and a finalist in the 2022 BBC Young Jazz Musician of the Year competition (the final takes place Saturday 19th November, and is televised the following day on BBC4 at 8pm).

After only five events, Epsom Jazz Club has created something rather special. The intimate 70-seater venue, with each table adorned with a charming cocktail table lamp, is the perfect setting to sit back and listen to some of the very best professional jazz musicians the UK has nurtured.

For more information on the 2023 jazz programme please visit <http://EpsomJazzClub.com> or @EpsomJazzClub on Twitter/Instagram/Facebook - tickets are on sale now.

Council's secret strategy on public resources?

Epsom and Ewell's powerful **Strategy and Resources Committee** went into secret session on four items of public interest at its meeting Tuesday 15th November. The four items were:

1. INCOME GENERATING OPPORTUNITY
2. COST OF LIVING PAYMENT
3. LAND RETENTION
4. COMMERCIAL PROPERTY UPDATE

In each case the secrecy was justified on the following ground:

".... the business to be transacted/nature of the proceedings..... deals with information relating to the financial or business affairs of the Committee and third parties and the public interest in maintaining the exemption currently outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information."

However, the Committee did not close the meeting during discussions on the motion to close. During that discussion **Councillor Eber Kington** (RA Ewell Court Ward) revealed in public that the "income generating opportunity" related to a crematorium.

Councillor David Gulland (LibDem College Ward) argued that the proposal "is an interesting development which would benefit from a wide-ranging discussion with our residents ... I feel we're trying to be too secretive...we should be open with what we're trying to achieve with our assets." The Interim Chief Executive, responded that "the reason this is a restricted item is because it's a commercial opportunity and we need to protect our negotiations...with potential suppliers, etc". However, **Councillor Kate Chinn** (Lab, Court Ward) agreed with Cllr. Gulland. "Part of making the business case is to see if there's a need for it in the borough," she said. "Surely the easiest way to do that is to ask the residents."

It was at this point that Councillor Kington made the statement that "I want to get as much as I can out in the open. But what we have here is the Council looking at a possibility of a crematorium." He went on to defend the proposal to exclude press and public: "[If this] is a runner, it would have to come back to this committee and it may well be that that will be the time when it will be a public document. We don't want to give anyone the heads up that this is what we are planning. In most cases, we will put things not on pink paper if we can help it." [Ed. "Pink paper" is the colour of secret papers.]

The Residents' Association majority on the committee agreed with Councillor Kington and excluded press and public from any further details of this and the other three items.

At the same meeting:

VOTER ID LIKELY FOR 2023 - BUT COUNCILS MAY HAVE TO PICK UP THE BILL

Following public consultation, a new polling station is expected to be in operation for the borough elections in 2023. This is to be situated in the arts centre at the newly refurbished Horton Chapel and will serve the residents of the new Horton Ward. This new ward will comprise the four former hospital sites of Clarendon Park, Livingstone Park, Manor Park and Noble Park, plus some roads that are currently in Court Ward around the northern end of Hook Road.

Receiving the detailed report that included this information Councillor **Hannah Dalton** (Residents' Association, Stoneleigh



Ward), asked about the Council's preparedness for the introduction of voter id at polling stations. "There will be a lot of communication from the government about this," the council officer replied. But he went to say that it will be a challenge getting it ready because the Council will be able to issue identity slips where people don't have photo identity.

Councillor **Liz Frost** (Residents' Association, Woodcote Ward) followed this up by asking about the cost implications of this for the Borough Council. The Interim Chief Executive, stated that "there are discussions going on with government at the moment ... At the moment, the proposal is that local councils will fund ID cards ... It's an ongoing discussion."

Tadworth Youth Club reduces crime

A youth club in one of Surrey's most deprived neighbourhoods is teaching children business skills, getting them birthday cakes and has seen kids queuing out the door to get in. The Friday night club, which can see up to 70 children in a week, also serves food to the kids, has them running their own tuck shop and deciding what to do with the profits, and aims to teach them things they may not learn at school.

Image: Councillors, Surrey Police officers, Surrey's deputy police and crime commissioner with staff and children at the MYTI Club. (Credit: LDRS)

The **MYTI club** runs each week and during school holidays at the **Phoenix Youth Centre** in Tadworth, and was set up by **Tony Britto** when he pitched to **Surrey County Council** after a call out for people to use the space. The LDRS (*Epsom and Ewell Times' news partnership with the BBC*) visited the youth club, where police officers were playing table tennis with the children, burgers were served for dinner, and everyone joined in with a rendition of happy birthday for two of the kids.

The deputy police and crime commissioner for Surrey and two county councillors were also there, showing just how much support this project has, as it takes steps towards gaining charitable status to take some of the strain off Tony's pockets. He's put a lot of his own money into the club, which costs around £70,000 a year to run, but that's no longer sustainable and getting charitable status would mean access to more funding streams. 'Parents can't believe how confident the kids have become'

Tony's own past is what has pushed him to want to pass on skills to these young people. After his dad died and Tony was taken into the care system in London, he said he started drinking from a young age and was "up to no good, getting into trouble, fighting". You had an inkling of something that you shouldn't be doing, I was probably up to it," he said. But he stopped drinking nearly six years ago, and alongside working for his own roofing company, is running the club with **Megan Ferguson**, the managing director.

Tony remembers something he was told when he was 13 years old that has stuck with him ever since: "Tell me, I forget; show me, I remember; involve me and I understand." It's what makes him want to get the kids deciding what they do with the profits from their tuck shop (they put them back into the club), help them foster good relationships with the police, and teach them the value of things in life.

They also get great feedback from parents, Tony said: "They can't believe how the kids change, how confident they've got. And if there's ever an issue, they come to us."



External view of Phoenix youth club in Tadworth, where the MYTI club is held each Friday and in school holidays. Credit: LDRS

A heat map shared on the club Instagram account (also run by the children) shows a drastic drop in anti-social behaviour in the vicinity of the club when its doors are open. Surrey Police could not provide more up to date information at the time of publication.

Kids would be down the 'wrong path' without the club. Megan is clear that were it not for the club many of the children would be going down the "wrong path". The Tattenham and Preston neighbourhood, where the club is, ranks 7th in Surrey for overall deprivation, according to figures from the county council. Nearly 20 per cent of the children in the area are in absolute low income families, which compares to 8.8 per cent in the borough of Reigate and Banstead, and 7.7 per cent in Surrey as a whole.

Ellie Vesey-Thompson, Surrey's deputy police and crime commissioner, said getting the kids in from eight years old is an important factor and praises both the impact on the children and the fact they are "diverted" away from getting drawn into crime and exploitation. But she's clear that a similar set up wouldn't work in all parts of Surrey in the same way, even if she did have the budget to do so. She said: "It's not just about the building, it's the environment they're creating. If you put one of these all across Surrey, it wouldn't have the same effect without having a Megan and a Tony in it."

Megan not only knows all the kids' names, having grown up in the area she also knows a lot of their parents too. With young children of her own, she fits the role around her family, and contrasts the difference between what they are running compared to the "dirty, grotty" youth clubs she went to as a youngster. She said her role is not the same as the kids' teachers or parents, and is happy to remind them that if they don't want to be there, they should leave. Saying it's important to teach the kids how much things cost, from bouncy castles the club hires to trips out, she said they start to appreciate how expensive the real world is.

With kids coming from as far afield as Leatherhead, Guildford, Kingston and Croydon, Megan says the space is a "privilege" for the children, and that's what makes them want to stay. She added: "Some of these kids don't have a voice in their life, they don't feel like it but we give it to them and we give them that power. All we can do is guide them along to making the right decisions."

Surrey County Councillor **Rebecca Paul** highlighted the strong relationship between those running the club and the children there. She said: "This is just a club that the local community feel real ownership for and, as a result, the kids really want to be here. They want to participate."

Epsom to help meet children's homes bed shortage?

With improvements to be made to existing children's homes, and **new ones being built in Epsom** and Walton, **Surrey County Council** is addressing a shortage of up to 60 children's homes beds for young people in the area. High property prices, difficulty securing planning permission and staffing issues, tied in with existing children's homes in need of repair and children with more complex needs have led to a "real problem" with provision in the county.



Image: Wells House or Karibu, Spa Drive - Surrey County Council Childrens Home

According to **Rachael Wardell**, the authority's executive director for children, families and lifelong learning, the county is "quite a long way short" on being able to provide for looked-after children in Surrey, and will need another ten or 12 homes to meet its needs. These would come from both council-run children's homes and private providers, with the county council currently having nine of its own homes and two new ones being built. She said the priority was always to keep children in Surrey where possible, to keep them near their families and communities.

The authority's children's services department was rated "requires improvement" in a January inspection, up from the inadequate rating it was first given in 2015. Asked if the council is playing catch up in terms of provision for young people being looked after by the council, Ms Wardell said it was "quite possibly true". The executive director, who joined the authority in December 2020, said the county council has fewer children's homes altogether than many neighbouring authorities, even across both in-house and private providers. She added: "When we look at some of the provision we've got for our children, it's quite a long way short in terms of numbers. It also often looks quite out of date, it hasn't necessarily been maintained or brought up to date on a regular basis over the years. What I would say is that we're investing really strongly now."

Part of that investment is more than £2million put into staffing, including staff achieving qualifications to be on a higher pay grade, and a recruitment drive since April which has seen 95 jobs offered and the council's residential team fully staffed with managers, deputies and portfolio leads.

With improvements to be made to existing children's homes, and **new ones being built in Epsom** and Walton, Ms Wardell said she wanted to be able to make children "feel like they're in a lovely place" with really good staff. Figures from July show that just under 40 per cent of looked-after children in the county were in homes in Surrey, with the authority aiming to increase that number to 80 per cent.

The county council closed one of its own homes in February this year, within 24 hours of an Ofsted report in which inspectors said "significant" management failings left its residents at risk "of significant harm".

In October, Elmbridge planners rejected an application for a children's home in a Claygate cul-de-sac, despite support from the county council and a recommendation to approve from council officers.

Ms Wardell said those residents who objected to children's homes had lost sight of the fact that they would be housing "children who've done nothing wrong, who've had a really, really tough life, and who need our support more than anything else". Of the shortage of beds in the county, she added: "It is a real problem. Not being able to develop [homes] ourselves and for other providers not to be able to develop them restricts the choices and opportunities for Surrey's children."

She also said she is not the only children's services director asking for Ofsted inspections that allowed more of a focus on the children and their journeys, as she reacted to an inadequate rating given to one of the council's children's homes in a report released last week. Saying regulatory inspections don't look "in the round" at what is going on in a child's life, and since inspectors "can't be in the home every day" they identify problems from months previously that have often since been corrected. While saying she would sometimes want staff to spend time with children rather than updating records, if they had to choose between the two, Ms Wardell also said: "I'm not trying to wriggle out of the responsibility, when homes get that wrong. At the same time, when they're trying to be very child centred, they're sometimes doing things with that young person, and maybe not keeping their records as up to date as they should."

She said being under less pressure with staffing would mean workers could both work with children and on paperwork, and that changes had been made to the system that logs information to make it easier for staff.

But she added that the "bounce" homes made between ratings and after inspections was "really tough" not only on staff but also on the young people living there, who would get a version of the report to read.

She said: "[The report] will say: 'The thing that you were experiencing as supportive, helping you, getting you back to school and all of the other important things, was something that we don't think is good enough.'" In small settings, she said a change of one or two key people could make a big difference, describing residential care as "more volatile than the rest of the service" and saying it could move both up and down quite quickly. She added: "Even the inconsistencies [across the county] are a bit inconsistent."