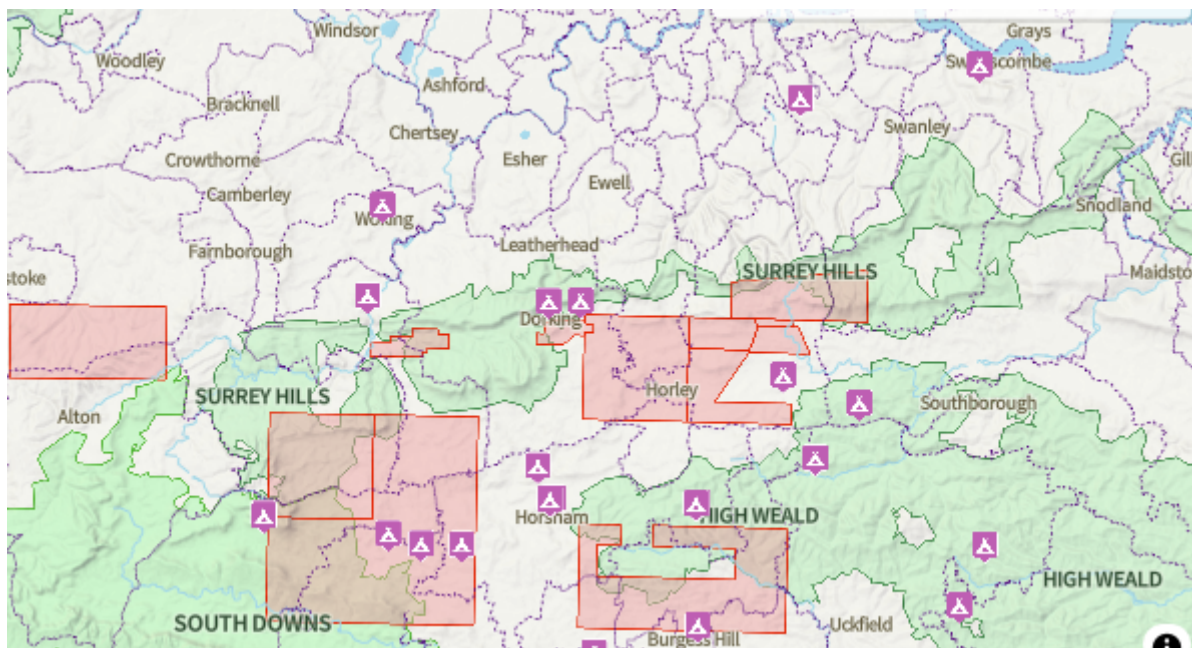




“Frackin’-hell!” - in Surrey?

Epsom and Ewell has so far escaped the grant of licences for shale-gas exploration. Other Boroughs in Surrey are targeted. 25th September Business and Energy Secretary **Jacob Rees-Mogg** announced: “In light of Putin’s illegal invasion of Ukraine and weaponisation of energy, strengthening our energy security is an absolute priority, and – as the Prime Minister said – we are going to ensure the UK is a net energy exporter by 2040. To get there we will need to explore all avenues available to us through solar, wind, oil and gas production – so it’s right that we’ve lifted the pause to realise any potential sources of domestic gas.” Including through new oil and gas licences and shale gas extraction.



Red blocks are areas licensed for shale-gas exploration. Purple triangles are local anti-fracking protest groups

Friends of the Earth has provided a map and statistics showing the areas and licences for shale-gas exploration in Surrey.

Constituency	Number of licences	Licences total area (sq m)	Proportion of constituency under licence
Guildford	2	54,008,711	28.6%
East Surrey	5	122,524,280	47.2%
Mole Valley	3	59,441,785	16.1%
South West Surrey	3	94,052,391	36.7%
Reigate	3	35,937,442	32.1%

Between now and 2040 will Epsom and Ewell’s natural resources have to play their part in energy self-sufficiency?

Let us know your views.

Housing plan flying in the face of opposition

Wisley Airfield town plan: We report on a Surrey housing application that illuminates issues all local boroughs face today [Ed.] : To paraphrase from a popular TV show: “Wrong location, wrong location, wrong location.” That’s the message from campaigners against plans for 1,700 homes on the former Wisley Airfield. They say traffic concerns, an abundance of wildlife and trying to fit



an urban development in a rural area are all reasons for the plans not to go ahead.

The former airfield is located alongside the A3 and is just over a mile from junction 10 with the M25, where another set of controversial works started this month. It was allocated as a new settlement in **Guildford Borough Council's** local plan for around 2,000 homes, shops and offices. An outline planning application was submitted to the borough council by **Taylor Wimpey** for the first 1,700 in the summer, and residents have until Monday (October 3) to comment on the plans.

There are so far 168 objections to the outline plans on the borough council's planning portal and comments received after the deadline will ordinarily also be considered. On a walk around the current site, which was used as an airfield from 1942 until 1972 and still has a tarmac landing strip in the middle, campaigner **Chris Campbell**, from Villages against Wisley New Town, told the LDRS he did not believe a new town should be built there. "Wrong location, wrong location, wrong location," he said. "Location is everything and as you can see, this is not the location for a town."

Around the old runway, the site is used as farmland, with two tractors out on the fields on the day of our visit.

We also see several kites in the air, and pass "Snakes Field", so-called, the campaigners tell me, because there are grass snakes, slow worms and amphibians living there. They've also seen badgers and owls on and around the site, and Mr Campbell raises concerns particularly about the impact of an increase in the number of dogs walking through woodland, a special protection area, between the site and the A3.

He said the "last thing" that's needed for the ground nesting birds on the site, including the Dartford warbler, night jar and woodlark, would be the additional 400 dogs that could come with the new homes.

A suitable alternative natural green space (**SANG**) will be allocated on the site to "avoid adverse effects on the integrity" of the special protection area according to the borough council's local plan. Taylor Wimpey documents state that the SANG provision is a "bespoke provision agreed with **Natural England**" and that more than half of the site will be accessible open space, as well as a 20 per cent biodiversity net gain on the site.

Frances Porter, chair of Ockham and Hatchford Residents' Association, walks across the former airfield every day with her dogs. She claimed she was told at a meeting with Taylor Wimpey representatives that traffic calming measures around the new town were designed to "frustrate" motorists out of their cars. But she doesn't think that people living in the town will be pushed out of their cars. "People haven't got anywhere else to go," she said. "You're going to need a car; you can't get the bus."

The borough council's local plan identifies requirements for the site including a "significant bus network" going to Effingham Junction and/or Horsley stations, as well as Guildford and Cobham. It would also require a cycle network to key destinations including stations, Ripley and Byfleet "to a level that would be attractive and safe for the average cyclist".



Frances Porter, Imogen Jamieson And Chris Campbell of Villages Against Wisley New Town. Credit Emily Coady-Stemp

Imogen Jamieson, vice chair of Ockham Parish Council, does not think the narrow roads surrounding the site can support the additional traffic, and isn't convinced cycle lanes would be used anyway. She said: "You're not going to pack your three children onto the back of bikes and cycle them to Horsley to get to school in the pouring rain." The parish councillor also said she believes it's a "myth" that so many new homes are needed, though she does acknowledge that there is a need for places for people to live. She said the environmental impacts of building new homes are far greater than re-purposing and retrofitting existing buildings, which can be done in towns and urban areas.

On top of the plans for the airfield, a further 1,500 new homes are planned in a three-mile radius of the site, but Mrs Jamieson said homes would be better built in areas where there are already transport links, employment opportunities and facilities such as doctors and schools. She said: "Here you're entirely reliant on a car. It's positioned right by the strategic road network. So it's going to mean that people are constantly in their cars trying to access everything." She claimed there was an over-allocation of homes in the local plan, which came to light when the census released in June showed the figures used to draw up the plan were too high. "I'm still trying to understand the way housing is delivered in the country," she said. "I think it's a bit of a myth that we need homes in the way that we're constantly told we do."

A Taylor Wimpey spokesperson said: "The former Wisley Airfield is allocated for development in the Guildford Borough Council local plan and our proposals have been carefully considered following close engagement with key stakeholders and the local community. We understand the concerns of local residents regarding traffic and our proposals include a number of measures to encourage the use of sustainable transport options, including new bus services and cycle routes. The design and layout of the development has been considered with the surrounding area in mind and we will continue to consult with residents on this as our plans progress."

Guildford Borough Council was contacted for comment.

Local plan documents: <https://www.guildford.gov.uk/localplan/2015-2034>

Wisley Airfield development page: <https://www.wisleyairfield.com/>

Image: Wisley Airfield plans. Credit Taylor Wimpey and Vivid



Stretching Resources?

Both “**The Horton**” (Arts Centre) and The **Horton Cemetery** featured on the agenda of the **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s Strategy and Resources** committee Thursday 29th September. For the second time this year discussion on a request to the Council to exercise Compulsory Purchase Order powers over the neglected 9000 body 5-acre cemetery on Hook Road, Epsom, was withdrawn.



Hon Alderman Alan Carlson by the memorial to the 9000 buried in Horton Cemetery. Image Stan Kujawa

As previously reported [HERE](#) the bone of contention, between the charity, **The Friends of Horton Cemetery** and a report to Councillors, concerns the valuation basis for compensation to the property speculator, to whom the intact Cemetery was incongruously sold by the NHS in 1983. Trustee of the Charity **Hon. Alderman Alan Carlson** stated “We are grateful our request has not been determined by the Strategy and Resources Committee. Our own independent expert and affordable valuations have not been enough to persuade the Council. We will now obtain more. We are also grateful to the many supporters who on short notice of the matter mounted an effective email campaign to Councillors in protest”. He further added: “This 5-acre Cemetery is sacred to a growing number of relatives of the dead. It is a **white elephant** in the possession of **Michael Heighes of Marque Securities**, who cannot in a thousand years develop it at all. This is why he has totally neglected the site for 40 years”.

Chairman of the Committee, Councillor **Neil Dallen** (RA Town Ward), responded to the supporters’ campaign stating the Council will meet the Charity as “aspects of the Council Report have been misunderstood by the Trust”.

The Horton

Just one week after an opening event at **The Horton** arts and heritage centre, the venue appeared on the agenda of the same meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee. However, without challenge from any of the 10 Councillors present, the Committee went into secret session to discuss the item. The committee stating that the item concerned the finances of a “third party” and it was not “in the public interest” for them to be disclosed publicly.

Other items:



The committee approved investment in a new gas boiler for the Council's **Community and Wellbeing Centre on Longmead, Epsom**. The Council has investigated the efficacy of ground and air heat-pump systems, but the building is not well enough insulated for them to be effective. This prompted Cllr **David Gulland** (LibDem College Ward) to query whether insulation should be invested in. The officer responded that the Council was reviewing insulation across the Council's entire estate.

Following the sudden departure of **Kathryn Beldon** from the top Council post of Chief Executive (reported [HERE](#)) the committee agreed to extend the employment of **Jackie King** as interim Chief Executive pending a permanent posting. The meeting also noted a requirement for the appointment of a chief legal officer. Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court Ward) joked she had asked a previous Council law officer **Simon Young** to return from The Falklands where he had migrated to be the islands' lead attorney.

The chief IT officer had been lost recently so an Information Technology strategy review was withdrawn from the meeting.

The committee approved the business plan being put this Autumn to a vote of business rate payers in the central Epsom area. This would allow **Epsom Bid Ltd** (known as **Go Epsom**) to continue for another 5 years to make improvements to the business zone, funded by an additional levy to business rates. Cllr **Eber Kington** (RA Ewell Court Ward) expressed enthusiastic support for the recent work of **Epsom Bid** in the changes and activities it has initiated.

Ring-tails are heads for Harriers

Epsom and Ewell Harriers sang "God Save The King" and then won some races on Ashted Common, Sunday 25th September. **Lauren Johnson** triumphing in the 10K fun run and her son **William** in the 2K. A week later than originally planned, due to the passing of Her Majesty, the **17th Ashted 10k and 2k fun run** took place on Ashted Common. Right after singing the Club's first ever rendition of "God save the King" the 2k race was off. A tight sprint finish led to **William Johnson** taking pole position, putting the pressure on his mum in the 10k. Lauren didn't disappoint, coming in first for the ladies in a time of 43:40, and securing first place for the **Epsom & Ewell Harriers**. That wasn't the only good news for the local Harriers, snatching 2nd and 3rd place too, with **Sophie Lomas** coming in 2nd at 44:18 and **Sophie Glencross** 3rd at 44:54.

More trees please for Surrey

Surrey County Council will receive £298,000 from the Defra Local Authority Treescapes Fund (LATF) to increase tree planting and keep on target with the planting of 1.2 million trees, one for every resident, by 2030, supporting the Council's aim to be carbon neutral by 2050.

This funding will help to facilitate planting in non-woodland settings such as parks and community spaces as well as along roads and footpaths helping communities to fight the effects of climate change. Trees in these settings are particularly valuable as they can provide the greatest levels of benefit to ecosystems, such as carbon absorption, flood protection and support for biodiversity, as well as connecting fragmented habitats through wildlife corridors.

Marisa Heath, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for the Environment comments: "Since 2019 over 333,749 trees have been planted across Surrey. We are well on our way to achieving the County Council's ambition to plant 1.2 million new trees and this boost in funding will help us to achieve this. We can't do this alone and encourage Schools, Parish Councils, landowners and community groups to help us achieve this".

The LATF fund will help the nation build back greener from the pandemic and will target landscapes that have been neglected in the past, ecologically damaged or affected by tree diseases like ash dieback - with ash being the most common species of tree found in non-woodland locations. For further information on the LATF Fund visit Local Authority Treescapes Fund - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

If you are a school, Parish Council, Charity or formal community group who own, or have a formal lease agreement on land and you are interested in receiving free trees to plant, you can contact SCC at trees@surreycc.gov.uk.

Read Surrey County Council's Climate Change Delivery Plan and New Tree Strategy.

Keep up to date on the progress towards SCC's target of making Surrey net zero carbon by 2050, and find out what you can do to help. Sign up to SCC's Greener Matters newsletter to get updates.



Tongham Tories Tetchy Tongues Ticked Off

Epsom and Ewell Times's inspiration, "**The Guildford Dragon**" was a victim of inappropriate comments from two Guildford Councillors. Report from LDRS:

Two Guildford councillors breached the authority's code of conduct in calling a journalist "pea-brained" and "grubby". A hearings sub-committee of the borough council on Tuesday (September 27) concluded that one member should apologise for the remarks and another should face formal censure.

In a series of events described by the investigating officer as "unfortunate" and "regrettable" that it could not have been resolved earlier with an apology, the meeting heard about emails and WhatsApp messages sent by Councillors **Paul Spooner and Graham Eyre**.

The councillors, both Conservative representatives for **Ash South & Tongham**, were accused of sending emails and messages about the editor of local news website the **Guildford Dragon**. Its editor, **Martin Giles**, complained to the council about their comments and the committee heard from the investigating officer that the facts in the case were "straightforward and not particularly in dispute".

Simon Gaucher, a partner at **Weightmans LLP**, had looked into the communications and interviewed those involved in the case, which centred around a story about Cllr Spooner being elected the Conservative group leader on the council in June 2021. The committee found that the councillors had breached the council's code of conduct regarding treating others with respect and in terms of councillors conducting themselves in "a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing your office or the Council into disrepute".

Cllr Spooner said in the meeting he disputed the fact he was acting in his capacity as a councillor, saying these were conversations held in a private forum, and there was a grey area in this respect. He asked the meeting: "If I go and I order a curry from the local tandoori and the proprietor greets me as: 'Hello Councillor Spooner', does that mean that I'm acting as a councillor or acting as someone collecting a curry for the family?"

In his report on the issue, Mr Gaucher said he had considered Cllr Spooner's article 10 right to freedom of expression and particularly political expression "which is afforded a high degree of protection". He added: "**Mr Giles** is a journalist writing about and commenting on political matters so must be expected to receive a certain amount of comment on his reporting by those he reports about. However, the comments made by Cllr Spooner which I have found to result in a failure to comply with the code are merely personal and abusive ("So you can get stuffed" and "pea brained editor") and cannot be categorised as political expression."

He said the same considerations applied in Cllr Eyre's case when he called Mr Giles a, "grubby little boss" in an email to one of the site's reporters, David Reading. The meeting also heard that the context for the emails and WhatsApps was Mr Giles contacting the late councillor Richard Billington, at a time when he was ill, to corroborate what he had been told by Cllr Spooner, and a typo in a message which seemed to call Cllr Spooner untruthful.

The report stated: "Cllr Spooner had indicated that one of the reasons he was so angry about Mr Giles's behaviour was because he had chosen to contact Cllr Billington despite knowing he was seriously ill. This may provide a degree of context and mitigation it does not justify Cllr Spooner's response."

Cllr Eyre, who was not present at the sub-committee, told the LDRS before the meeting: "I don't believe I was in breach of the code of conduct because I sent the email from my private email account and it contained thought to someone I had known for years." Cllr Spooner made clear in the meeting he would not apologise to Mr Giles or the Guildford Dragon, and on this basis the committee decided he should be subject to formal censure.

He will also be sent a formal letter of advisement about his conduct.

Cllr Eyre will be sent a formal letter of advisement about his conduct and asked to apologise to Mr Giles.

A borough council spokesperson said before the meeting: "Councillors are routinely reminded of their duties at committee meetings. They are reminded to disclose any interests they may have in respect of matters to be considered. We review our code of conduct at least every four years. The next review is due following the borough council elections next year. Councillors complete training that we arrange for them on a regular basis. The next training is due to take place in October 2022. We endeavour to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by our Councillors."

Speaking after the meeting, Mr Giles said the messages sent by Cllr Spooner had come about because he had been clarifying information he was given, when "journalists are often criticised for not checking or double-checking facts".



Should go to Specsavers not Epsom Hospital?

Our special correspondent shares his local experience.

In the good old days before Covid 19 you could visit the surgery to book to see a doctor, or instead telephone. You can do neither these days; now you have to fill an online form in and in a day or so the doctor will get back to you. If you are lucky, you will be able book a face-to-face appointment with the doctor provided you do not have a temperature or any other of the dreaded symptoms of Covid.



Malcolm Howard is a retired accountant and lecturer in Financial Mangement at the University of Surrey. In 2008, his book 'Accounting and Business Valuation Methods' was published by Elsevier. As an accountant he specialised in making the best use of available resources.

There is one exception to this; if you have an eye problem you book an appointment at SpecSavers as (at least in this area) they act on behalf of the NHS. They do an excellent job; for minor problems they will sort it out. If not, they will send you off to the eye hospital to be seen straight away as a lengthy wait to see a consultant may result in more damage.

I have been a type 2 diabetic for twenty-five years and because of this annually I have my eyes screened; photographs are taken of the back of the eyes. When I started this was done at **Epsom Hospital**. I got there by bus and the procedure was tiresome, as they put drops in your eyes which make your sight blurry. But it had to be done! Then after a few years the technician gave me some good news; they had a modern machine and drops in the eyes were no longer needed. Absolutely brilliant. On top of that she would put your mind at ease and tell you not to worry.

Then someone in government decided to privatise the operation and accepting the lowest bid without having regard to anything else the service went into rapid deterioration. The new equipment was sold off and outdated technology returned. Years later, the privatised version of diabetic eye screening is still using equipment that became obsolete twenty year ago. Now you are advised:

- * plan how you'll get to and from the test - do not drive, as you sight may be blurry for a few hours afterwards.
- * you might want to bring someone with you or ask someone to collect you after the test.
- * During the test you'll be asked to read some letters on a chart first.



* Drops are then put in your eyes. This may sting for a few seconds. The drops make your sight blurry after about 15 minutes. After that you'll be asked to look into a camera.

* After the test you will not get the result on the day. You will get a letter about your result within 6 weeks.

Screening can take place at various venues, such as community centres, as well as hospitals.

I could have my eyes screened at **Epsom Hospital** without spending a penny on transport as the 166 bus would drop me outside. However, I choose not to because I do not need to waste a few hours being unable to see properly. Instead, I have my eyes photographed at Steven Harris Opticians in Beckenham. I get there by train and tram, but if I did not want to spend any money, I could take the 166 to Croydon Bus Station and get another bus from there to Beckenham. They take a number of photos in each eye (not just one in each eye) and the consultant shows me these and what they mean; he says we are looking for consistency with last year. No drops and a fantastic service.

Of course, other opticians, including SpecSavers, have the latest equipment also.

I keep on being harrassed by Surrey's Diabetic Eye Screening Programme (DESP). They insist that if I opt out it means I don't have my eyes screened and they will inform my GP. They simply don't understand that there are better services out there.

Anyone over 60 can have a full eye test, including a retinal scan FOR FREE under the NHS. Those under 60 can go privately and the same procedure costs around £45. In my view, such a fee is worth every penny. After all, it would relieve the anxiety of waiting six weeks to know if there were a problem or not.

The NHS would save a fortune if they scrapped this privatised service and organised screening through qualified opticians.

[Do you have a view? Write to us. Ed]

Surrey social media sex fiend gets 18 years

A man who used multiple personas to target children online has been sentenced to 18 years behind bars in a case the Guildford Judge called 'the worst I've seen for some while'. **Jonathan Woodward**, 22, of no fixed address, pleaded guilty to 39 child sex offences on 22 August and was sentenced 28th September, at Guildford Crown Court.

Surrey Police image of the offender

The extensive investigation into Woodward first began when he was reported to police after a suspected indecent image of a child was seen on his mobile phone. Woodward, who was living in Ashford at the time, was arrested and multiple digital devices seized from him.

During the course of the investigation, examination of his devices revealed contact with children from across the world on multiple social media platforms. He used fake profiles pretending to be a woman to lure children into sexual activity online, which he then recorded.

Woodward also used software to identify the areas where his victims lived and then used this information and the recordings, to threaten the young victims and obtain more graphic material.

Woodward pleaded guilty to:

- Two charges of rape of a child under 13
- 20 charges of causing or inciting a child under 13 to engage in sexual activity
- 14 charges of causing or inciting a child to engage in sexual activity
- One charge of making indecent images of a child - Category A
- One charge of making indecent images of a child - Category B
- One charge of making indecent images of a child - Category C

The offences took place between 2015 and 2021.

Woodward must serve two thirds of his 18-year custodial sentence with a further eight years extended license. He has a life-time Sexual Harm Prevention Order.



Detective Inspector Antony Preston, from the Paedophile Online Investigation Team, said:

“Woodward’s behaviour has impacted countless lives, and I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the bravery and courage of these young victims who have helped put this man behind bars for a long time.

“I would urge those using social media to speak out should they feel threatened or intimidated online, using online reporting functions or contacting Police to report such behaviour.

“This investigation and sentencing shows that there is no place for such vile behaviour. We will work tirelessly to ensure child sex abusers face the consequences of their actions.

“If there is anyone reading this who has been a victim of child sex abuse, I would encourage you to speak to us. We will do everything we can to support you.”

If you have concerns that someone you know may have a sexual interest in children, please contact Stop It Now, a UK-wide charity focused on stopping child sexual abuse.

For more information about online sexual abuse and how to spot it, please visit CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command).

Epsom Advice Bureau Board boost before bad times

Four new trustees have joined Citizens Advice Epsom & Ewell’s (CAEE) Board to guide and lead the charity as it approaches what will undoubtedly be a very difficult winter.

Peter Edwards, chair of the Trustee Board, said: “I’m delighted to welcome four new and very talented trustees who will strengthen the Board at a challenging time for our charity, as we are already seeing rapidly rising demand for our services, inflationary pressures on costs, and fewer resources. With inflation rising steeply, the cost of living is a major concern for us all, and especially for the people we are here to help. Families on the lowest incomes will be hit hardest by spiraling price increases and our frontline advisers are already supporting people who are finding it difficult to get by.”

Photo from left to right back row: Andrew Heffernan, George Bell, Ian Davison, Shaun Jones, Patrick O’Driscoll. Front row left to right: Fiona Taylor, Lisa Davis, Yvette Ball, Hardik Trivedi and Peter Edwards.

Joining the Board as new trustees are Yvette Ball, Hardik Trivedi, Fiona Taylor and Andrew Heffernan. Yvette’s professional career was with the Probation Service culminating as Chief Officer of the service in Gloucestershire and then Surrey. With retirement her voluntary career has included Chair of Faith in Action Merton Homelessness Project and then of Refugees at Home before joining CAEE. In these roles Yvette led the organisations to achieve success, changing dysfunctional groups into high functioning teams and enabling the charities to thrive. She gained good knowledge of governance from experience as an Honorary Secretary. She understands disadvantage and brings her passion to tackle it as incoming Chair designate.

Hardik is an experienced consultant with Duetsche Bank and has a track record in delivering transformation projects across different industries in government and commercial organisations. Prior to consulting, he was a systems engineer within the UK Ministry of Defence. Hardik holds an MBA from University of Warwick and a MEng in Aerospace Engineering from Queen Mary University of London.

Fiona has 35 years’ experience in the transport industry including 13 years with her current employer, Network Rail, holding a number of director and senior leadership roles. Fiona spent several years as a self-employed consultant, working on a range of transformation, business improvement and commercial bidding assignments.

Andrew started his career in brand marketing for a number of blue-chip organisations, following which he took a break from the corporate world to qualify as a teacher. Andrew then worked for an educational charity before taking on the role of Membership and Marketing Director for a leading membership body in the social care sector.

Those who have departed are Alison Cribbs, vice-chair, who had been a trustee since 2015, Ian Davison who joined the board in October 2016 and chaired the HR committee, Bernie Watson who joined the board in 2018, and Alexis Marz and Hony Premial who both joined in 2017 and sat on the Finance and HR committees respectively.

Citizens Advice is made up of the national charity Citizens Advice; the network of independent local Citizens Advice charities across England and Wales; the Citizens Advice consumer service; and the Witness Service.

Citizens Advice Epsom & Ewell (CAEE) is a small, local charity offering free advice and information for all who live, work and study in the borough of Epsom & Ewell. All advice is free, confidential, impartial and independent.



Each year CAEE helps around 3,000 clients with issues such as benefits, housing, debt, fuel poverty, family issues and much more. Our outcomes are extremely positive not only for the clients we serve, but also for the wider community. During 2020/21 we secured income in excess of £1.2m for our clients. Our added value to society totalled £1.06m in fiscal benefits by reducing health service demand and maintaining employment and housing. The wider economic and social benefit of our work during 2020/21 totalled almost £8m.

As a small charity we are responsible for raising our funds. It costs, on average, £60 for each client that we help. To make a donation please visit www.caee.org.uk/donate/ Just £5 per month could enable us to help another client this year.

To get advice please use our freephone advice line 0808 278 7963 or visit our website where you can get advice by emails and also find details of our drop in service.

Epsom and Ewell not stung by this Surrey debt scandal

Three Surrey councils are owed a total of £30million by a council which has seen the government intervene in its borrowing problems. The government announced this month that after “serious concerns about the financial management” at Thurrock Council, neighbouring Essex County Council would be brought in to take control.

The Bureau of Investigative Journalism revealed a total of £138m of public money was unaccounted for, with questions raised over the Essex council’s borrowing and investment in 53 solar farms.

Three Surrey councils have loaned money to Thurrock Council, with **Waverley, Spelthorne and Guildford** borough councils each having invested £10m in the troubled council.

A Guildford spokesperson said lending between local authorities was a “common practice” and that the risk rating of the debt had not changed since the government’s intervention. Spelthorne and Guildford are both due to have the debt repaid in 2023, with Waverley’s money due to be paid back in January and March 2024, because it is two separate loans of £5m.

Essex County Council will take full control of Thurrock’s finances and has powers to see if there are failures elsewhere to mitigate any further risk to services. Guildford’s lead councillor for finance Cllr Tim Anderson (Residents for Guildford and Villages, Clandon & Horsley) said the authority had invested £10m with Thurrock Council from March 2022 until March 2023, at a rate of 1.35% per cent.

He confirmed the council had also loaned more than £40m to eight other local authorities, including £10m to the London Borough of Croydon, which issued a section 114 notice, effectively declaring itself bankrupt, in November 2020.

The other loans are £5m to Birmingham County Council, Derbyshire County Council, Somerset West & Taunton, Gravesham Borough Council, Mid Suffolk District Council and Cherwell District Council, and £2m to South Somerset District Council. Cllr Anderson said: “A council has never defaulted on a local authority investment.

“Councils are required, by law, to produce a balanced budget, and if they can’t their chief finance officer may, as a last resort, have to issue a s114 notice. “The notice suspends all new expenditure with the exception of statutory services including schools, adult care and safeguarding until the council agrees a robust recovery plan. “If a revised balanced budget cannot be approved, then external auditors and central government may decide to intervene and impose an action plan to resolve the financial issue.”

Spelthorne confirmed two loans of £5m each are due for repayment in January 2023. A spokesperson said no further loans had been issued and the agreed terms and conditions and risk assessment still applied.

They added: “It is important to note that government will underwrite ability of councils to meet their liabilities and there is no indication to show a different approach is being taken now, therefore, the monies will be repaid.

“In terms of low levels of credit risk councils rank only after sovereign governments.”

Waverley Borough Council did not wish to comment further, but a spokesperson confirmed two loans had been made to Thurrock Council of £5m each, one with a maturity date of March 2024 and the other of January 2024.

Then local government secretary Greg Clark MP said in a statement on September 2: “Given the serious financial situation at Thurrock Council and its potential impact on local services, I believe it is necessary for government to intervene. “I strongly believe that when a council gets into difficulties its local government neighbours should be the preferred source of help in turning it around. I know that Essex County Council possesses the expertise and ability to help its local government neighbour. Working together, I believe the councils can deliver the improvements local people expect and deserve.”

Surrey County Council and the remaining districts and boroughs confirmed they did not have any outstanding lending with



Thurrock Council. Thurrock Council did not respond to a request for comment.