

Cyclist death prompts A217 review

17 May 2024



The death of a “fit and active” cyclist has prompted a coroner to raise concerns over paths near a main road in Tadworth.

A man named John Bass died after falling from his bike following an incident involving a van on the A217 at Tadworth in December 2022.

Encroaching mud, twigs and grass more than halved the width of the popular cycle path which poses a risk of further fatalities, a coroner said at Mr Bass’s inquest.

The 80-year-old was considered a “fit and active cyclist”. While the footpath from which Mr Bass fell was 1.4 metres wide, due to encroaching mud, grass, twigs and acorns on the pavement space, the space where he was able to cycle was reduced to only 0.6 metres wide.

Weeks before his death, a highways inspector visited the path and did not consider the narrowing of pathway as a safety concern.

Assistant Coroner Krestina Hayes found in a Prevention of Future Death Report: “There is a risk to future pavement users if clear guidance is not provided to inspectors to identify safety concerns regarding vegetation growth on footpaths.”

The report, published May 14, 2024, also expressed concerns that the frequency of the yearly road inspections should be reviewed.

Speaking at the inquest, Mr Bass’ family advised the footpath by the Tadworth Road is used regularly by cyclists to avoid the vehicles on the busy road, where the speed limit is up to 40mph.

As the highway authority, Surrey County Council (SCC) is responsible for maintaining public highways. Although there is reference to trees and vegetation in SCC, there is no clear guidance on encroachment on pavements.

Inspected yearly, the stretch of highway was examined by car on November 14, and on foot on 22 November. No safety defects were found to meet intervention level by SCC. The family said the pavement was cleared shortly after the accident.

A spokesperson for SCC said: “Our deepest sympathies remain with John’s family and friends, and we will respond to the Coroner’s report following careful consideration of the concerns raised.”

SCC has been given until 3 July to respond to the report.

Image: A217 Road, Near Tadworth, Banstead. (Photo Google)

Non-political and all-political

17 May 2024



Dear Editor,

It is good to see that, despite stepping down as a Borough Councillor, Vince Romagnuolo has lost none of his enthusiasm for historically partisan approach to local politics. Labelling Resident Association councillors closet Conservatives is nothing new. Vince and the Labour Party have never understood the concept of local volunteers whose national voting patterns are often diverse, but who come together in a non-ideological commitment to promote a shared view of localism, civic duty and what is right for all residents in Epsom and Ewell.

If only Vince knew the real national preferences of RA councillors, he might be surprised. Although I never discussed national political allegiances with my RA colleagues, it is sometimes not difficult to know them. There were and are

councillors who nationally support the Labour Party, and at least one RA Councillor who was a Labour Party Councillor in another local authority.

So come on Vince, by all means criticise Residents Association councillors if you disapprove of their policies, but please don't use labels and unfounded accusations of national party-political bias to explain the clear voting preferences of residents, the long absence of Conservative councillors, and the actions of Epsom and Ewell MPs over the last 87 years.

With all good wishes

County Councillor Eber Kington

Residents Association Ewell Court, Auriol and Cuddington

[Ed: A right of reply was warranted but we now draw this particular debate to a close on our pages.]

Epsom and Ewell's new Mayor

17 May 2024



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has appointed Councillor **Steve Bridger** (RA Stamford) as the new Mayor for the year 24/25. In a ceremonial meeting Tuesday 14th May, speeches were made to propose the new Mayor, to thank the outgoing Mayor, and by both the incoming and outgoing Mayors themselves.

Councillor **Phil Neale** (RA Cuddington) proposed his appointment. He said "I hope I will achieve at least one of these requirements," referring to the traditional brevity and humour expected in such speeches. Cllr Neale detailed Cllr Bridger's extensive background, highlighting his early career in the family-owned wholesale fish business and his long tenure at Tesco, where he achieved notable success. "Steve proudly states that he managed every department... all except working the tills," Cllr Neale quipped. He also mentioned Cllr Bridger's dedication to family, particularly his support for his late son Richard, who battled Duchenne muscular dystrophy.

Councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) paid tribute to the outgoing Mayor, Councillor **Rob Geleit** (Labour Court), lauding his achievements over the past year. He highlighted the Civic Celebration of Culture as a significant event and praised Mr Geleit's fundraising efforts. "A charity dinner brought a year of fundraising for his three well-chosen charities to a successful conclusion," Cllr Ames remarked. He also expressed eagerness to have Cllr Geleit return to his duties with the Labour group, emphasizing the importance of his presence in the upcoming general election.

Councillor Rob Geleit reflected on his tenure with gratitude, sharing various highlights from his year as Mayor. "I've had a fantastic year serving Epsom and Ewell and its people," He expressed deep appreciation for his consort, Tina, and the support team, particularly Lolli from the Mayor's office. He recounted memorable events such as the Derby, Christmas carols at Downview Prison, and the Buckingham Palace garden party. He proudly announced that over £15,000 had been raised for his chosen charities, exceeding expectations. "We managed to keep it all together until the end, which may or may well be unprecedented," he said, praising the charity committee's efforts and in particular the dedication of Cllr **Dr. Graham Jones** MBE (RA Cuddington).

In his address, new Mayor Councillor Steve Bridger expressed excitement and gratitude for his new role. He acknowledged the challenges and opportunities ahead and looked forward to serving the community alongside his wife, Carol.

Cllr Robert Leach (RA Nonsuch) will serve as Deputy-Mayor.

Image: L to R Cllr Robert Leach (Deputy Mayor) , Mayor Steve Bridger, CEO Jackie King. The New Mayor takes the chair in Council chamber. Credit EEBC YouTube

Annual audit of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

17 May 2024



The annual Grant Thornton Auditor's Report on the workings of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has delivered a positive assessment of its performance across financial sustainability, governance, and value for money, despite acknowledging the ongoing challenges the Council faces. The report was formally presented and noted at the Council meeting of 14th May.

Financial Sustainability: The report highlights that the Council operates in a challenging financial environment with prudent short and medium-term planning. While financial stability remains dependent on continual savings plans, the forecast indicates a need to deliver approximately £1.4 million in savings by 2027/28. The auditors emphasized the importance of finding alternatives to using reserves to manage budget gaps, noting no significant weaknesses in financial sustainability arrangements.

Governance: The Council's governance structure was praised for maintaining appropriate arrangements and compliance policies. An updated Risk Management Strategy and adherence to CIPFA's Good Governance Framework were noted as strengths. However, the auditors recommended prioritizing the completion of management actions and reviewing the composition of the Audit & Scrutiny Committee to potentially include independent members.

Value for Money: The Council's efforts to ensure economy, efficiency, and effectiveness were aligned with delivering value for money. Recommendations were made to develop a partnership governance framework and to address underperformance in processing minor planning applications, despite improvements seen in 2023.

Overall, the audit reflects positively on the Council's operations, suggesting continued disciplined financial management and strategic governance enhancements.

Criteria	2022/23 Risk assessment	2022/23 Auditor judgement on arrangements	2021/22 Auditor judgement on arrangements
Financial sustainability	No risk of significant weakness identified.	G Our work did not identify any areas where we considered that key or improvement recommendations were required	A No significant weaknesses in arrangements identified, but two improvement recommendations have been made.
Governance	No risk of significant weakness identified.	A No significant weaknesses in arrangements identified, but three improvement recommendations made	A No significant weaknesses in arrangements identified but two improvement recommendations raised.
Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness	No risk of significant weakness identified.	A No significant weaknesses in arrangements identified, but one improvement recommendation made to support more effective partnership working arrangements.	G No significant weaknesses in arrangements identified and no improvement recommendations raised.

G No significant weaknesses in arrangements identified or improvement recommendation made.
A No significant weaknesses in arrangements identified, but improvement recommendations made.
R Significant weaknesses in arrangements identified and key recommendations made.

The four key recommendations in more detail and the responses of EEBC management:

Grant Thornton Recommendation 1: Timely Internal Audits.

The auditors suggested that internal audits focusing on financial controls should be completed before the end of the financial year to aid the Head of Internal Audit in forming their opinion.

EEBC Management Response: Acknowledging the importance of timely audits, management noted past challenges due to staff turnover and long-term sickness, which have now been resolved. With a fully resourced team, management is confident in meeting the audit schedule, with progress monitored by both the Strategic Leadership Team and the Audit & Scrutiny Committee.

Grant Thornton Recommendation 2: Monitoring Framework for Audit Actions

The council was advised to develop a framework to monitor management actions identified in internal audit reports, ensuring these are completed by the agreed due dates to enhance clarity and accountability.

EEBC Management Response: Management emphasized that a robust monitoring framework is already in place, with the Business Assurance team logging all actions and requiring quarterly updates from Heads of Service. Additionally, new performance management software has been procured to further improve monitoring capabilities.

Grant Thornton Recommendation 3: Audit & Scrutiny Committee Composition

Auditors recommended reviewing the composition of the Audit & Scrutiny Committee to exclude Strategy & Resources members for independence and considering the appointment of independent members.

EEBC Management Response: Management revealed that a review of the committee's operations is already planned

following a Corporate Peer Challenge in March 2024. The audit recommendation will be considered during this review in consultation with relevant members.

Grant Thornton Recommendation 4: Partnership Governance Framework

To enhance partnership working, the council was advised to develop a governance framework to guide and evaluate the success and effectiveness of these collaborations.

EEBC Management Response: Management expressed a commitment to positive partnership working, acknowledging recognition from the recent Corporate Peer Challenge. This recommendation will be considered in conjunction with the Action Plan resulting from the Peer Challenge.

Leatherhead Women top their league

17 May 2024



Leatherhead Women's FC finished the season on a high, winning the league without losing a single game. The team finished with a record of 15 wins, one draw and not a single loss in the league securing promotion into the Premier Division.

Specsavers have championed the team since its introduction into senior women's football, with new kits and banners and continued support from the team of opticians and audiologists.

The team plays every home game in Fetcham Grove where you will be able to see the new kits in action.

Specsavers retail director, **Mihaela Ovadiuc** said: "At Leatherhead, we strive to be a shining light within our local community, whether that be directly or indirectly. Supporting Leatherhead Women's has been such an honour, and we are all over the moon that we are extending the sponsorship. The club aligns with our commitment to promoting healthy and active living and takes pleasure in offering a secure environment for the local community."

A cloud followed by silver for Old Glynionians

17 May 2024



Old Glynionians are the new holders of the Papa Johns Community Cup Counties 3 South Shield, having overcome Cranleigh in a thrilling 22-21 victory on Sunday 12th May.

After an emotional minute's silence was held in honour of former Old Glynionians player **Ben Rollinson**, who sadly died aged just 42 last Friday, Glyn started with a fire in their belly and scored two early tries to take a 10-0 lead within the first 20 minutes, but the next 60 minutes would not be as straightforward.

Cranleigh responded with two converted scores to lead 10-14 and appeared to be heading towards half-time full of confidence, but OGs captain Tim Laughton-Scott crashed over the whitewash in the last play of the half to restore the Epsom & Ewell-based side's lead.

With temperatures rising to an annual peak of 25c down at Shaftesbury Park in Bristol, home of the Bristol Bears Women, and just a point separating the teams at 15-14, everything was set for an exhausting second 40.

Five minutes into the second half, Man of the Match Michael Hume showed speed, power and calm to break through the Cranleigh defence and juggle a back-and-fourth pass with his fellow centre before dotting down to extend Old Glynionians' lead. The try was converted by fly-half Sam Smith to make the score 22-14.

And that kick that would prove the difference between glory and gut-wrenching defeat, as 35 minutes of gruelling Glyn

defence was finally broken by Cranleigh who got over the line to make it 22-21. But as the Crane's conversion sailed through the sticks, the full-time whistle was blown. The match would end 22-21 in favour of the Old Glynionians.

The 2024 Papa Johns Community Cup Counties 3 South Shield now sits alongside three Surrey Bowls (2008, '09, '12) in the Old Glynionians trophy cabinet.

James McFarlane, Chairman of Old Glynionians RFC, said: "Firstly, huge credit has to go to Cranleigh. They have given us one of the hardest-fought games I can ever remember. The one-point winning margin is a fair representation of how tight the game was and how well-matched the sides were, so they should also be proud of their performance.

"Winning this competition is hugely satisfying. There are so many people that have been mucking in both on and off the pitch for so many years, and now it all feels worth it."

Tim Laughton-Scott, Captain of Old Glynionians RFC, said: "We really had to dig deep out there to win this, so it feels like a very sweet victory. We knew we could do it, but when the score flipped against us in the first half, it tested our belief for sure. We stuck to our game, fought bravely on what was an exhausting day under the sun, and just about came away on top.

"I never expected to be picking up silverware in my first season as captain, but the support from the players and the backroom staff has been great. It's a big win for everyone involved."

James Kennedy-Myers, Head Coach of Old Glynionians RFC, said: "I didn't play but I'm still exhausted! To win our first trophy in over decade and to do it less than 48 hours after the devastating loss of a former player stirs up so many emotions. Rollo [Ben Rollinson] was a great friend of mine, and this win will be well and truly dedicated to him.

"I'm thrilled with the squad that we have, probably our strongest ever, and look forward to defending our crown next season."

Image: Old Glynionians lift the Papa Johns Community Cup. credit Lisa Banning/Old Glynionians

Redrawing Surrey's political map - literally

17 May 2024



Major boundary changes could see some Surrey residents change wards for the next local elections in a redrawing of the political map of the county.

Council wards in Surrey are to increase by over 1,000 residents per councillor by 2029 in new county boundaries which have been drawn up.

Around 70% of ward boundaries will change as the Local Government Boundary Commission estimates an increase of nearly 90,000 people who are registered to vote.

The commission says the new layout - which would retain the 81 elected councillors we have today - would help the council to carry out its functions more effectively as it would even out the populations within each division.

The commission is the independent body which draws these boundaries based on community ties, similar electorate numbers and which facilities (e.g parks, leisure centres) it makes sense for people to share.

Varying levels of public consultation on draft proposals took place between February 2023 and March 2024.

Professor Colin Mellors, Chair of the Commission, said: "We are very grateful to people in Surrey. We looked at all the views they gave us. They helped us improve our earlier proposals. We believe the new arrangements will deliver electoral fairness while maintaining local ties."

Recommendations from the Commission cannot affect the Surrey county's external boundaries, or result in changes to postcodes. It does not have an effect on local taxes, house prices, or car and house insurance premiums. However, it may affect which ward someone is in.

The Commission is required by law to consider not the number of households, but the number of electors within each division. For instance, residents suggested East and West Molesey should be combined in a single council ward division. However, such a division covering the two borough wards of Molesey West and Molesey East would have 36% more electors than average. It was therefore not accepted because it would have a disproportionate number of eligible voters compared to other wards.

County councils elect its members once every four years. Surrey's next election is taking place in 2025. Currently, the Conservatives are the largest group with 49 councillors out of a total 81 seats. There are also 16 Liberal Democrats, two Green Party, two Labour (and Co-operative) councillors, four Independents, and 13 from different resident associations

and groups.

Changes to ward boundaries will be made so each councillor represents roughly the same number of electors. Recommendations are based on how many electors (ie people registered to vote) there are “likely” to be in five years after the publication of the Committee’s proposal.

Approximately 876,454 eligible voters lived in the county in 2022, averaging at 10,820 electors per councillor. The Commission estimates this number will increase by nearly 90,000 by 2029: Around 964,825 Surrey electors will be divided up to roughly 11,911 residents for each councillor. Just 24 ward boundaries out of 81 will stay the same.

Over 900 comments were made by people and organisations to help decide the new divisions. Changes in response to what local people said include altering the divisions in rural areas of Guildford, in response to fresh evidence on the ‘community identity’.

For example, the village and civil parish of Ash was seen as more urban than rural, consequently moving out of the Worplesdon division and into Shalford. Additionally, Jacobs Well village was reviewed as having stronger community identity and rural connections with Worplesdon parish rather than neighbouring areas of Guildford.”

The Commission opted against having two councillors representing one ward in the Elmbridge borough as SCC argued that larger divisions had the potential to “dilute democratic accountability”. The Molesey Residents’ Association said locals would find a two-member division confusing and that councillors might have difficulty representing a division on this scale.”

The changes become law once Parliament has approved them. Staff at the council will ensure that the arrangements are in place for the 2025 elections.

Review and report: <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/surrey>

Image: Proposed Surrey County boundaries (Credit contains Ordnance Survey data Crown copyright and database rights 2024)

Up to 2003 MPs happy no Conservatives on Epsom and Ewell Council

17 May 2024



Dear Editor,

I note with interest the letter from Mr Kington “*Epsom and Ewell was the first Conservative free Council*” outlining the dire electoral fortunes of the Conservative Party in Epsom & Ewell. But he doesn’t tell the full story.

With the odd exception, despite sporadic efforts by eccentric Tory candidates, it is true that it is only since 2003 that the Tories have made a concerted effort to gain seats on the council. The truth is that successive Tory MPs for the area seemed quite happy with the composition of the council due to the fact that, on the whole, the ruling group was made up of small ‘C’ conservatives and in some cases, card carrying Conservative and UKIP members.

It was during the Labour government, with local government being property funded, that they embarked on a spending spree with taxpayers money. But they gleefully reverted to type when the austerity obsessed Tory/Lib Dem coalition government came to power in 2010 that budgets were slashed following Tory edicts.

Yours faithfully,

Vince Romagnuolo

Former Epsom & Ewell Borough Councillor, 1999-2007, 2015-2019

County Councillor Community funding

17 May 2024



Surrey residents can now apply for cash grants to improve their local area through the Your Councillor Community Fund. Last year the Fund supported over 380 community projects via Surrey County Councillors, totalling £404,330.

This community fund is flexibly designed to help with costs that can range from purchasing sports equipment for local clubs, to the creation of websites, providing financial support to community groups and projects that improve the quality of life in for residents in Surrey.

Each year, Surrey County Council's 81 councillors each allocate £5,000 of funding within their local communities. With their deep understanding of the needs and priorities of their communities they can ensure that the funding is targeted to areas where it is most needed and where it can make the biggest impact. It can be used across a variety of projects that help promote the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of their communities.

Surrey County Council Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities Denise Turner-Stewart said: *"As a council we are committed to working together with communities to improve the lives of people living or working in Surrey. The Your Councillor Community Fund is a great example of how even a small amount of funding can make a big difference in the communities we serve. These initiatives can help to deliver such things as sports for fitness, places to come together, providing facilities that help improve health and wellbeing and in other cases an improved pride in their local areas."*

"It embodies our commitment to empowering local residents to have a say and make a real difference in their own communities. By supporting initiatives driven by the passion and dedication of our residents, we aim to create vibrant, inclusive communities where everyone thrives".

The Your Councillor Community Fund is open now and closes in January 2025.

To apply for money from this year's Your Councillor Community Fund you should contact your Epsom and Ewell Councillor. They are:

Epsom Town & Downs Steven McCormick Epsom Town & Downs Residents Association **Steven.McCormick@surreycc.gov.uk**

Epsom West Bernie Muir Epsom West Conservative **bernie.muir@surreycc.gov.uk**

Ewell John Beckett Ewell Residents Association **john.beckett@surreycc.gov.uk**

Ewell Court, Auriol & Cuddington Eber Kington Ewell Court, Auriol & Cuddington Residents Association **Eber.Kington@surreycc.gov.uk**

More information can be found here **Your Councillor Community Fund - Surrey County Council (surreycc.gov.uk)**.

Examples of projects funded last year include:

£1,493 to help make Spelthorne cleaner and greener by providing group litter picking equipment which can be loaned out to encourage individuals, groups and schools to adopt an area for regular picking and to take a pride in their local environment.

£2,000 towards equipment for the 2023 Shepperton Village Fair, including banners, sail flags, display board and cashless payment devices.

£700 towards replacing a 25-year-old table tennis table used by Leatherhead U3A Table Tennis Group, helping to keep members physically and socially active.

£1,000 towards new uniforms for Godalming Youth Band. The new polo shirts and hoodies are more suitable for events all year round and will be loaned out, much like the instruments, to help keep music-making as accessible as possible.

As well as Your Councillor Community Funding, there is also funding available via Your Fund Surrey for small and large community projects. Visit **www.surreycc.gov.uk/yourfund** to find out more.

Image: Left to right - County Councillors McCormick, Muir, Beckett and Kington

Green view of Mole Valley elections

17 May 2024



Dear Editor,

In Mole Valley national issues probably mostly impacted the main parties who lost support. However these local election results will be of little significance in the forthcoming General Election in Epsom and Ewell constituency for several reasons.

Firstly only a small area of Mole Valley falls within the parliamentary constituency of Epsom and Ewell, namely Ashted and Leatherhead. While these two areas will be very important to our campaign in the General Election there did appear to be some tactical or protest voting in the local elections in

Mole Valley as there was no great change in turnout. In Leatherhead Liberal Democrats were elected with a similar vote compared with 2023 despite their record of supporting development in the Green Belt.

The Green Party targeted resources in the Dorking area of Mole Valley in order to maintain a previous strong showing there. Secondly, as local elections did not take place for the Epsom Borough Council area the bulk of voters in the Epsom and Ewell constituency were not able to express their choices at the ballot box.

Nevertheless the threat to the Green Belt will be one of the key issues in the General Election in Epsom and Ewell as a whole so voters will have a genuine opportunity to test candidates about this particular matter, which is of great priority for the Green Party, including in Ashted and Leatherhead where we will be actively campaigning to galvanise our support there.

Finally, whilst votes were quite well dispersed across different parties in the local elections in Mole Valley there will be even more parties standing in the General Election in Epsom and Ewell including the Green Party. The share of the vote will also probably be quite dispersed as a result in the General Election and in this scenario tactical voting will be of limited benefit. In such circumstances voters will be well advised to vote for policies they believe in, as a surprise result is quite likely.

Stephen McKenna

Prospective Parliamentary Candidate Green Party Epsom and Ewell

Epsom and Ewell was the first Conservative free Council

17 May 2024



Dear Editor,

I refer to your article on the May local elections headed ***“First Surrey Borough with no Conservative Councillors”*** and which includes the comment that ***“The result makes it [Woking] the first council in Surrey not to have a single Conservative councillor.”*** However, that is certainly not the case.

From 1937, when the Borough of Epsom and Ewell was created, and until 2003 (66 years), the Conservative Party was only represented on the Borough Council twice (and by a very small number of councillors). Since 2003 the Conservative Party has maintained a constant presence, but never larger than four in number and it is currently languishing at two.

Whilst I don't wish to diminish the historical importance of the Conservative Party's demise in Woking, they have had to

face regular failures at the ballot box in Epsom and Ewell ever since George VI became King.

Yours faithfully,

Eber Kington

Residents Association County Councillor Ewell Court, Auriol and Cuddington

[Mr Kington is an Honorary Alderman of the Borough of Epsom and Ewell and served as Borough Councillor for many years.]

Spelthorne in financial trouble

17 May 2024



Inspectors have been sent to Spelthorne Borough Council as concern grows over its ability to deal with its extreme debt and borrowing. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has been working with the borough since May 2022 and now the Secretary of State has weighed in over the “authority’s extremely high levels of debt and borrowing”.

A letter to Spelthorne Borough Council’s chief executive, confirming the department’s decision to appoint Lesley Seary to carry out a formal inspection of the council over its capital risk was published on Wednesday, May 8.

It read: “As of March 31 2023, Spelthorne’s debt was £1.096 billion, which was 87.1 times the council’s core spending power and 52.4 times its total service expenditure.”

The average borough council has a debt to spending ratio of 5.65.

A July review of the borough’s finances also found the council needed “expert independent support” to assist with its “immediate and ongoing financial challenges” and required help to mitigate its risk as well as improve its governance and decision-making culture.

It comes just four months after another Surrey authority, Runnymede Borough Council was served a notice over its finances, and a year after Woking Borough Council declared itself bankrupt.

Concerns over the council’s finances date back to a 2017/18 report from accountants KPMG – published in November 2022. It highlighted concerns over the council’s investments and set out the auditor’s view that Spelthorne Borough Council had acted unlawfully in borrowing and then purchasing three properties.

The Secretary of State has given certain directions to Lesley Seary’s inspection. First, she will examine concerns over the council’s governance and scrutiny, with particular attention to its financial arrangements and decision making. She is also looking into the council’s ability to carry out its new housing strategy, as well as the impact its investment portfolio has had on service delivery.

The inspector, who will have right-of-access to all council premises and documents, will then report her findings to the Secretary of State by August 30. The council has also been told it cannot destroy any documentation or records.

The letter was sent as part of a best value directive from DLUHC. As part of the process the council must publish its response, together with the letters on its website.

The statement from Spelthorne Borough Council read: “Over a year ago, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) asked the professional body for public sector finance, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), to review Spelthorne Borough Council’s investment portfolio and borrowing position.

“The authority has now received a letter from the department advising that they have appointed an independent inspector to undertake a review of Spelthorne Borough Council to seek assurance that the Council complying with its Best Value Duty.

“The Secretary of State decided to commission this inspection to provide him with direct, independent assurance that the council has ‘arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, with regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness.’

“The government letter outlines concerns around debt relative to size of the Council’s budget and governance whilst acknowledging that Spelthorne Borough Council has engaged constructively with the Department since 2022 and already taken action to mitigate risk.

“DLUHC has appointed Lesley Seary as Lead Inspector, who is independent of government, and has asked her to report

her findings to the Secretary of State by 30 August 2024.”

Leader of Spelthorne Borough Council, Councillor Joanne Sexton welcomed the review and would work with the inspector and her team.

She said: “This administration has taken many decisive and positive steps since the May 2023 election including instigating a full external independent review of our commercial property portfolio. Additionally, we have reduced future borrowing requirements by nearly £200m and are pursuing alternative ways to deliver more affordable housing. We will continue to work with DLUHC in an open and transparent way and look forward to receiving the findings of the report.”

“The rental income received from our commercial property portfolio more than covers the financing costs and provides a significant contribution to support council services, additionally there is a reserve to cover possible income variation in future years.”

Spelthorne’s neediest lose out on housing

‘Crisis point’ in local government funding

Relative relief about Epsom and Ewell’s debt?

Leader of Spelthorne Borough Council, Ashford East councillor Joanne Sexton, at the council building in Knowle Green, Staines. Credit: Emily Coady-Stemp

Two horse race coming to Epsom?

17 May 2024



The Liberal Democrats continue to tighten their grip on Epsom & Ewell’s southern flank in Mole Valley, as the Party cements its position in Leatherhead. With two out of three seats in Leatherhead South now in the hands of the Lib Dems, the Conservatives are now down to just two seats in the whole of the Mole Valley district.

According to the Lib Dem PPC the general election stage in the wider Epsom & Ewell constituency is now set for a two horse race between the Liberal Democrat’s **Helen Maguire** and the Conservative **Mhairi Fraser**.

Commenting on the recent Mole Valley Council elections results Helen Maguire said, “Each month we are knocking on 1000s of doors and hearing from residents who are understandably upset with the way this government is running this country. They are looking for a change. With the boundary changes, Labour declaring the seat a non-battleground seat and the Liberal Democrats now having more councillors than the Conservatives across the country, we know there is a good chance of change here in Epsom, Ewell, Ashted & Leatherhead.”

Mhairi Fraser, the Conservative Prospective Parliamentary Candidate responded: “Although the results were not what we had hoped or worked hard for, I am incredibly proud of the integrity our local Conservative candidates showed. We ran an honest campaign focusing on what the Conservatives will continue to fight for on behalf of local residents, without resorting to attacking our individual opponents on the doorsteps or in our literature. I wish the new and re-elected councillors well in the term ahead, but the Conservatives will continue to be the loudest voice against the Liberal Democrats’ plans to forever destroy our Green Belt, and to plaster tower blocks over the green spaces in our towns.”

Mark Todd, Chair of the Epsom and Ewell Labour Party said: “As a rule of thumb, Epsom town centre and the north of Epsom and Ewell are strong for Labour, as you move South the areas become more Conservative. We were very heartened therefore by the results in Leatherhead at the local elections. It was the first year Leatherhead has been part of the Epsom and Ewell Constituency and we fielded fantastic local candidates who live and work in the area. We got really good feedback on the doorstep and the Labour vote across Leatherhead increased by 73%. A similar swing will see us win the Epsom and Ewell constituency in the upcoming General Election.”

The Labour Party is yet to select a Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for the constituency. Epsom and Ewell Times has been informed that National Labour Party managers are conducting due diligence on all prospective MPs. Once they have completed this, they will give the Epsom and Ewell Labour Party a shortlist for local member’s consideration.

Local Council elections in Mole Valley in Leatherhead, which will be within the recently changed boundaries of the Parliamentary Constituency of Epsom and Ewell, produced two Liberal Democrat victories on 2nd May. In Leatherhead North **Benjamin Wear** secured 671 votes with the Conservative candidate **Alan Gibbs** trailing with 327 votes. In Leatherhead South **Gareth Parsons** gained 970 votes against Conservative **Tim Hall** getting 714 votes.

Wards in Ashted also went to the polls and returned independent candidates with healthy majorities.

2019 General Election result:

Party	Candidate	Votes	%
 Conservative	Chris Grayling	31,819	53.5
 Liberal Democrats	Stephen Gee	13,946	23.5
 Labour	Ed Mayne	10,226	17.2
 Green	Janice Baker	2,047	3.4
 Independent	Clive Woodbridge	1,413	2.4
Majority		17,873	30.0
Turnout		59,451	73.3

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Inclusive sportsmanship in Worcester Park

17 May 2024



The annual Linden Bridge Football Festival kicked off with a vibrant display of teamwork, camaraderie, and sheer determination. Organized by **Linden Bridge School**, Worcester Park, and led by enthusiastic pupils, this event brought together 15 special educational needs (SEN) schools and over 100 pupils for a day of spirited competition.

The festival, held at **Wandgas Sports Ground**, exemplified the inclusive spirit that Linden Bridge School stands for. Students of all abilities participated in various football matches, showcasing their skills and passion for the beautiful game. From footgolf to mini-tournaments, the atmosphere was electric as players cheered each other on.

One of the festival's highlights was the unwavering support from local businesses. **MetroRod**, a leading drainage and plumbing company, stepped up as the main sponsor. Their generous contribution ensured that every participant received a commemorative medal, a symbol of their hard work and dedication. In addition, MetroRod provided trophies for all participating schools, recognizing outstanding performances and sportsmanship.

Coach Dom, from **KEY Sports Academy**, played a pivotal role in making the festival a success. His expertise in organizing sports events and passion for nurturing young talent shone through. Coach Dom lent equipment and offered valuable coaching tips. His commitment to empowering young athletes was evident as he encouraged fair play and teamwork.

"The Linden Bridge Football Festival is more than just a tournament," Coach Dom shared. "It's about fostering a love for sports, building confidence, and creating lasting memories. These students inspire us all with their determination and resilience."

The **Surrey Special Schools Sports Association (SSSSA)** includes the Linden Bridge Football Festival as a key event in its annual calendar. Linden Bridge School takes immense pride in being an active member of the association. This year alone, Linden Bridge pupils have participated in 25 SSSSA-organized events across various sports disciplines.

"Our students thrive when given the opportunity to compete," said Mr. **Borja Vidal**, PE Lead at

Linden Bridge School. “The festival allows them to showcase their abilities, make friends, and celebrate their achievements. We’re grateful to everyone who made this day possible.”

The Linden Bridge Football Festival reminded us that sports transcend barriers, bringing people together in the spirit of unity and joy.

With the success of this year’s festival, Linden Bridge School is already planning for next year. The goal remains the same: to create an inclusive platform where every student can shine, regardless of their abilities. As the festival becomes a cherished tradition, it reinforces the belief that sports have the power to transform lives.

Bed pressures rushing doctors

17 May 2024



Pressure to free up hospital beds can “rush” clinicians to make under-informed decisions and discharge plans, a coroner has found.

A man who tragically died from hypothermia and chronic alcoholism in **Epsom General Hospital** prompted a coroner to raise concerns that demands on beds can put patient safety at risk.

A local man was admitted to hospital three times from October 22 to December 5, 2022. Each time, the underlying cause of his condition was not diagnosed and he was soon after found to be medically fit for discharge. He died on December 12 2022, after being found profoundly hypothermic the previous day.

Coroner **Caroline Topping** found: “Pressure on staff to vacate hospital bed spaces led to inadequate discharge planning and more than minimally contributed to the death.”

It was accepted by the Epsom and St Helier NHS Trust that pressure to vacate hospital bed spaces contributed to the inadequacy of discharge planning. The coroner ruled the need to free up a bed space led to the patient’s rushed release on December 5, 2022 without an adequate care plan being in place.

Nationally, the NHS faces significant pressures to use beds as efficiently as possible. The Trust said it will never willingly compromise a person’s safety by discharging them sooner than it should.

Clinicians and staff discharged the patient without knowing what underlay his deterioration and how his ability to self-care was impacted.

His expressed wish to go home alone was “erroneously” relied on to justify an “unsafe” discharge on the basis he had capacity to make a decision, according to the coroner’s prevention of future death report.

An inquest on March 12 2024, heard how the man was suffering from alcohol related brain damage, impacting his mobility and fluctuating confusion. Malnourished, as a result of his chronic alcohol use, his health had declined and he lost a significant amount of weight over the summer.

Continuing to “abuse alcohol”, he was self neglecting and his ability to live alone was reduced. He developed hypothermia in an inadequately heated flat and had not been eating properly.

Contrary to NHS policy, the man was not identified as a vulnerable patient. Any adult unable to take care of themselves (e.g. alcohol as a risk factor) is defined as a vulnerable adult.

The coroner found there was a lack of information sharing and investigation in relation to the discharge planning for the patient.

Reportedly unaware of the discharge planning policy, staff made decisions in a vacuum. There was no understanding of the man’s recent history of frequent admissions, his diagnosis or sufficient investigation of his home circumstances.

The man’s family was not involved in the discharge planning. Concerns were raised by the family on a number of occasions about his ability to look after himself. No heed was paid to these worries and the man was discharged on December 5 to live at his own flat without an adequate care plan in place. He died a week later.

The coroner’s report states the Trust has already put in place a number of improvements around effective information sharing and recognition of safeguarding issues, including self-neglect.

However, she “remained concerned” that the hospital’s discharge policy remains under review, including how families are involved, meaning it has not been possible to access how effective it is.

The coroner wrote to St George’s Epsom and St Helier Hospital Group and NHS England to raise her concerns, which also included pressure to vacate beds leading to rushed under informed decision making and ability to prepare ‘properly considered’ discharge plans, urging them to take action to reduce the risk of future deaths.

A Trust spokesperson said: “We are deeply sorry that we didn’t give [the man] the care that he and his family were entitled to expect, and our heartfelt apology and condolences go out to [his] family.

“We took immediate steps to review our discharge process, adding in additional checks, greater contact with families of vulnerable patients and we have also improved safeguarding training for our staff.”

Epsom and St Helier Hospital added they will respond fully to the coroner’s concerns within the set timeframe, by June 12, 2024.

Rated as ‘good’ in an inspection in 2019, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) said it has received the coroner’s report on the hospital. The CQC said, as always, it will utilise the information during its forthcoming engagement meetings with the Trust.

Making a racket for new padel centre

17 May 2024



Leatherhead could soon host international competition after Surrey’s first indoor padel centre was approved. Padel is a racket sport of Mexican origin, typically played in doubles, and is like a mix between Tennis and Squash.

The Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) has said it is committed to investing in the growth of padel and wants to build more courts that can be used throughout the year.

The new facilities, granted planning permission next to Leatherhead Leisure Centre by Mole Valley District Council, are considered critical to sustaining this growth, the LTA said, and would enable more adults and juniors to enjoy, compete and experience the game.

Six new courts will be split by cafe area and viewing platform under a large dome next to Leatherhead Leisure Centre. Councillors agreed the benefits sports and recreation would bring to the borough outweighed the harm the 11 metres-tall dome would have on the green belt.

The LTA has also said the courts would be used at both national and international levels. The dome would be shielded to help it blend in to the surrounding area.

Councillor Roger Adams (Liberal Democrat, Bookham West) said: “I’m all for trees being used as screens and the more we can screen buildings the better and certainly this is a very large building, although it is green, it will be nice just to take the solid lines away by more planting.”

Cllr Raj Haque (Liberal Democrat, Fetcham) said: “This proposal is one of the best ones in terms of sporting facilities that will be provided.”

Cllr Simon Budd added that he was pleased the dome was going to be green as the white one in Dorking was now discoloured by mould.

The courts include parking for 24 cars and will occupy land used as a boating lake as well as storage for waste containers.

To help spread the game, developers said they would run outreach programs with nearby schools “encourage involvement with the facility” as well as set up a club and hold regular padel lessons.

The land council owned and will be leased for use as a padel facility and the dome structure will be fully enclosed to prevent significant light spillage.

Image – example of indoor padel centre