

Taking a ride on Epsom's new S2 bus

6 April 2024



More than most in the capital, South Londoners notice when the bus timetables change. Whether this stems from a love of the iconic red fleet or an over-reliance on the service due to a lack of London Underground coverage is besides the point.

Therefore, news of Transport for London's (TfL) latest bus rejig last month did not go unnoticed. The changes affecting the capital's most southerly boroughs have seen routes withdrawn and re-drawn.

Perhaps the most exciting changes have come in the form of the entirely new 439 and S2 routes, that would take South Londoners across Sutton, Merton, and Croydon in a fleet of brand-new EV buses.

Last month I took a long and winding ride on the 439, which was comfortable but eerily quiet. Now I decided to jump on South London's other newcomer, the S2. The S2, introduced on March 2, has replaced sections of the old 470 and S4 route that took passengers between **Epsom town centre** and St Helier station. The route is operated by Go Ahead.

Getting a measure of what a bus service is actually like is hard, as there are so many variables that can influence the length and enjoyment of the journey. That said, I thought it best to take a ride mid-afternoon to get a taste of the post-lunch slump and rush hour mania.

While waiting outside my local **Ewell East** bus stop on an overcast Monday afternoon, I felt a pang of nostalgia for the former 470 service. While slow and clunky, the old route served me well during my school days.

However, this nostalgia quickly evaporated as the souped-up S2 came into view. The bright LED numbering and hum that come with all-electric vehicles suggested TfL was taking bus travel seriously in South London.

Once onboard you are met with a range of features designed to keep passengers occupied during their journey. The charging points (currently working) and display telling you how far you are from your destination are mod cons we will soon come to expect from all buses in London.

As with all new services, teething problems are common. Despite some press and handy diagrams displaying the new changes, some passengers remained confused by the change. Elderly passenger Sharon, on her 'potter round the shops' in Sutton, told me: "It's the first time I've been on it. They've messed it all up, I don't know where it goes now."

I saw this confusion unfold later on in my journey as several passengers stood by the doors of the bus, waiting for what they thought was their stop only to find out the new stop was a further 200m up the road. One disgruntled passenger mumbled: "I've got to go all the way back on myself now."

However, she admitted that she had seen news of the changes online. Moreover, she welcomed the increased frequency of the new service. She said: "They're more frequent than the 470 though, which is good. If you missed it you thought, 'oh god I have to wait half an hour'."

Fellow passenger David agreed, saying: "I've seen these new buses fly past much more often than the ones before. It makes a change." The route is largely residential, choosing to link up Sutton and North East Surrey's stations via a network of sleepy tree-lined avenues rather than on the more hectic dual carriageways.

The salubrious route, plus the relative quiet of the electric engine, can make for a pleasant journey. Whilst gliding through Cheam's affluent Sandy Lane, Sharon turns and says: "I like this bit, nice houses round here."

However, as the service passes through Sutton town centre it becomes apparent that this is not the service for those in a hurry. While temporary traffic lights and the mid-journey driver change did their best to obstruct the service, the S2 route is far from direct.

The bus slows to a snail's pace as it passes the decaying white edifice of the St Helier Hospital. Being a popular stop for visitors and medical professionals, most passengers alight at this point.

The one remaining passenger then begins to loudly cite the entire phonetic alphabet during a phone call to what sounded like a party planner. While this did provide some entertainment, the stuttered progress of the S2 meant I started to tire of her recital by the time she got to echo.

The next stage in the journey provided no relief as the bus passed through a location feared by learner drivers across Sutton and Merton. The dreaded four-lane Rose Hill roundabout.

After nearly an hour on the S2, the bus rolls up St Helier station ending the first leg of my journey. By this time the bus is empty save for me and the driver, which seems apt for the equally deserted St Helier.

Before starting on the return leg to Epsom, I ask the bus driver for his thoughts on the new service. He said the service is based out of the Sutton bus garage and is pretty easy-going compared to other routes.

He added: “It’s not been busy in general, to be honest. The buses are nice and smooth.”

During the journey back towards Epsom, you realise the journey’s most odious section comes when you pass through The Wrythe and its network of hilly residential roads. Things get a bit more straightforward once the bus passes through Cheam.

After leaving the bus on Epsom High Street, you are immediately struck by how busy Epsom’s main thoroughfare can be during rush hour. Its main road is teeming with school children hanging outside vape shops and weary late-afternoon shoppers trying to get in before closing time.

While the S2 is a pretty comprehensive route, taking in useful stations and popular shopping locations, it seems amiss to not extend the route that little bit further up to Epsom Hospital.

Surely a route joining Epsom Hospital with St Helier, which are joint in an NHS trust, would make sense for staff and visitors. While other services serve Epsom Hospital, it wouldn’t take much effort to extend the route.

Despite this, the S2 delivers on the whole. It gets you from A to B in comfort, and the increased frequency benefits those who relied on the previous service. Just don’t be fooled by its spruced-up appearance, it’s not taking you anywhere fast.

Related reports:

New Bus Route for S2 through the Borough

Image : Harrison Galliven on the S2* Credit the author.

Tree felling foul of the law

6 April 2024



The culprits who illegally chopped down more than 100 protected trees and damaged seven others have been fined nearly £20,000, Woking Borough Council said.

A landowner, together with its contractor were prosecuted and fined for the unauthorised felling of the trees near Upshot Lane, Pyrford, after pleading guilty at Guildford Magistrates’ Court.

Burhill Development Ltd admitted it ignored a tree preservation order on its land and was made to pay £15,140, comprising fines of £11,000, a victim surcharge of £2,000 and costs of £2,140.

Their contractor, P&A Services, which carried out the work, also pleaded guilty to the unauthorised felling and causing damage to the protected trees and was ordered to pay a total of £2,900; fines of £1,000; a victim surcharge of £400; and council costs of £1,500.

The action was taken against the two firms by Woking Borough Council. The original hearing took place in October 2023 with the judge issuing sentence in March 2024.

Speaking about the prosecution, Beverley Kuchar, Woking Borough Council’s strategic director for place, described it as an “important case” and welcomed the decision.

She said: “Whether you permit or cause wilful damage to our environment we will take legal action wherever necessary.

“It is important that landowners and their contractors take the necessary steps to understand what consent is required before commencing tree works.

“The status of the borough’s trees can be checked quickly and simply online. If in doubt, our arboricultural team can provide advice in advance of any works commencing.

“There is no excuse and, as in this case, failure to do so can lead to a criminal prosecution and significant fines.”

Tree Preservation Orders protect specific trees, groups of trees, or woodland that benefit the wider community

Psychiatric bed shortages in Surrey

6 April 2024



A man tragically took his own life in Surrey after a mental health relapse, prompting a coroner to warn of a shortage of psychiatric beds in Surrey hospitals.

Jonathan Harris, 52, who suffered from paranoid schizophrenia, died by suicide on June 27, 2022.

If an inpatient psychiatric hospital bed had been available just days earlier, Jonathan would not have died, the coroner ruled. Coroner Anna Crawford judged that action should be taken to prevent future deaths.

Bed shortages for mental health patients in Surrey, as well as nationwide, has been an ongoing issue for NHS Trusts. Many patients are forced to move up to 60 miles away from home to receive treatment because there are few beds in their area. The court heard that this is in the context of a national shortage of suitably qualified psychiatrists.

Following a lengthy psychiatric inpatient stay in Camberley in November 2021, Jonathan was under the care of Surrey Heath Community Mental Health Recovery Service, which is part of Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust.

Jonathan was prescribed anti-psychotic medication. In February and May 2022, Jonathan requested for his medication to be reduced to fortnightly and then once every three weeks.

The reduction in medication in May 2022 was judged as “premature” by the coroner. Jonathan had reportedly shown signs of appearing “suspicious” when he was seen by the Surrey Heath Mental Health Team (MHT) on May 4. However, these signs were not explored.

The mental health team were also aware Mr Harris was moving house, meaning and move to a new community mental health team, which may affect his wellbeing.

Jonathan’s mental health continued to deteriorate and on June 24 it the MHT decided that he required an assessment under the Mental Health Act.

No inpatient bed was available and therefore the assessment did not take place. If Jonathan had been assessed, he would have been detained under the Mental Health Act and admitted to hospital.

The coroner said: “Mr Harris would not have taken his own life had he remained well and the relapse of his paranoid schizophrenia materially contributed to his death.

“Mr Harris would not have died had an inpatient psychiatric hospital bed been available on either 24, 25 or 26 June 2022.

“The court also heard that there is an ongoing shortage of available inpatient psychiatric beds in Surrey and that this is in the context of a national shortage of inpatient psychiatric beds. The court is concerned that both of these matters present a risk of future deaths.”

The Prevention of Future Deaths report was issued to NHS England rather than to Surrey and Borders Partnership. NHS England was invited to comment; it said it is working to the coroner’s deadline of 56 days to respond with the action it will take or proposed to take, and such information is not yet available.

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New Chief Executive for County

6 April 2024



Surrey County Council has appointed **Terence Herbert** as its new Chief Executive.

Terence, currently Chief Executive at Wiltshire Council, was chosen after a robust recruitment process to find a

replacement for **Joanna Killian**.

Subject to formal ratification at an extraordinary Full Council meeting on 9 April 2024, Terence is expected to take over as Chief Executive in the summer.

Leader of Surrey County Council **Tim Oliver** said: *“Terence is an outstanding leader bringing over 25 years of local government experience to the role, and it is excellent news that he will be joining us.*

“Under his leadership, Wiltshire is regarded as a strong local authority – one of the largest unitary authorities in the country – with sound finances and a high-performing workforce.

“I am certain that he will be a tremendous asset to Surrey and is the right person to lead us as we face the challenges ahead.”

Terence said: *“I am delighted to have been appointed as the Chief Executive of Surrey County Council. I’m looking forward to working with the leader, Members, staff and our partners to build on Surrey’s significant track record and lead the organisation through the next stage of its transformation in what continues to be a challenging time for local government.*

“Having spent much of my earlier career in children’s services and mental health, I am passionate about delivering quality services for the most vulnerable residents across our communities. I know the importance of retaining a motivated and ambitious workforce with a focus on celebrating the success of our staff, so this is an area that will be a key priority for me.”

Terence joined Wiltshire Council in 2011, where he was appointed Chief Executive in June 2020. Prior to this he held a number of senior leadership roles including Head of Service for Safeguarding, Associate Director for Children’s Services, Executive Director for Children & Families, Leisure & Communities, Corporate Services and HR & Organisational Development, and Chief Executive Officer for People.

Terence began his career as a Registered Mental Nurse (RMN) and then qualified as a social worker, taking up posts in children’s services at the London Borough of Lewisham, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, and North Somerset Council.

Related reports:

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Enforcing planning enforcement in Epsom and Ewell

6 April 2024



In a comprehensive analysis of the **Epsom & Ewell Borough Council**’s planning enforcement procedures, a recent audit report titled “EPSOM & EWELL BOROUGH COUNCIL INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT 2023-24,” conducted by the Southern Internal Audit Partnership in February 2024, has brought to light a litany of deficiencies and failures. These findings, detailed in a thorough examination of the council’s practices, underscore significant shortcomings in record-keeping, response times to complaints, and the enforcement of regulatory measures.

Central to the audit’s findings is the examination of the administration of planning enforcement, a critical function entrusted with ensuring the adherence of development activities to established regulatory frameworks. Despite assertions by the council regarding the existence of a comprehensive Local Enforcement Plan, purportedly designed to outline clear guidelines and timelines for enforcement actions, the reality paints a starkly contrasting picture upon closer scrutiny.

“Testing of a sample of cases revealed a disconcerting trend of non-compliance with stipulated timelines,” the report notes. Contrary to the Local Enforcement Plan’s mandate of acknowledging receipt of planning enforcement complaints within five working days, numerous instances were found where this requirement was not met, resulting in prolonged delays and a lack of clarity for complainants.

Moreover, deficiencies in the triage process, a critical step in determining the priority level of enforcement cases, were exposed. Despite the plan’s directive to assign priority levels ranging from one to three, the absence of mechanisms within the council’s system to accurately record these priorities severely hampered monitoring efforts. As a result, the council’s ability to effectively manage and expedite enforcement actions was compromised, leading to further delays and inefficiencies.

“Key documentation associated with enforcement actions was found to be missing altogether,” the audit report reveals, casting serious doubts on the thoroughness of investigations and the efficacy of enforcement measures. In several instances where enforcement notices were issued, no evidence of follow-up actions to ensure compliance was found, directly contravening statutory requirements under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

The repercussions of these systemic failures extend beyond procedural lapses to tangible impacts on the community and the council’s reputation. So heard a meeting of the Council’s **Audit and Scrutiny Committee** Thursday 28th March. Councillor **Jan Mason** (RA Ruxley), drawing from her extensive experience in planning, expressed profound dismay at the council’s failure to uphold its responsibilities in enforcing planning regulations. “I am totally surprised that we haven’t dealt with this in a more timely fashion,” she remarked. “This reflects poorly on our council, and I am deeply concerned about the potential consequences of unchecked development activities.”

Echoing these sentiments, Councillor **James Lawrence** (LibDem College) highlighted the significance of planning enforcement to residents, citing recurring issues and delays in addressing enforcement matters. “For many residents, planning enforcement is a top priority,” he emphasized. “The council’s failure to act swiftly in response to complaints undermines public confidence and raises serious questions about its commitment to upholding regulatory standards.”

In response to queries raised by councillors, council officers sought to clarify the circumstances surrounding the appointment of a permanent Enforcement Officer. While acknowledging the existence of temporary officers in the past, they emphasized the recent transition to a permanent role as a step towards addressing staffing concerns within the planning department.

Stoneleigh library flats for homeless

6 April 2024



Two flats above a library are set to be used as temporary accommodation for homeless people, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council decided yesterday (March 26).

Demand for temporary accommodation is “acute”, according to the council. It is currently predicting an overspend of £200,000 of its £1.5m temporary accommodation budget, according to the Local Democracy Reporting Service.

Two self-contained, two bedroom maisonettes that sit above the Stoneleigh Community Library in Epsom that are accessed through the back of the building are earmarked for use.

Surrey County Council, who commercially lease the empty flats, have reportedly refurbished the maisonettes to a “high standard” and will require “minimal preparation” to be used as temporary accommodation.

Emergency and temporary accommodation is provided to housing register applicants whilst their claim is being investigated. Homeless people currently sit in Band A of the council’s housing allocations.

Around 235 homeless ‘households’ (i.e individuals or families) were accommodated by the council in 2021, with 155 in temporary accommodation and 80 in nightly-paid accommodation, costing up to £140 a night.

Meeting documents state the decision will create a real cost saving of £30,920 pa for the two maisonettes combined to the council.

A budget of £15,000 was agreed to cover the development of the site, with £5,000 covering legal and/or surveyor costs to the council and contributing to SCC for landlord approval costs. An additional £10,000 is set aside for a maisonettes preparation contingency.

Owned by a private landlord, the borough council will under lease from SCC who currently commercially lets the property. SCC and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council lease will co-expire in just under three years. The terms will then be renewed or re-negotiated.

Stoneleigh Community Library (Credit Google Maps)

Was County HQ sold for a song?

6 April 2024



Surrey County Council faces scrutiny over its £25 million sale of a former headquarters site after it was revealed it could have a gross development value of £250 million once redeveloped. The new owner of the former HQ has listed the site for sale with a gross development value of 10 times more than the council got when it sold the historic building in 2021.

The huge gap between the two figures led to the county council to be challenged on whether it got the best deal for residents although the lead member for property said it secured a “good deal” and would sell it again at the same price. The 5.2 acre site in Kingston is being marketed by Savills. It is described as a “landmark opportunity” with “stunning former County Hall buildings” and has planning permission for 254 private apartments, 16 shared ownership apartments, and 20 affordable rent apartments.

Rob Pollock, Savills director, London development, said in a statement promoting the sale: “With its scale and heritage, Surrey County Hall offers the opportunity to deliver a truly unique development in southwest London that might seem more at home in central London, and consequently appeal to buyers across the city. With world famous attractions like Hampton Court and Wimbledon Tennis Club in striking distance of the property, combined with the obvious curb-side appeal, we expect that the ultimate developer of the property will set new record for pricing in Kingston.”

The sale was discussed during the Tuesday March, 19 meeting of Surrey County Council. In March 2021 Surrey County Council sold the site for about £25m to RER Kingston Limited, according to officers although it was suggested the figure may have been “in excess” of that.

Councillor Robert Evans (Lab Stanwell and Stanwell Moor) asked: “When Surrey County Council was selling County Hall, its former Kingston headquarters, developers RER issued a release stating it had a guide price of £20m. This week Savills has issued a press release stating the site now has a Gross Development Value of £250m.

“Can the council tell us exactly how much it got for its former Grade 2 listed site, and whether it feels this was best value for residents seeing as it now has the potential to bring in hundreds of millions of pounds for its new owners?”

In a written response, he was told the council sold the site for £25million, on a subject to contract only basis, following “an extensive open marketing campaign for which best value was secured”. Since the sale, RER (Kingston) Ltd has been holding the 300,000 sq. ft site vacant, while pursuing a planning application through the Royal Borough of Kingston to convert much of the former complex into residential units.

The official council response read: “Costs would have been incurred for empty business rate liability, which would have been circa £700,000 per annum alongside security and other holding void costs. “Although planning consent is now expected, RER have placed the complex on the market through Savills.

“Whilst the agents suggest a potential value post development, it should be noted that when fully sold or let, this is not the value that a market bidder will pay for the asset today. A value bid would consider the cost, timing and risks of the development, the capital investment needed to complete any approved scheme (heritage build costs, consultant fees, ongoing security, void costs, finance costs at elevated rates since 2021) and the marketing period to sell or rent all units once converted.

“This could be a further three to five year project”. As part of the sale agreement the council negotiated a contractual position to secure any excess of value that might arise from any future development “if the quantum of development exceeded a certain level”.

When asked to elaborate on this, cabinet member for property, waste and infrastructure, Councillor Natalie Bramhall said the developers had spent £700,000 a year on empty rates, had to cover the cost of security, and that planning application costs would have been in excess of £1m.

She added that to get to the full £250m they would also need to spend ‘hundreds of millions’ to bring it forward. She said: “Residual land value with planning persimmon is between £35m and £40m.

“Somebody is going to have to spend hundreds of millions of pounds bringing that forward and I would suggest that as the purchaser is trying to sell at this time in the market which is probably at the bottom they spent far more on this site than they probably expected already. I actually think we secured a good deal and would again sell at that price.”

Image - former SCC HQ County Hall in Kingston. Surrey Live

Unstable world, religious discrimination, the Local

Plan and trains

6 April 2024



We live, sadly, in an increasingly unstable world. The situation in Israel and Gaza has been and continues to be horrendous. There is a huge international diplomatic effort, involving the UK and other European countries, the US and countries across the Middle East, working to try to find a way of bringing both a short and long term resolution to the conflict. I really hope it succeeds.

At the same time the situation in Ukraine seems increasingly difficult, with Russia starting to make ground again in the conflict. In the short term at least there seems little prospect of peace – and my heart goes out to all of the Ukrainian families here in Epsom as they fear for their friends and relatives there.

But at Easter time I would also like to remember another group facing violence and persecution around the world. Every week I receive a newsletter from a member of one of our local Churches about what seems to be an endless stream of violence against Christian communities around the world. In Nigeria and Pakistan in particular attacks on Churches and Christian homes happen all too regularly, and in Nigeria thousands of Christians have been killed or kidnapped by extremists in recent years.

Christian communities are not alone. Ahmadiyya Muslims, a minority group in the Muslim faith, are another example of a group which faces persecution around the world.

In Epsom where different faiths live side by side, and where Church communities are strong and free to worship, we should never forget how fortunate we are compared to many in the world.

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As I enter my last few months in Parliament, so the debate over the local plan in Epsom is beginning to heat up again. I will no longer be MP by the time it is finalised, but as a local resident as well I have a very strong interest in making sure it is done in the right way.

At the same time we can be in no doubt that we need new homes to be built. We cannot continue with a situation where so many people are struggling to get into a home of their own.

That's why I have always argued that we need substantial smart development in this area, making best use of existing developed land, and mixing commercial and residential buildings in a way that is carefully and thoughtfully designed.

What this area does not need is more substantial family homes built on green belt land away from existing public transport. We need starter homes and affordable homes close to local centres.

I hope that even at this late stage the Residents Association councillors who control the Borough Council will change tack and look at the very real opportunities for smart brownfield development in the area. We can build substantial numbers of new homes without creating a new urban sprawl on the farm land to the East and West of Epsom.

With development, it is always much easier just to build on a green field. But the easy option is not always the best one. And in Epsom and Ewell it is certainly not.

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If you travel by train into London, you have probably seen the new trains for our network lined up in sidings at Clapham Junction. They have been there for some time. And not in service.

There are a variety of reasons why our line is suffering from worsening overcrowding at the moment – and I am pushing South Western Railway very hard on this. Last year I got some extra semi-fast trains added to the evening peak timetable. Now I am working to do the same at other times of day.

But a lot of the problems would be solved if the new 10 coach trains were coming on stream. But it seems pretty clear that the main reason they are still parked in the sidings is because the unions are still dragging their feet on allowing them to be used. The reason – they are new, modern trains which work in a different way to the old ones. And the changes are still being resisted.

Perhaps one day the union leadership will put the passenger first. I am not optimistic.

Fast track your planning application at a premium

6 April 2024



From 1 April 2024, applicants submitting certain planning applications in Epsom & Ewell will be able to choose to ‘fast track’ their application.

Developed to meet customer demands, the new optional service will be helpful to applicants who have a builder waiting to start work, or who need building work to start or finish by a certain date. Applicants will be able to pay to have their planning applications determined more quickly than the statutory eight-week period.

The types of applications that can be fast-tracked are:

- Householder Applications – for instance, those required for extending homes e.g. building a single storey rear extension, or front porch.
- Certificate of Lawful Development Proposed (Householder) – an application to show that the work you are proposing to do to a house is a ‘permitted development’ and therefore doesn’t need a formal application. Sometimes you will need a certificate of this nature when you sell a house.

The fast-track fee is £350 for a Householder Application and £150 for a Lawful Development Certificate and is paid to the council, in addition to the usual cost of submitting a planning application.

Councillor **Steve McCormick**, (RA Woodcote and Langley) Chair of the Licensing and Planning Committee, said,

“We are incredibly proud of our Planning department who in the last year, have overcome significant challenges to go from being one of 10 UK council teams performing below an expected threshold of 70% for minor/other applications, to well exceeding national targets. It is brilliant that Epsom & Ewell Borough Council can now facilitate a service which will meet an obvious need for many residents wishing to progress building projects within the borough.

“I hope that this will ease stress for many people working to tight timelines for their builds.”

Applicants can learn more about the service and apply by visiting the council’s dedicated webpage: [Fast Track Service | Epsom and Ewell Borough Council \(epsom-ewell.gov.uk\)](https://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk)

How many £s does it take to change a Council light bulb?

6 April 2024



The cost of changing Council light bulbs was the subject of some concern at Tuesday 26th March’s meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee of **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council**. The committee was considering the annual maintenance programme for Council run properties.

Cllr. **Robert Leach** (RA Nonsuch) enquired: “I thank the officers for a very thorough report, but when I look at the planned maintenance, it does seem to me that this is an area where a stricter financial control is perhaps needed. I look at some of these figures with amazement. £56,000 to change the light bulbs in Bourne Hall. £70,000 to paint the woodwork in Ewell Court House. What controls do we have that we are getting value for money from these contractors?”

The Council Officer replied: “With Bourne Hall, to change a light bulb in this building is not a simple case of getting a step ladder out. It needs scaffolding to get up to these lights here. The costs of replacing the lighting also includes all the equipment to enable those lights to be replaced where they’re in very hard to reach positions. So it’s not just simply

changing light bulbs.”

Cllr Leach’s question on financial controls was left unanswered.

Cllr. **Alison Kelly** (LibDem College) wanted to know about the environmental cost of the main entrance doors to the Epsom Playhouse that open directly onto the lobby. It was observed that the construction of an second inner set of doors was resisted by the theatre as it would take away vital foyer space.

Cllr. **Graham Jones** MBE (RA Cuddington) had earlier that day taken a stroll over to the Epsom Playhouse and had a “light bulb” moment. He suggested: “I’ve seen quite a lot of places where instead of taking away from the lobby you go outwards. There’s lots of space there, and it would make a really nice feature and I would recommend that you consider that option.” His idea was warmly received with the officer responding: “That would be exactly the solution. Hence why it would need to be a future capital bid. Because that’s clearly a larger project than creating it within the building itself. But you’re absolutely spot on. Thank you.”

Cancer patient getting the right royal treatment

6 April 2024



The first cancer patient set to undergo a revolutionary new procedure that could cut treatment time to almost a quarter said it was a “ privilege” to be given the opportunity.

The **Royal Surrey NHS Foundation Trust** is taking part in a new clinical trial led by the **Royal Marsden** into prostate cancer. Currently, patients are treated with radiotherapy over a minimum of 20 treatments which lasts four weeks or more. Under this new process, that time could be reduced to one and a half weeks.

Michael Robson, 78, is the first patient to be part of the trial in Royal Surrey. He was diagnosed in December 2023. He said: “One of my friends was diagnosed with prostate cancer and he said I should get a test so I had a blood test and I was called by my GP and sent for an appointment at urology. I was fortunate enough to meet Dr Philip Turner who gave me the options and went through everything. Everything has been explained to me in a way that is easy to understand and made the journey so much easier to deal with. All of the staff I couldn’t complement them highly enough. They have been fantastic.”

Michael was given options for treatment and was asked if he was interested in taking part in the clinical trial and he agreed straight away. He added: “It’s been fantastic here. I feel very privileged to be the first patient. The service has been first class from everybody concerned.”

Patients with low and intermediate risk disease who took part in a trial called PACE-B demonstrated that the process would work in the tighter time frames. This new study is to determine whether those considered high-risk would get the same benefits. The trial, called PACE-NODES, was opened at The Royal Marsden and was designed jointly by investigators from Queen’s University Belfast and The Institute of Cancer Research, London.

Dr Philip Turner, consultant clinical oncologist and principal investigator for the trial, said: “We are delighted to be opening the PACE NODES trial in Royal Surrey. This is part of our drive to give Surrey patients access to the very best oncology clinical trials from across the UK and indeed from across the world.

“The benefits with regard to timing are enormous – the standard of care for these men is a minimum of four weeks of daily visits which is very disruptive to life. The rates of side effects are low. Crucially, the five fraction treatment appears just as safe as conventional 20 fraction treatments which we have been using for years very safely.”

Chief executive Louise Stead said: “Royal Surrey has a long and proud tradition of being a premier centre of UK oncology research and we are determined, with the support of our patients and other partners, to ensure as many patients as possible have access to ground-breaking research close to home. If successful, this could make a huge difference to patients receiving treatment for prostate cancer.”

L-R: Radiographer Kate Maltby, Michael Robson, Dr Philip Turner

Chalk Pit action - a tale of two committees

6 April 2024



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council grappled with the pressing issue of noise and dust pollution stemming from the waste recycling centre, Chalk Pit off College Road in Epsom. Residents' longstanding grievances prompted a debate among council members at yesterday's meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee.

The discussion opened with an account from an affected resident, urging action to alleviate the suffering. The resident implored the council: "Epsom and Ewell Borough Council must allocate funds to proactively manage the Chalk Pit site, in accordance with your statutory duty to protect residents under the Environmental Protection Act." There was support from a pro-active public gallery that was asked a couple of times not to interrupt.

Councillors echoed residents' concerns, emphasizing the gravity of the situation and the need for decisive measures. Cllr **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley) emphasized the Council's duty to support residents, stating, "This Council has been formed to serve local interests and must prioritize residents' wellbeing by allocating funds to tackle the Chalk Pit issue."

The legal dimensions of the problem were underscored by Cllr **Bernie Muir** (Conservative - Horton), who highlighted residents' legal rights and the Council's responsibility to address statutory noise nuisance. "Residents have a legal right to be protected," declared Muir, emphasizing the need for unequivocal support for allocating funds.

Cllr **James Lawrence** (LibDem - College) emphasized the importance of prompt action, proposing earmarking funds to respond swiftly to noise complaints. "We must prioritize residents' protection and ensure prompt action when noise nuisance is experienced," Lawrence asserted, urging fellow council members to prioritize residents' needs.

The wide-ranging impact of pollution on residents' health and wellbeing was emphasized by Councillor **Christine Howells** (RA Nonsuch), who stressed the Council's duty to enforce compliance with regulations. "Residents' mental and physical wellbeing are compromised, necessitating urgent action to protect their rights," Howells affirmed.

Amidst impassioned pleas for action, the Chair of the Committee, Councillor **Neil Dallen** (RA Town), provided a sobering assessment of the financial implications. Cllr. Dallen cautioned against hasty decisions, citing budget constraints and the need for responsible financial management to ensure continued service provision.

An officer provided updates on recent developments and enforcement actions, highlighting ongoing complaints and regulatory interventions. The officer's report underscored the need for coordinated efforts to address pollution effectively.

Despite financial constraints, Cllr **Shanice Goldman** (RA Nonsuch) voiced support for allocating funds, citing previous actions and the importance of addressing environmental issues promptly. "We must prioritize residents' welfare and take decisive action to address pollution," Shanice urged fellow council members. She added: "I think the fact that it's been passed from committee to committee, started off at full Council, was deferred to the Environment committee then passed on to this committee. I don't think we can justify passing it on again."

Cllr **Robert Leach** (RA Nonsuch) shared residents' grievances and proposed practical measures to address noise issues, emphasizing the moral imperative to protect residents. "We must cooperate across party lines and take decisive action to address this environmental tragedy," Leach asserted. He read from a resident's email: "I was awakened at 6.30 this morning by the sound of the site, preparing for the day, with lorries and presumably other machinery warming up and skips being made ready for transport before 6:45 a.m. A number of skipped lorries were exiting the site last week. On last Friday, 39 lorries left between 6.40 and 6.50. That is before they're even supposed to be on the site. Let's tell it as it is. We have two operators there, who blatantly just ignore the regulations."

Following extensive deliberation, the Committee unanimously resolved to approve the allocation of funds. £40,000 was reserved for independent noise investigation, with an additional £100,000 allocated for potential enforcement and litigation work. The Environment Committee was tasked with identifying equivalent savings or income to replenish the reserve by the end of the financial year 2025-2026.

Related reports:

"Heat and Dust" epic in Epsom

Chalk Pit debate deferred by late abatement

Will the dust ever settle on Chalk Pit conflict?

Music for our times

6 April 2024



Shelagh Godwin reviews last Saturday's Epsom Chamber Choir concert at St Martin's Church.

Imagine writing a piece that means a lot to you and then never hearing it performed. This was the fate of **Maximilian Steinberg's** Passion Week. Composed in the 1920s just as the Soviet regime was banning any religious music, the piece was published in Paris at the behest of the composer in 1927, and scores eventually made it to the United States, but it was not until 2014 that a complete performance and an award-winning recording took place. It has had its enthusiasts since, one of whom, Epsom Chamber Choir's conductor Jack Apperley, presented a performance on Saturday 23rd March in St Martin's Parish Church in Epsom.

Based largely on Russian Orthodox chants, Passion Week could not be more different from the sacred music composed by Steinberg's contemporary and fellow-student Igor Stravinsky. Indeed, it draws more from the influence of his father-in-law Rimsky-Korsakov. It is more reflective in mood than Rachmaninov's more celebrated Vespers, and the stepwise movement of Orthodox chant pervades the work and the general mood. The texts are Church Slavonic hymns for Holy Week, and are reflective tableaux rather than narrative. The eleven sections tend to sound somewhat the same, but there are great moments, enhanced on Saturday by the Epsom Chamber Choir's well-co-ordinated ensemble and effective use of excellent soloists from within the choir. Like much Russian choral music of the time, it abounds in low notes for the basses, who dealt with that challenge magnificently.

Interspersed with the hymns of Passion Week were the five deeply moving spirituals from **Tippett's** A Child of our Time, which received superb and moving performances from the choir.

A more unfamiliar interjection was **Owain Park's** Phos hilaron (Hail gladdening Light), a complex setting of psalms and Greek liturgy. I say complex because it was very difficult to follow the words! It did achieve the desired effect, as did the extremely evocative encore, **John Rutter's** heart-rending Prayer for Ukraine, sung in Ukrainian. Entirely appropriate in view of the tragedies of the previous few days.

Shelagh Godwin

Sutton and Epsom leapfrog Old Colfeians in the end

6 April 2024



Old Colfeians 22 - Sutton and Epsom RFC 31. Saturday 23rd March.

In bygone years this was a regular league fixture and Saturday bore witness to the sixteenth such encounter between the clubs. Old Colfeians is a club to be mentioned in whispered tones whilst in the company of James Clark's title-winners of 2006-07. That Black and White celebrated side saw their perfect record spoiled on the club's last venture to Horn Park in January 2007. The 2023-24 vintage may not have won this league but they headed home with a 31-22 victory and replaced the hosts in eighth place in the league table.

The revolving door of selection meant that only Messrs Lennard and Bunting were in the same shirts in a reshuffled Sutton back division following the culling of Cobham. For the pack it was a minor disruption that saw Tom Boaden elevated from the bench in the absence of Alex Mount. Sutton played with the significant advantage of the elements in the first period as a strong wind tore down the pitch. Despite this handicap Colfeians started on the front foot. A sublime moment of legerdemain by Tom Chapman put Ollie Burkett into space and the full back was only denied by an eleventh hour cover tackle by Tom Lennard. The wind hampered the Sutton lineout and led to an OCs scrum. The set piece wheeled and the alert home Number 9 Jed Wylie wriggled free to score from 5 metres out. Chris Harris added the conversion for a most valuable 7-0 lead in less than advantageous conditions.

Sutton replied instantly as the Horn Park XV struggled to deal with the restart gifting the visitors with a prime attacking penalty position 5 metres from their line. The initial surge from the set play failed to secure the score but a couple of phases later Josh Pulvirenti forced his way over in the corner. The touchline conversion was blown wide and the Black and Whites trailed 5-7. Moments later a counter by Kyren Ghumra ended in an SandE penalty that was drilled into the corner by Freddy Bunting. From the 5-metre lineout the Sutton pack went through multiple phases inching not only closer to the try line but also the uprights. Robust Colfeians' defence was finally ended by Mr Tobias Whinney awarding Sutton another 5-metre penalty. Once more the attacking tapped option was taken rather than a kick at the posts.

Again the forwards took control and ushered hooker Chris Farrell over the line. Normal service resumed for the Bunting boot and the visitors led 12-7 after a dozen minutes.

From the restart Sutton's counter was penalised for crossing and it was Colfeians turn to put the ball in the corner and attack from a 5-metre lineout. The Black and White line held but infringed. Playing the advantage a Colfeians deft chip just sailed over the head of Chris Harris but the winger punished SandE by adding the three points when play was brought back for the penalty. OCs trailed 10-12 in a game of fluctuating fortunes in the first quarter.

Approaching the half hour Sutton secured their third try. With their best passage of play of the match so far the backs and forwards combined through several phases before Ellis Rudder was stopped deep in the 22 but the cover infringed on the deck. On this occasion it was Callum Gibson who was the beneficiary with a try from the forward effort from the tapped penalty. Freddy Bunting's touchline conversion was even more impressive as he made it at the third attempt having aborted his first two approaches as the wind blew the ball off the tee. Sutton had extended their advantage to lead 19-10.

The visitors were soon threatening another score. A wonderful break by Tom Lennard from his own half released fullback Ciaran Mohr who stepped inside the cover, took the last tackle before passing to Alfie Baker but the ball was not gathered and a wonderful score was denied. In addition Ciaran Mohr injured his ankle and was replaced by Austin Bell. A rampant Sutton did not dwell on this missed opportunity and shortly afterwards had their bonus point try. The impressive Josh Pulvirenti made a break and marauded into the 22 and passed to Angus Findlay who was rewarded for his excellent support play with the try. Bunting moved to the ball with his familiar constabulary stroll and converted with a laconic air for 26-10. Ten minutes later and SandE added a fifth try from a precise lineout routine that saw Rob Hegarty burst through a gap to score. Though the conversion failed Sutton had a healthy 31-10 lead.

With the first half near completion SandE ran the ball from their 22 from the restart looking to maximise their advantage from the windy conditions. They were brought back for a forward pass and there began a lengthy final play. It was a rugby version of 'Groundhog Day'. The teams scrummaged, the hosts were awarded a penalty, the visitors prevented a score and the referee brought them back for the penalty and Colfeians chose to scrummage again. Finally, after 52 minutes in the first period, and a yellow card for Sutton's Dan Jones, winger Tom Chapman squeezed in at the corner. A very challenging conversion fell short and the first half ended with the Black and Whites 31-15 ahead.

The interval had comical overtones as Sutton stayed out on the pitch whilst their hosts enjoyed the warmth of their dressing room. With a sable sky, a hailstorm swept the pitch and Sutton players took shelter behind their bulkier colleagues. Perhaps it was the reward of the Gods for braving the weather as the game restarted in sunshine and becalmed as cruelly the Colfeians were to be denied the strong wind enjoyed by Sutton. The second half was a curious affair. With excellent tactical acumen and pragmatism the numerically inferior visitors spent their punishment time in the opposition 22. This benevolent occupation was then extended to practically the entire second half. Old Colfeians adopted the mantle of Horatio and Rorke's Drift in heroic defence whilst Sutton became a hybrid of Sisyphus and Tantalus.

With the game approaching full time Old Colfeians finally made it into the Sutton and Epsom half and won a penalty. The ball was drilled into the corner for a 5-metre lineout. The throw was secured and the mountainous figure of captain Andy O'Malley powered over to score. Chris Harris then reduced the arrears to 22-31 and the crowd awoke from their slumber at the prospect of a thrilling climax. After their prolonged territorial dominance Sutton's character was now put to the test as an element of doubt over the outcome entered into the equation. If the first period was inordinately lengthy the second period was unbelievably time consuming as it racked up 57 minutes. There were several stoppages with the physios in attendance but once again it was last play that endured. Sutton were again reduced to 14 when Rob Hegarty departed following a high tackle but Colfeians could not force another score to garner any points. The game ended with the hosts defending and frustrating SandE who failed to add to their score in the second period. The match finally concluded with the Black and Whites victorious by 31-22.

There may be aficionados who love nothing more than a reset scrum and a catalogue of infringements as frequent stoppages deny free-flowing rugby as with this second half. However, that seems as likely as someone preferring the brutalist architecture of a housing estate in Stalinist Russia to the Taj Mahal. It was a shame as a sizeable crowd had gathered

for Past Players' Day adding greatly to the occasion and superlative bonhomie in the clubhouse after the game. Sutton were the deserved winners but Old Colfeians failed to exploit their superiority at the scrummage as discipline and errors undermined their performance. In the lineout and the loose the SandE pack played with great control.

Angus Findlay, starting for the first time in his preferred Number 9 shirt, gave an assured performance releasing the back division that showed moments of fluency and quality. The Black and Whites failure to convert pressure into points in the second half was more down to the courageous Colfeian defence than the inadequacies of the Sutton attack.

The Easter weekend offers a rest for the teams before the league season concludes on Saturday 6th April. Old Colfeians will be taking a trip to relegated Cobham and have the prospect of ending the campaign with a thumping victory. Meanwhile at Rugby Lane Sutton and Epsom will host Reeds Weybridge aiming to make amends for a 27-12 loss on the opening day of the season.

Sutton and Epsom

Mohr, Baker, Rudder, Bunting ©, Ghumra, Lennard, Findlay, Boaden, Farrell, Gibson, Glanville, McTaggart, Jones, Pulvirenti and Hegarty.

Replacements: Al Khaldi, Tame and Bell.

Old Colfeians:

Burkett, Harris, Hepden, Jones, Chapman, Smith, Wylie, Whichello, Newins, Rameaux, O'Malley ©, Cunningham, Walker, Carter and Smith.

Replacements: Orubo, Greatorex-Sanderson and Nagel.

Council cancel culture?

6 April 2024



Some opposition Councillors on **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council** have voiced concerns over the apparently high rate of cancellation of policy and scrutiny committees of the Council on which they serve.

Epsom and Ewell Times has looked at the 8 policy, audit and standard committees (and Full Council) in the Council calendar ending 31st March 2024.

Of 39 programmed meetings 9 are marked as having been cancelled in the 12 month period.

Councillor **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) said "With 4 policy committees cancelled in March it does beg the question if the Residents' Association (the ruling group on the Council) leadership has run out of steam and ideas. There is little evidence of a vision and the laser focus needed to tackle the challenges the borough faces. Homelessness costs the council ever increasing amounts to house residents in out of borough temporary accommodations away from their children's schools and family support networks. Reducing crime and anti-social behaviour these are the issues we hear about on residents' doorsteps and where the residents want change."

She added: "We need the committees' meetings to generate ideas and plan how to manage these difficult issues rather than ignoring them in the misguided hope they will go away."

Cllr. **Julie Morris** (Liberal Democrat - College Ward) said: "The Liberal Democrats have been concerned at almost a whole cycle of policy committee meetings being cancelled. A progress statement, or discussion in public, on the Draft Local Plan is long overdue, amongst other progress reports on various topics. Whether or not decisions are being taken under delegated powers, or whether or not decisions do not actually need the meeting of a policy committee to take place, is irrelevant.

The point is that surely it is now virtually impossible for either councillors or the public to influence an agenda, similarly for the public to know what's going on within the Town Hall, or track a topic, nor is it obvious what major or minor decisions are being taken, and how and why they are being taken. Public engagement is at an all time low, lower than it has been at any time during my 27 years involved with the borough council."

She is proposing a motion at the next Full Council meeting due 16th April to promote greater transparency and reduce private sessions of committees that exclude press and public without clear justification.

Cllr. **Robert Leach** (Residents Association - Nonsuch Ward) said: "My understanding is that a meeting is cancelled if there is nothing to discuss. Simple as that!"

Cllr. **John Beckett** (Residents Association – Auriol Ward) said: “The reality is that the Council agrees dates of committee meetings up to 18 months in advance and Council business doesn’t always fit with the timings of the agreed dates. Every council cancels and adds meetings to its annual calendar to reflect this and EEBC is no different. Also, no meeting is ever cancelled, or an extraordinary meeting called without there being a valid reason to do so.”

Cllr. **Alex Coley** (Residents Association – Ruxley Ward) is Chairman of the Crime and Disorder Committee which has had three out of four meetings *apparently* cancelled, said: “There was a Crime & Disorder scrutiny committee from May 2022 to May 2023 which never met. This is because it would have duplicated the crime & disorder scrutiny powers of the Audit & Scrutiny committee. The cancellations of 10 Nov 2022, 10 Jan 2022 and 4 Apr 2023 were programmed in advance and should ideally be removed.

The current Crime & Disorder committee had meetings programmed into the annual calendar before I became chair. Upon taking the role I decided it would be more practical to reschedule the 2 Nov 2023 and 19 Mar 2024 meetings so they are in line with the other policy committee meetings which align to the Council’s budget cycle (hence 12 Sep 2023 and 17 Jan 2024). I believe that ModGov (committee software) shows reschedules as cancellations.”

A spokesperson for Epsom and Ewell Borough Council wrote: “Committee Meeting dates are agreed up to 18 months in advance, and Council business does not always fit with the timings of the agreed dates. It is normal practice in every council to cancel, reschedule or add meetings to reflect this, and Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is no different. We have thorough, legally compliant and transparent processes to propose and add items to Committee Meeting agendas, and no Committee meeting is ever cancelled or rescheduled (or an Extraordinary meeting called) without there being a valid reason to do so.”

Epsom and Ewell Times has looked at the committee calendars of the other ten Surrey Boroughs for the same period.

It is not possible to compare accurately as each Council uses its own terminology. Some Council’s may programme fewer meetings in the first place. We have ignored, as we did for Epsom and Ewell, sub-committees, postponements and committees driven by external demand eg., planning and licensing.

Elmbridge Borough Council is very difficult to compare as it uses a different nomenclature and form for its committees. Guildford Borough Council cancelled 8 meetings in the same period. Mole Valley District Council appears to have had 3 equivalent committee meetings cancelled. Reigate and Banstead Borough Council cancelled 3. Runnymede Borough Council = 1 . Spelthorne Borough Council = 3. Surrey Heath Borough Council – None. Tandridge District Council – None. Waverley Borough Council -2 and Woking Borough Council – None.

Related reports:

“Audit and Scrutiny” under scrutiny

Should we have a petition about petitions?

Gina Miller Urges Ecocide Criminalization

6 April 2024



Gina Miller, the leader of the True & Fair Party, and her Party’s Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for **Epsom and Ewell**, has called for the criminalization of ecocide, highlighting concerns over the UK’s environmental stance post-Brexit and its widening gap with the European Union (EU).

The True & Fair Party has become the first UK political entity to incorporate an ecocide pledge into its manifesto for the next general election.

Miller’s argues that Brexit has not only hindered environmental progress but also left the UK trailing behind the EU in environmental protection measures. The proposed legislation aims to define ecocide as a criminal offence, targeting deliberate acts leading to significant and lasting harm to ecosystems.

Gina Miller said: “We were once called the poor man of Europe. Unless our politicians seriously address the need for robust, pragmatic rules and regulations to safeguard our nation against the negative effects of climate change, we will be the dirty, ill, poor man of Europe.

“The WMO is sounding the alarm that climate change is closely intertwined with the inequality crisis. That extreme weather conditions, worsened by lack of action, are leading to food security and population displacement – unfairly impacting vulnerable populations.

“By enacting a law against ecocide, we will be taking decisive action to limit the reckless destruction.

Under her proposed law, major polluters could face severe penalties, including up to ten years in prison or fines of up to £3.85 million. This initiative aligns with efforts in other countries; France has already implemented similar regulations, while the EU is in the process of ratifying an ecocide law.

Recent analyses by the Institute for European Environmental Policy suggest a concerning trend in the UK's environmental policies post-Brexit, indicating a weakening of regulations on crucial fronts like water treatment, air quality, and industrial emissions.

Miller emphasizes the need for international recognition, advocating for ecocide to be classified as a crime under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, alongside other serious offenses.

The urgency of such measures is underscored by warnings from the World Meteorological Organization about the escalating climate crisis. Miller warns that failure to address ecocide not only undermines environmental sustainability but also exacerbates inequalities and threatens future generations' well-being.

Chris Packham, environmental campaigner, said: "It's a bold, brave and exciting move by the True & Fair Party, to campaign to have ecocide written into law, in the midst of our climate and biodiversity crises. Congratulations!"

Georgia Elliott-Smith, Director of Fighting Dirty, and former UNESCO Special Junior Envoy for Youth & Environment, said: "Embracing ecocide as an international crime is a beautifully simple solution. It ensures the polluters pay for the harm they cause and can be punished as such."

Miller's call to action reflects a growing consensus among environmentalists and policymakers: addressing ecocide is imperative for safeguarding the planet's future. As the UK navigates its environmental challenges, decisive legislative action could pave the way towards a more sustainable and equitable future.

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