Poor road conditions a real test for learners

A driving instructor said he's on a "one man crusade" to fix the roads around Redhill Aerodrome Driving Test Centre. Martin Pitchley, 57, said he was "shocked" at the road conditions in Redhill, Surrey.

Unreadable road markings, overgrown hedges blocking speed signs and poor road conditions were some of the issues raised by the driving instructor.

"It's not very fair for students taking their test with all these problems with the road which is caused by poor road management by the [county] council," Martin said.

Emailing Surrey County Council (SCC) on June 3, Martin said nothing has been done to fix the issue.

A SCC highways maintenance officer said the vegetation covering road signs will be removed as part of the rural cut back of Earlswood and Reigate South on July 19. Fixing chevrons and replacing speed signs have also been requested on a list of works to be done.

Students who are just about to take their driving test come out of the centre not knowing what the speed limit is on that road, according to Martin. He claims a speed sign had been knocked over and lying down in a hedge for over six months.

Outside the driving test centre is the 40mph Kings Mill Lane, but Martin says there is no signage until a good few hundred yards up the road.

He said: "It's not fair to be giving students tuition and telling them there should be a speed limit here but there's not one, or it's knocked down.

"It's an unsafe speed for that road" he added, "It's got so many sharp bends, and big lorries yet students are expected to drive 40 mph up there.

"It's like a one-man crusade really. It's not really fair for the students going up to the test centre and taking their test with all these problems with the road."

Not only worried for his driving students, Martin said he was concerned for the general public including pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles.

"They are very severe and dangerous [roads] for any motorists, either for a learner or a full-time experienced driver," he said. "They have to drive up these roads and find there's a big steep dip in the roads or uneven roads that will make them steer awkwardly or crash their car."

According to Crash Map data, seven 'slight' accidents and two 'serious' incidents with vehicles have occurred on Kings Mill Lane between 2018-2022.

Martin said the county council has had enough time to fix the issues with the road and wants to see change. He said: "I just want this issue to be resolved so students can go up to their driving test, get a fair test, and members of the public are not going to get hit by a speeding car."

A SCC spokesperson said: "We appreciate the concerns raised and our Highways officers have been in communication with the individual to talk through the issues.

"The grass verges in question will be cut as part of our twice per annum rural cuts – information on where and when these take place are available on our website.

"Requests to replace speed signs in the area have been raised, however these need to be prioritised against other requests across the county and officers will review this as soon as they can."

Image: Driving instructor Martin Pitchley, Credit: Road Rules Driving.

Tree falls on van in Ewell Village

On Saturday a tree close to the bus stop, opposite the entrance to Bourne Hall in Ewell Village fell across the road onto a passing red Mercedes van shattering its windscreen.

Surrey Police were quickly in attendance and a female police officer used a broom to sweep debris from the road to make the road as safe as possible for passing traffic.

After approximately 30 minutes, contractors arrived on site to remove the fallen tree. No one is believed to have been injured by the tree falling across the pavement.

A few months ago, a similar incident occurred when a large tree inside the entrance gates to Bourne Hall fell causing major damage to walling which has had to undergo major restoration.

Whilst Saturday's incident required Surrey Police's involvement, it is not believed that any of the other emergency services were called upon. Two trees falling within only a few metres of each other within such a short space of time in a busy village suggests that people were lucky to escape serious injury. Does more need to be done in the Borough to ensure trees overhanging public spaces do not pose a danger to anyone?

Ivy can choke a tree if allowed to climb it and dead branches will then fall to the ground below. Ivy can, however be easily dealt with by removing a section of it from the base of a tree so that the ivy above dies and loosens its grip on the tree.

The tree that fell across the pavement and road onto the top of a red Mercedes van on Saturday was visibly covered in ivy.

Feast your eyes and ears on this

Epsom Choral Society and The Barnes Choir, two amateur choral groups renowned for their passion and dedication to musical excellence, are set to entertain audiences with a grand performance of Sir William Walton's epic masterpiece, **Belshazzar's Feast**, on Saturday 13th July 2024, at **Cadogan Hall** in London. Under the baton of their Musical Director, Julian Collings, and featuring acclaimed baritone soloist, Philip Tebb, this event promises to be an unforgettable evening.

The work will be performed by an 80-piece professional orchestra, including two additional brass bands as called for in Walton's score, complemented by a combined choir of over 160 singers. Such a collaborative effort shows the commitment of both choirs to showcasing the exceptional standard of amateur choral singing prevalent in this country.

The programme will also feature a selection of other notable works, including Vaughan Williams' evocative Five Mystical Songs, Parry's majestic I Was Glad and stirring Blest Pair of Sirens, as well as Elgar's enchanting Serenade for Strings.

"We are thrilled to bring together the talents of Epsom Choral Society and Barnes Choir for this ambitious performance," said Julian Collings, Musical Director of both choirs. "Through our dedication and passion for choral music, we aim to inspire and uplift audiences, showcasing the extraordinary level of artistry that exists within the realm of amateur choral singing."

Tickets for this event are now available from Cadogan Hall box office, offering audiences the opportunity to experience the power and beauty of choral music at its finest. Don't miss this exciting collaboration.

Event Details:

Date: 13th July 2024Time: 7:30 PM

• Venue: Cadogan Hall, 5 Sloane Terrace, London SW1X 9DQ

For ticketing information and enquiries:

Please visit www.cadoganhall.com or contact the box office on 020 7730 4500 or online https://cadoganhall.com/whats-on/belshazzars-feast/book/912634/

Democracy at work? Or strange mathematics?

For the first time in its history as a Parliamentary constituency Epsom and Ewell has a Member of Parliament who is not a Conservative. Undoubtedly the events, personalities and circumstances at the national level impacted local results. Controversies that swirled around recent Conservative Prime Ministers Boris Johnson and Liz Truss, the squeeze on living standards, the failure of Brexit to deliver on its promise to stem immigration, Conservative aides and Parliamentary candidates placing bets on the date

of the General Election.

Nevertheless, there were some local factors that contributed to the change that happened in Epsom and Ewell. The neighbouring constituency of Esher and Walton witnessed former Conservative Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab's share of the vote slump from a peak of 63% in 2015 to 49.5% in 2019 with Monica Harding for the Liberal Democrats just 4.5% behind. She proceeded to win on 4th July. Esher's rise of her party must have given Epsom and Ewell Liberal Democrat's choice of Esher based candidate **Helen Maguire** belief that change was possible.

The Epsom and Ewell Liberal Democrats ran their campaign with an unrelenting belief that even in the Conservative stronghold of this constituency voters could change their allegiance.

The intervention of the Reform UK party impacted the local result on 4th July with its 5795 votes, which if cast for Chris Grayling's replacement **Mhairi Fraser**, might have seen the new Conservative candidate, being elected. Reform's previous incarnation as UKIP not standing in the General Elections of 2017 or 2019 after the 2016 EU referendum.

Local tactical voting appears to have been influential with the Liberal Democrats seemingly taking the anti-Conservative or protest votes where in earlier elections Labour has come second in Epsom and Ewell to the Conservatives in both 2015 and 2017. The Liberal Democrats moved to second place in the 2019 poll.

The headlines of a Labour landslide nationally mask the true expression of public opinion with Labour's 4th July 2024 share of the vote being only 2% higher than Jeremy Corbyn's 2019 "worst election result for Labour in history". In fact in 2017 Labour polled 40% of the national vote under Mr Corbyn's leadership. Labour's 2024 share of the national vote at 34% is the lowest of any British Government ruling with a majority in the House of Commons seemingly ever in history.

Where the translation of votes into seats in the Commons appears to be so wildly out of sync. it requires new MPs to work their socks off in their constituencies if they wish to maintain the loyalty of voters in 2024 to the end of the new Parliament and the beginning of the next one.

Epsom and Ewell's new MP and new Party

The 2024 general election count for Epsom & Ewell was held last night at the Epsom Downs racecourse from 10pm to the early hours today.

This year's election introduced new boundaries for the constituency of Epsom and Ewell, with the addition of wards from Ashtead and Leatherhead.

With the vote closing at 10pm, the official ballot count revealed a voter turnout of 70%. (2019: 81,138. 73.3%)

Mrs **Jackie King**, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's CEO and Returning Officer, revealed the official result at about 06:15 with the results as follows:

LIBERAL DEMOCRAT: Helen Maguire:

- Votes 20.674
- Share 37.9%
- Share change +13.7
- **2019**: 13.946 (23.5%)

CONSERVATIVE: Mhairi Fraser:

- Votes 16.988
- Share 31.2%
- Share change -22.4
- **2019**: 31,819 (53.5%)

LABOUR: Mark Todd:

- Votes 8.325
- Share 15.3%
- Share change -1.5
- **2019**: 10,226 (17.2%)

REFORM UK: Mayuran Senthilnathan:

- Votes 5,795
- Share 10.6%
- Share change +10.6

GREEN: Stephen McKenna:

- Votes 1,745
- Share 3.2%
- Share change -0.1
- **2019**: 2,047 (3.5%)

TRUE and FAIR: Gina Miller:

- Votes 845
- Share 1.6%
- Share change +1.6

Social Democratic Party: Damon Young:

- Votes 153
- Share 0.3%
- Share change +0.3

Each candidate was accompanied by a fairly large cohort, all working endlessly to keep up with a general sense of how well their party was doing nationally. While the rest of the UK's election results unfolded on TV screens, mixed reactions were circulating. However, it was the Labour corner with the most cheers throughout, with a landslide exit poll for the Labour party unfolding into a reality. The announcement of a Labour government was issued around 4:55 am.

Helen Maguire (Liberal Democrat) said a priority for Epsom and Ewell was getting the new hospital built that had been promised for 10 years. On the election campaign she said "There are so many pollsters saying different things it has been difficult for voters to know what has been going on. It brings up the question whether we should have polls during election campaigns. If we had proportional representation we wouldn't need polls anyway."

Responding to the result **Stephen McKenna** of the Green Party said "With a super-majority is it less likely that the new Government will work with other parties to get proportional representation and introduce the Green policies the country needs. We hope the new MP preserves the Green Belt and makes sure we have a housing policy that works for everyone and sorts out the NHS locally."

Mayuran Senthilnathan of Reform UK said "The first past the post system does not serve the interests of this country so I hope the constituents of Epsom and Ewell get behind a campaign for proportional representation."

Gina Miller of True and Fair said of the future of Epsom and Ewell "I hope the Green Belt is preserved and Epsom and Ewell becomes a place where health and well-being come first". On the national picture she said "I think the share of the vote for

Reform UK is quite terrifying. The centre parties need to start listening to people and deliverying for them." On her local campaign experience Gina Miller said she was shocked by the negative campaigning that had gone on. She called for regulation of campaign literature and tactical voting websites. "The bullying is something I never thought I would experience".

Editorial:

Democracy at work? Or strange mathematics?

Wet weather kicks into the long grass

People fed up with long unsightly overgrown grass and verges can use an interactive map to see when their favourite spots are next due to be cut.

The seemingly endless rainfall this year has heavily affected work across the county as the wet weather shuts down the process – Surrey County Council says this is because its machinery will not cut wet grass properly and can, in some cases, even damage the turf

Urban areas are due to have six cuts a year by the county - unless they have been designated as a blue heart zone. Rural cuts and high speed roads are chopped twice a year.

Blue hearts are part of Surrey's 3,000 miles of grass verges but have been deliberately left to grow as a way of increasing plant and insect biodiversity.

Reducing the amount of times these areas are cut is intended to allow native plant species to thrive – or even to sow native wildflower seeds.

As well as using the map, the county council has published a table covering each area in Surrey and when it estimates to get on with the job.

The council's website reads: "We are experiencing some delays with our planned grass cutting programme dates in parts of the county as a result of the weather and operational issues.

"We are working with our contractors to improve the situation and are sorry for any inconvenience. Thank you for your patience."

The Blue Campaign, founded in 2014 by wildlife filmmaker Fergus Beeley in response to dramatic declining biodiversity in the UK, lets nature take a bit more control, the county council said.

It encourages the rewilding of green spaces in suitable areas and are marked in blue on the map.

Often they can be identified with a blue heart planted in th ground to show residents grass and flowers are deliberately being left to grow – and the council is encouraging residents to identify new sites and gather local support.

Any areas put forward for blue hearts will be reviewed by the county council and, if approved, contractors told to skip the verge unless some safety work is needed.

All verges, including blue hearts are supposed to have a full cut each autumn.

Surrey County Council spokesperson said: "Our new interactive grass cutting map available here shows residents when their area is due to be cut.

"Our grass cutting programme can however be heavily affected by weather. We cannot cut when it is raining heavily or shortly after as the machinery will not cut the wet grass properly and risks damaging the grass itself.

"Weather and ground conditions permitting, urban spaces are cut six times a year and for rural areas, this takes place twice a year."

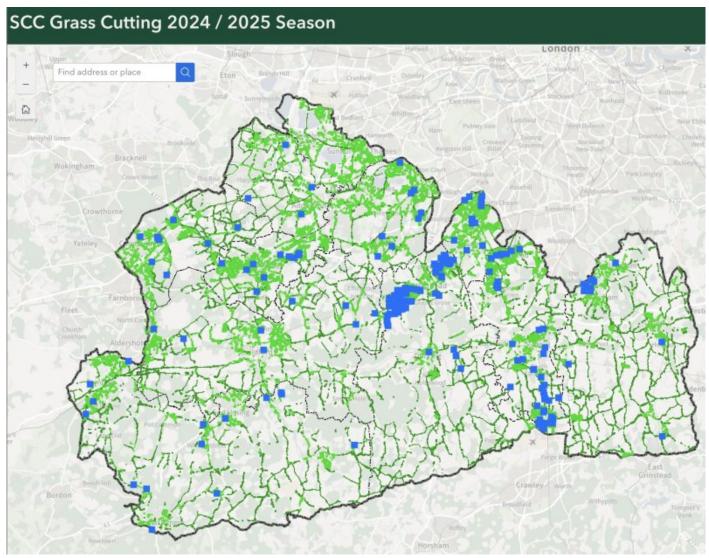


Image: Surrey grass cutting, when your verge is due to be cut. Areas in blue are being left to grow over the summer to encourage biodiversity (image SCC)

INTERACTIVE MAP

Blue Heart

Related reports:

A Greener Future in Partial Sight As Verges To Be Left Unmown

Verging on the ridiculous

Feature photo: credit Jon Hawkins - Surrey Hills Photography

May our hustings make up your mind?

Epsom and Ewell Times staged a six election candidate Parliamentary hustings at the Adrian Mann Theatre, **NESCOT** in Ewell on Wednesday 26th June. With every seat in the 230 seat theatre occupied, **Gina Miller** (True and Fair), **Mark Todd** (Labour), **Mhairi Fraser** (Conservative), **Stephen McKenna** (Green), **Helen Maguire** (Liberal Democrat) and **Mayuran Senthilnathan** (Reform) took the stage, with **Lionel Blackman** in the Chair.

Questions on Brexit, local government financing, arming Israel, where to build houses, crime, tactical voting and proportional

representation and others were asked by a lively audience. Many voters from the new southerly Ashtead and Leatherhead areas of the Epsom and Ewell constituency came along.

Below is a recording of the hustings. After introductions the hustings get going after 06:50.

The Epsom and Ewell Times is indebted to NESCOT CEO **Julie Kapsalis** and **Louise Gaskin** of the Creative and Media Department of NESCOT, who worked so hard to make a success of this once in a Parliament event. Special thanks to **Charlie McCarthy** of NESCOT who edited the video recording.

Top image credit Steven McCormick photography.

[Please note that in error the introducer muddled the Labour candidate Mark Todd with a former Labour MP of the same name.]

Related reports:

Epsom and Ewell Parliament candidates interviewed

Conservative who promises to serve "with integrity"

Mark my words for Labour candidate

Lib Dems' Helen Maguire - "Getting Things Done"

The Green promises

Reform candidate for Epsom and Ewell

A True and Fair view of the world

The cost of sending pupils to school

Surrey County Council (SCC) has been ordered to pay out £1,500 by the social care ombudsman for a 'service failure' in defaulting its legal duty to provide SEND transport to and from school. The local authority is already predicted an overspend of £7.3m on SEND school transport for its 2024-25 annual budget.

A family has received £1,500 after Surrey County Council (SCC) failed to provide a child with complex medical needs school transport adding pressure to the family. The boy missed 27 days of education as well as special needs provision, causing his mother and the wider family "avoidable" distress.

The provider suspended the child's transport after no longer feeling able to meet the boy's change in medical needs, on June 15, 2023. The boy waited for his school transport to pick him up the next morning but it did not arrive to collect him. It was not until lunchtime until the travel provider informed the Council that it had suspended its service.

SCC speedily offered the mum a travel allowance while it explored longer term solutions but she felt 'pressured' into taking this as she did not have the time to recruit carers. The travel allowance is a more cost-effective option than managed transport services.

Report documents detail the "avoidable distress, frustration and inconvenience" that the child's transport withdrawal caused his family. The social ombudsman said "the council did exactly what we would expect in the circumstances it found itself in" and it now has contracts with two ambulance-style providers able to transport children with complex medical needs.

A SCC spokesperson said it would not comment on individual cases and "although the report does recognise that we put appropriate mitigations in place, we accept the findings from the Ombudsman report and sincerely apologise for any distress caused".

They added: "We know how important it is for children and young people to have access to their education setting, however a lack of suitable providers has meant that some children who require specialist provision for high and/or complex medical needs have had to wait longer for appropriate arrangements than we would like. In these circumstances we always work actively with families to find a solution and offer measures such as personal travel allowances in the interim."

The ombudsman demanded the council pay his mother £1,000 in recognition of his missed education and SEN provision during the period he had no transport to school, plus £500 for the 'avoidable distress' it caused her and her family.

An overspend of £7.3m, all based on home to school transport, is already predicted one month into SCC's new budget for 2024-25.

In 2023, SCC saw an overspend of £12m on SEND transport, with nearly a third of the transport costs being to independent schools outside of Surrey.

Rising demand, more travel days and anticipated increase in the number of children who need transport have contributed to a pressurised budget. SCC said it is reviewing all discretionary travel arrangements, tightening applications and is actively promoting personal travel allowance to manage costs.

A SCC spokesperson added: "We have seen a 64% increase in education, health and care needs assessment requests across Surrey since 2020, which has naturally had a knock on effect with a year on year increase in demand for Home to School Travel Assistance (HTSTA) as many children and young people with an education, health and care plan require HTSTA. This has resulted in a predicted overspend for this service."

Image: Credit: Arriva436 CC BY-SA 2.0

Scoutabout success for Surrey

More than 6,000 Scouts and Guides and adults from **Surrey** enjoyed an action-packed weekend of activities over the weekend of 28^{th} to 30^{th} June 2024.

Scouts, Guides, and adults from Epsom & Ewell joined other Scouts and Guides from Surrey.

The first Scoutabout was at Ardingly back in 1984 and and thus event 40 years was celebrated. The boys and girls aged 10 to 14 had the opportunity to take part in more than 100 activities at the three-day Scoutabout event at the South of England Showground in Ardingly, West Sussex, the only site big enough and close enough to house the Scouts and Guides of Surrey for the weekend.

There were over 150 activities including Bus Driving, car driving, bungee running, kayaking, archery, air rifle shooting and caving, to name just a few. The young people were able to try something new, in a safe environment, gain skills-for-life and make new friends at the same time.

The weekend will not have been possible without the hard work of a determined team of 1,500 adult volunteers from across Surrey who have carried out a range of roles to make Scoutabout a reality.

From camp cooks to a doctor and from fire teams to IT engineers, adult volunteers would have shared their skills to benefit these young people.

One of the biggest tasks has been to source the huge number of activities that make Scoutabout such a success.

On the Friday night Sour Kix played for the camp at the opening ceremony and on the Saturday night Doubting Thomas and The Ariston played on stage.

Over the weekend Scoutabout FM was broadcasting and along with competitions (Thanks to Guildford Flames, Bentley Copse Activity Centre, Airfix and Surrey Sports Park for the donation of prizes) Explorer Scouts were able to present shows.

Bear Grylls, Chief Scout said "A special message for all of you at Scoutabout 2024 at Ardingly showground. I really hope all of you have a brilliant weekend together, look after each other and most of all have fun. So proud of what you all do, helping other people always, showing the true Scouting spirit, you are all amazing".

Marcus Martin-Burns, County Youth Commissioner for Surrey Scouts said "Seeing 5,000 Scouts & Guides all together for one weekend at Scoutabout has been truly awesome, giving them the opportunities to learn skills for life, make new friends and discover new activities. From Archery to Zorbing, Scoutabout had it all and a big thank you goes to all the leaders and service crew who made this weekend possible."

Eashan, aged 10 from Epsom & Ewell district (1^{st} Ewell Court) said "The best bit of Scoutabout was the fun activities, I enjoyed the bungee slip slide because its fast and fun and gets you active."

Lucy, aged 11 from Leatherhead district (3rd Bookham) said "I liked the quad biking as I have not done it before, and it was really fun."

- The first Scoutabout was at Ardingly in 1984.
- Scoutabout happens every three years (apart from this one, due to the pandemic the 2024 one puts it back into a tri-

annual event.

- Scouts are for Boys and Girls aged 10.5 to 14.
- Guides are for girls aged 10-14
- Individuals are 15% less likely to suffer from mood swings and anxiety if you've been a Scout or Guide. Source: Cohort study by the University of Edinburgh and Glasgow, 2016

Neil Wibberley

Epsom library to lend an ear on changes

Epsom Library is being transformed as part of Surrey Libraries modernisation programme and residents are invited to drop in to give their views at the library on Tuesday 9th July from 10am to 4pm.

This is an opportunity to meet library staff, hear more about the improvements and give feedback on the designs for the library.

A separate session especially for children, parents and carers will be held during Story-time from 10:15am to 10.45am. The designs will remain on display in the library for at least 2 weeks following the 9^{th} July, to provide an opportunity for further feedback.

The library changes will include a fully flexible layout with space for events and performances; improved furniture and increased study space; new **Super Access technology** enabling out of hours use and multi-use meeting rooms.

To enable initial set up works to be completed, the library will be closed from 5th August for one week only. It will then re-open from the 12th August within Epsom library's learning centre, still within the Ebbisham Centre, which will be accessed via the cafe.

Customers will be able to access a range of library items, along with computer workstations, printing and the popular Rhymetime and Story-time events, which will still run at a reduced capacity to suit the space.

Work at the library will continue throughout 2024, until the expected final completion date of February 2025. Any further short closures required will be well publicised before they take place.

More information on Epsom Library changes will be found at the **Epsom Library page**.