Not in Epsom and Ewell but other Surrey elections test the water...

The fate of 116 council seats in Surrey are up for grabs as voters head to the polls on Thursday, May 2. There are 11 boroughs and districts in the county, with widespread voting taking place in six - Elmbridge, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead, Runnymede, Tandridge and Woking. There is also a bye-election for a single seat on Waverley Borough Council.

There are no local council elections this year in Epsom & Ewell, Guildford, Spelthorne, and Surrey Heath Borough Councils.

With a general election less than a year away, this vote will be viewed in some quarters as a significant bellwether for the race for Downing Street. Counting will begin on Friday May 3.

The first results area expected to come out of Woking Borough Council at 4pm, followed by Runnymede and Tandridge at 5pm. Mole Valley and Reigate and Banstead councils are predicted to declare by 6pm with Elmbridge tellers expected to be wrapped up by 6.30pm.

Do I need photo id? Yes -you need to bring valid photo identification in order to vote this year. Valid IDs include expired official documents such as passports that still have a strong resemblance. Voters without an accepted ID can apply for the free Voter Authority Certificate – a fast track card that will allow people to vote.

Elmbridge Borough Council

Number of seats up for election: 16

Election result expected: 6.30pm Friday, May 3.

Largest party: Liberal Democrats

There are 48 seats in total on Elmbridge Borough Council with 16, one third of the total, up for grabs on May 2. The Liberal Democrats have 20 councillors, Residents' Associations, 16, and the Conservatives, 12. The Liberal Democrats became the largest party in the borough, overtaking their coalition partners - Residents' Association - last year in a borough that has been historically Conservative.

The Esher and Walton parliamentary constituency largely covers Elmbridge and is represented by Dominic Raab, who resigned from the cabinet on April 21. He later announced he would guit as MP at the next general election.

Mole Valley District Council

Number of seats up for election: 14

Election result expected: 6pm Friday, May 3.

Largest party: Liberal Democrats

A boundary review last year led to all out-elections across the borough, delivering a sweeping victory for the Liberal Democrats. This year, Mole Valley District Council reverts to electing its members by thirds across its 13 wards. In Capel, Leigh, Newdigate and Charlwood voters will be sending two representatives, bringing the total elected this year to 14 as they replace the seat formerly held by Lesley Bushnell, In total there are 39 councillors in the district.

The council is currently controlled by the Liberal Democrats who have 29 elected members. The opposition is formed from six informal independents and three Conservatives. At a national level the Conservative Mole Valley MP since 1997, Sir Paul Beresford, said he will not stand in the next general election.

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council

Number of seats up for election: 16

Election result expected: 6pm Friday, May 3.

Largest party: Conservative

The Conservatives, with 22 councillors, are the single largest party in Reigate and Banstead but do not have overall control of the borough council. In the 2023 election, the Tories lost seats to the Green Party, which now has 11 councillors and Labour, one. The rest of the authority is made up of five Residents' Association, three Lib Dems, two independents.

Voting takes place across in each of the borough's 15 wards with one person elected in each. The exception is in Tattenham Corner and Preston where, to fill a vacancy, two members will be elected.

Conservative MP for Reigate Crispin Blunt announced in 2022 that he would not run for re-election, having first won the seat in 1997.

In January Mr Blunt was re-bailed until April after his arrest on suspicion of rape and possession of controlled substances.

Runnymede Borough Council

Number of seats up for election: 15

Election result expected: 5pm Friday, May 3.

Largest party: Conservative

Runnymede Borough Council went to no overall control in 2023 but has had a Conservative leader ever since it's formation in 1974. Going into this May's election there are 18 Conservative councillors, six Runnymede Independent Residents Group, five independents, four Labour, four Liberal Democrats, two Green Party, and one Reform UK - after former Tory and current deputy mayor Robert Bromley crossed the floor.

Runnymede is one of the three Surrey councils, the others being Spelthorne and Woking, to rank in the top five nationally for local authorities with the largest average debt per resident.

The MP for the area - which also includes Weybridge in neighbouring Elmbridge, is Ben Spencer. He was elected in 2019 with 54.9 per cent of the vote, ahead of Labour candidate Robert King, 20.6 per cent.

Waverley Borough Council

Number of seats up for election: 1

Election result expected: Early Friday, May 3.

Largest party: Liberal Democrats

Waverley Borough Council has 50 councillors across 24 wards that are voted for in an "all out" elections where every seat is decided. This year however is the much smaller matter of the race for the vacant Witley and Milford Borough seat in a May 2 by-election. The last all out vote was in 2023 when the council remained in no overall control.

The Liberal Democrats are the largest party with 22 councillors and are in coalition with the Farnham Residents' 13 members, Labour's two officials and the single representative of the Green Party. There are 10 councillors on the Conservative opposition and a further two independent members.

The MP representing the greatest number of people who call Waverley Borough Council home is the chancellor Jeremy Hunt. The 57-year-old MP was first elected to the Southwest Surrey constituency in May 2005.

Woking Borough Council

Number of seats up for election: 11

Election result expected: 4pm, Friday, May 3.

Largest party: Liberal Democrats

Woking Borough Council votes in thirds -with one councillor elected in each of its 10 wards. A by-election to fill the vacancy in Hoe Valley to bring the total number of seats decided up to 11. Voters in Woking began to turn their backs on the Conservatives after its financial problems became clear. The borough had a Tory leader from 2007 up until 2022 when the Liberal Democrats took control. Going into the May 2024 local elections the Lib Dems hold 19 of the 30 potential seats on the council with the four Conservatives making up the official opposition group.

The rest of the council is made up of four independent members, two from Labour and one vacant seat.

MP Jonathan Lord, who assumed office in 2010, was given a vote of confidence by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to hold his seat in the next General Election.

Tandridge District Council

Number of seats up for election: 43

When is the election result expected: 5pm Friday, May 3.

Largest party: Residents' Alliance

Every seat on Tandridge District Council will be decided when voters go to the polls on May 2. This year there will be 43 councillors returned to 18 wards, up from the current number of 42 - after the Local Government Boundary Commission for England redrew the electoral map. Previously the council elected its members by thirds.

Currently Tandridge Distrcit Council is led by the Residents' Alliance, which holds 18 seats. The Liberal Democrats, 11, Conservative nine and Independent Group, four, comprise the rest of the council.

The nearest matching parliamentary constituency is East Surrey, currently held by the energy secretary Claire Coutinho after she was elected in 2019.

Epsom and Ewell candidates dominate Police Commissioner election

Nominations have closed in the race to become the next Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) with four candidates across the parties lined up. Two of the four candidates are Epsom and Ewell councillors.

The Epsom and Ewell Times has invited all candidates to submit statements to our publication and we hope to publish them in the days ahead.

The PCC role oversees the work of Surrey Police and its Chief Constable and holds them and their decisions to account. They set the strategic direction and aims for the force through the Police and Crime Plan.

In the running on May 2 are Lisa Townsend (the current PCC and Conservative), Paul Kennedy (Liberal Democrat), Kate Chinn (Labour) and Alex Coley (Independent).

Salaries of the PCC are decided on a national basis and vary depending on the size of the force; the commissioner for Surrey will receive a salary of £73,000 per annum.

PCCs are also responsible for all funding relating to policing, including the police precept, and to work with the Chief Constable to set the force budget in line with priorities and deliver value for money for residents.

Providing a link between the police and Surrey residents, the PCC listens to the public's concerns and works with the Chief Constable to create improvements.

Lisa Townsend, Conservative

Looking to get a second term, one of Lisa's major flagships is campaigning to end violence against women and girls. She has been working on various community projects including Safer Streets tackling anti-social behaviour and support services for victims.

In a post on X, formerly Twitter, Lisa said her immediate priorities are maintaining and growing the police force, as well as working with the Chief Constable on 'back to basics' policing. She said this includes "ensuring Surrey Police do what only they can: investigating and solving crime, not sitting in hospitals."

Alex Coley, Independent

Previously a Digital Lead for the Met Police, Alex said he wants "more bobbies on the beat" in Surrey. Headline policies include petitioning to parliament to change the way police funding is allocated in the country; so that the government contributes more for policing in Surrey than the taxpayer

Since 2018 Alex has been an Epsom and Ewell councillor as well as chairing the Crime and Disorder panel for the borough. The only independent candidate, Alex is campaigning to "take party politics out of policing" and put "pride and professionalism back into Surrey Police".

Paul Kennedy, Liberal Democrat

Hoping to be third-time lucky is Paul- a former barrister, accountant, actuary and Mole Valley councillor. Some of his campaign policies include "bringing back community policing" and combatting offending behaviour through restorative justice, education and support for mental health and addictions.

In a press statement, Paul said: "Like many people I disagree with the idea of PCCs, but we're stuck with them for now. So, let's do the job properly." If elected, Paul said he will work with the Chief Constable to fix the issues highlighted in the December 2023 inspection report.

Kate Chinn, Labour

Councillor for Epsom and Ewell, Kate's policies include refocusing on neighbourhood-based policing and using empty shops in the town centre for a police presence. Preventative measures is another concern as Kate aims to increase support services for young people.

Kate has said that she wants to review current training to ensure police have a good understanding of domestic violence, misogyny and sexual assault.

The deadline to register to vote is April 16, which can be done online. Elections take place on May 2, with the result announced the following day.

To vote for your preferred candidate, a valid ID must be brought to the polling station. This can include passport, driving licence, disabled or older person's Bus Pass funded by the UK Government, and a biometric immigration document. Residents without an accepted form of photo ID can apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate (VAC).

Avoid ticket scams this summer

Residents are being warned to be aware of online ticket scams that are catching out eager concert-goers ahead of the summer.

Surrey Trading Standards is pleased to announce the launch of a campaign aimed at curbing event ticket fraud across both counties. With a number of residents falling victim to deceptive practices when purchasing event tickets online, this initiative seeks to protect residents from financial loss and disappointment.

Event **ticket fraud** involves unscrupulous individuals exploiting the high demand for tickets to concerts, sporting events, and other popular attractions. Fraudulent practices include the sale of counterfeit tickets, non-existent tickets, and tickets with inflated prices. Such schemes not only result in financial losses for consumers but also tarnish the reputation of legitimate event organisers and venues.

Surrey Trading Standards has already witnessed online scammers attempting to exploit people wanting to see concerts by Taylor Swift, and the Foo Fighters. Future scams may include Glastonbury and sporting events such as Wimbledon and this summer's Paris Olympics.

Steve Ruddy, Head of Trading Standards at Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards said: "Music and sports fans are at risk of huge rises in online ticket fraud. Criminal activity selling fake tickets is becoming more and more prevalent online and we urge people to avoid disappointment by being cautious when purchasing tickets for all sporting and music events.

"Ticket fraud not only harms consumers financially but also undermines trust in the marketplace. Our campaign aims to empower our residents with the knowledge and resources they need to make informed ticket purchases. By raising awareness, we can create a safer environment for consumers to enjoy live events across Buckinghamshire, Surrey and beyond."

Tips for purchasing event tickets online

- Only buy direct from legitimate ticket sites
- Always use a debit or credit card when you buy tickets online (not bank transfer). This helps to protect your money should something go wrong
- Be extra cautious when purchasing tickets advertised by individuals on social media Fraudsters use social media to
 advertise tickets that don't exist. If you're looking for a ticket, always search for it yourself from a trusted source
- Low prices and seemingly great deals are often used to disguise scams. However, if demand for tickets is high or an event is sold out, fraudsters can charge more to trick desperate buyers
- Check the details of the site you are buying from and before entering payment ensure the web address starts with https and that there's a padlock icon in the browser bar
- Check the vendor is a member of the Society of Ticket Agents and Retailers (STAR)

Residents are encouraged to report their concerns about event ticket fraud to the **Citizens Advice consumer service** on 0808 223 1133. The helpline takes all enquiries on behalf of Trading Standards across England and Wales and will pass the report to the relevant Trading Standards team.

Alternatively, if you have been a victim and lost money, please report to Action Fraud at **actionfraud.police.uk** or by calling 0300 123 2040.

1st generation UCA graduates celebrated

Two graduates from the University for the Creative Arts (UCA) in Epsom, Surrey have been named in Universities UK's 100 Faces campaign, celebrating the stories and achievements of first-generation students.

McKenna Marsden and **Troy Hunter** feature in the campaign's arts and sports talents category alongside Happy Valley star, Amit Shah, the crime writer Sir Ian James Rankin OBE, and BBC Sports Personality of the Year 2022, Beth Mead. All 100 graduates listed by Universities UK were the first in their families to attend university.

"Going to university gave me a lot more independence and taught me new skills, developing my abilities in a subject which was once just a passion," said McKenna, who is a BA (Hons) Fashion graduate. He was chosen by British Vogue as one of its top 50 emerging designers, showcased his graduate collection at London Fashion Week, and interned at Christopher Kane.

He said: "University gave me stability while allowing me to break into the fashion industry, leading to many big achievements. I don't think I would have had the success I did without studying at university."

Originally from Newcastle, McKenna's working-class background was the main inspiration for his final graduate fashion collection and continues to influence his designs.

"Anything is possible if you believe it and work hard for it no matter how many setbacks you may have, if you believe you can achieve your goals you can," McKenna added.

Troy, who graduated from UCA in 2013 with a degree in BA (Hons) Film Production, has gone on to write episodes for the hit Netflix show Sex Education and an episode of Eastenders. He was also nominated for Outstanding Breakthrough Creative (Television) at the NAACP Awards.

Troy said: "Studying film production at UCA made a huge difference in my life, it gave me the confidence and determination to continue pursuing a career in the TV and Film industry when people around me were telling me otherwise."

His success continues in the form of a short film called Mya and his debut play Black Pride, as well as a television adaptation of the same name, with Maia Pictures.

New research commissioned by Universities UK revealed the transformative impact of going to university, with almost three-quarters of first-in-the-family students agreeing their degree gave them the confidence to apply for jobs without feeling like an imposter.

Vivienne Stern MBE, Chief Executive of Universities UK, said: "There are those who say that too many people go to university. I disagree. These stories tell you why. In this country, you are still twice as likely to go to university if you are from the wealthiest background, compared to the least wealthy. That's not right.

This defeat will not count

Epsom & Ewell FC 1-3 Fleet Town. ABANDONED AFTER 55 MINUTES. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Saturday 13th April 2024.

An attendance of around 80 people gathered at the Madgwick to watch our penultimate League match at the ground before we move on to Corinthian Casuals for next season. However, it didn't work out quite like that as the contest was abandoned in the 55th minute following a nasty injury to young Fleet defender Ed Scott and the fixture will now have to be rearranged back at the Madgwick, with Thursday 25th April looking to be the most likely date, due to our opponents currently having matches scheduled for both remaining Tuesdays. Please note that this is only speculation on my part and confirmation will follow in the near future.

Those present on a sunny day (but one which had brought swarms of flies out behind the far goal where we were standing) witnessed an hour of football that summed up our season really as we looked quite threatening in patches, only to part like the Red Sea at others and we were 3-1 down at the time of the abandonment.

We had a number of changes to the line up from the loss against Spelthorne Sports as Thompson Adeyemi, Jaevon Dyer and Callum Wilson were all unavailable. Worse still, Wilson confirmed that he is done for the season following a dislocated thumb. However, it wasn't all bad news as Carl Oblitey returned from injury up front while Tijani Eshilokun was also back in the line up

alongside Luke Taylor who made his first start for our club. Also back from injury was Ethan Brazier who relegated Ayran Kugathas to the bench and was arguably our best player on the day, making a number of marauding runs.

Now, I'm not a fan of playing three at the back, as regular readers will be aware. We started the season with that formation and we have recently tried it towards the end of recent defeats to Balham and Horley Town. However, this time we started with the three and on this occasion, I could see why. Clearly the plan is now to try and outscore teams in the knowledge that we do not do clean sheets any more!

It is sound logic based on the fact that we are now nineteen matches without a clean sheet, and this formation did enable us to play Oblitey up front alongside Will Kendall, which was a bit of a throwback, although it will only work if enough service is provided to our front two. It nearly paid dividends with just 32 seconds on the clock as Ethan Nelson-Roberts made tracks down the left and sent over a low ball, but it was just too far ahead of Kendall who couldn't wrap his leg around the ball enough at the far post to keep the shot on target.

The opening minutes looked quite promising for Salts fans until a hopeful punt upfield from the visitors left our keeper Dan O'Donovan and our retreating defender Matt McGillivray uncertain of who should claim the ball on the edge of the area and while they dithered, Dan Bone nipped in to poke the ball away from both of them and roll the ball into the empty net in just the eighth minute.

This was horrible, but we were back on level terms just three minutes later after Eshilokun fed the overlapping Brazier on the right wing and his pinpoint cross enabled Oblitey to score with a diving header into the bottom corner of the goal from six yards out. Luke Miller was next to deliver a dangerous right wing cross but it was punched away by Fleet's keeper Filip Chalupniczak. It was a fairly even contest to this point, but then we started to get pushed back by our opponents. McGillivray was forced into conceding a yellow card to stop an attacker breaking through.

We then had an extremely odd and contentious issue in the 24th minute. Chalupniczak made a routine catch and went to drop kick it clear, only for it to hit Oblitey on his back, just outside the penalty area and rebound straight into the net! It was surely a lucky break for us, but no! The referee consulted with his Assistant before then disallowing the goal and awarding a free kick against our man. This appeared extremely harsh, but having seen the video from our excellent Videographer Gary Jarman, you can see Oblitey jumping to block, even though his back was turned. On many occasions, the goal would still have stood, and I believe it should have still counted, but I can at least understand why it might have been disallowed. You'll have to draw your own conclusions as to whether Oblitey really did enough wrong here!

The setback gave us momentum for a while and Miller sent a ball in that was just turned away from Eshilokun at the far post, but on the break Fleet struck a shot just beyond our own post and from this point until the end of the half you could see us being pushed back. Brazier had to head an effort off our own goal line but in the 39th minute they went ahead through the ill-fated Scott with an unmarked near post header from a corner that was a carbon copy of one we conceded recently at home to Horley.

We nearly equalised in the second minute of injury time after Nelson-Roberts did really well to reach the touchline just a few yards out and pulled the ball back for Adam Green to side foot it towards the goal. It took a slight deflection on the way, but even so, it was somehow clutched right on the line by Chalupniczak and we went in at the break a goal behind, but not yet out of the match. However, the writing was on the wall within two minutes of the second half after a long throw was flicked on and then volleyed in from about ten yards by Bone to make it 3-1 which left us facing a mountain to climb.

However, the game took an unfortunate twist in the 55th minute when Nelson-Roberts threatened to break through on the left, but was then brought down by a high and very clumsy looking tackle from Scott, which left the offender in a heap in the floor. It was immediately clear that he was badly injured and all those in the ground knew there would be the possibility of an abandonment, as happened to us eighteen months previously when Andy "Woody" Hall was injured in a goalless draw at Forest Row. Looking back at the incident itself, it's possible that one of Scott's feet got caught in or on the artificial surface, which was why the original challenge looked so awkward as he looked off balance when he made it. Either way, this became the second Combined Counties League match to be abandoned at the Madgwick since the artificial surface was installed back in August after an injury curtailed the Cobham v Abbey Rangers fixture back in the Autumn of 2023. We obviously wish Ed Scott well for the future and hope he is back playing the game he loves as soon as possible.

From a personal point of view, the Forest Row match I referred to was abandoned with the score level at 0-0 and we went on to win the replayed contest 2-0 which, although we didn't know it at the time eventually gave us the pivotal second place finish and subsequent home advantage in the Southern Combination League playoffs last season. I wonder whether this replayed fixture turns out to be as significant. A new date for Fleet's re-visit will be advised as soon as possible.

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O'Donovan, Ethan Brazier, Ethan Nelson-Roberts (c), Adam Green, Reece Tierney, Matt McGillivray, Luke Miller, Tijani Eshilokun, Will Kendall, Carl Oblitey, Luke Taylor

Subs: none

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Surgery delay after hip break led to death

An elderly woman who tragically died after waiting five days for hip surgery prompted a coroner to raise concerns that a hospital is putting patients at risk of an early death.

Anne Rowland, a care home resident in Oxted, died in East Surrey Hospital after inflammation and infection of the lungs following surgery.

Ms Rowland broke her hip following a collision and fall with another care home resident who was partially sighted on February 27, 2023. She was taken to East Surrey Hospital the same day.

Coroner Anna Crawford found there was "no clinical reason" for the surgery not taking place until five days later on March 3 as the patient was "clinically fit".

She concluded that outstanding infrastructure repairs and the use of different guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) that the Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust was "placing patients at risk of early death".

NICE guidelines say that hip surgery should take place on the day of the injury or the day after. Early mobilisation is recommended for hip fracture patients to reduce the risk of complications, including pneumonia.

East Surrey Hospital uses a metric of 48 hours within which to conduct such surgery and does not use the NICE timeframe. Although the hospital has a dedicated operating theatre for trauma patients, on some occasions demand outweighs capacity.

However, the surgery did not take place because "other trauma patients were prioritised ahead of [Mrs Rowland] based upon their relative clinical need".

Operating theatre capacity at the hospital has on occasion been compromised by infrastructure failings. An entire new surgery unit is being constructed and is anticipated to be completed by 2025 at the latest. The orthopaedic theatres also need new air handling and chillers which is yet to be completed.

The coroner concluded that waiting for her operation "caused" Mrs Rowland to develop dementia and immobility. This "contributed" to her developing aspiration pneumonia following surgery. Mrs Rowland's condition deteriorated resulting in her death at East Surrey Hospital on March 31, 2023.

Ed Cetti, chief medical officer of Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust, said: "We are profoundly sorry for the delay in Mrs Rowland's hip surgery and offer our deepest sympathies to her family during this difficult time."

The Trust said that in the months since Mrs Rowland's death, it has "significantly" reduced delays in hip fracture surgery. In November 2023 59 per cent of operations occurred within 36 hours and 91 per cent within 48 hours.

Mr Cetti added: "We always strive to perform surgeries of this nature as soon as possible and monitor our performance against the 36-hour time window identified by NICE guidance. We also monitor against a 48-hour window to ensure any patients that miss the 36-hour target are not waiting longer than 48 hours.

"Recognising that not all patients are medically well enough for surgery within 36 hours, we are working on improving our performance further and reaching the 80 per cent target by the end of 2024/25."

Image: Entrance to East Surrey Hospital. Credit Get Surrey*

Surrey Uni works on self-drive safety

As the UK prepares to introduce legislation that paves the way for self-driving vehicles later this year, scientists and experts led by the University of Surrey have launched a new network to ensure that this new technology is safely implemented.

The MASSDRIVE (Methods for Assurance of Self-Driving Vehicles) project has been funded by Innovate UK to help the country

and industry develop robust methods of approving and certifying self-driving cars as they become available.

Professor Saber Fallah, co-investigator on the project and the Director of Connected Autonomous Vehicles Research Lab (CAV-Lab) at the University of Surrey, said:

"MASSDRIVE is all about bringing together industry, scientists, regulators, and the public to begin a conversation about how we can make self-driving cars safe for our roads.

"Our main goal is to make sure these vehicles are safe. We want to create strong connections between car makers, people who set the rules, academics, government groups and local communities. By having regular discussions, workshops and meetings, we're creating a space where everyone can share ideas and good ways of doing things, focusing particularly on making sure the AI in cars is trustworthy."

MASSDRIVE is a collaboration between the universities of Surrey, the West of England and Bristol.

If you want to know more about MASSDRIVE or if you are interested in shaping methods for the safety of self-driving vehicles, please contact Professor Saber Fallah.

Image: Creator: eschenzweig Common License 4.0

Just not cricket to replace Banstead pavilion?

A long-standing cricket club's ambitious plans to construct a modern pavilion and expand its facilities have sparked a debate from people that live in the area, saying it would "ruin the village feel".

A centuries old sports club wants to modernise its facilities, in part due to the massive growth of the game among girls and women, although some warn its ambitious plans overstep the mark.

Banstead Cricket Club has applied to demolish its current clubhouse, which it says was only every designed to last 10 years but has stood for 60, and replace it with a new modern facility that conforms to "Sport England and the sports governing body standards".

It is also seeking to refurbish its pavilion to create a dedicated changing space for women and girls. While opponents to the plans aren't arguing against its need to modernise, and would like to see the 182-year-old cricket club get a new clubhouse – they say they are worries about the size and location of the plans. They feel the potential increase in social events at the site, could have a negative impact on people living near the ground.

The club, however, told the Local Democracy Reporting Service that they are "not trying to just suddenly become an events business" and that "the most important thing to stress is that Banstead Cricket Club is a cricket club". The application has already had 252 comments with the majority (151) backing the plans and 91 objecting.

Club chairperson Neil Bowman said: "We need something bigger and we need something that has more than one room. We need to have other areas where people can hang out, or have a team meeting. We didn't design it as a wedding venue, and we do appreciate the neighbours' concerns, there was a concern about creating an event venue, and all the additional traffic, noise.

"I can entirely understand people's concerns, but we are not trying to do that, we are trying to build a modern clubhouse." The club said that Sport England and the England and Wales Cricket Board have been consulted in terms of the most ideal sighting for the new building and it's the internal layout.

Its new location will allow people to take in matches from either of the club's two pitches. The club has also said it will re-lay its car park with an environmentally friendly solution. Project head Ian Rusbridge said: "We are not trying to just suddenly become an events business, that's not our game.

"We don't foresee (a surge in) event hire, there may be a little bit more during the summer – because at the moment we can't hire it out at all. The other thing to stress, is that the cricket club is run by volunteers, who have full time jobs, and lives and children. They haven't got the capacity to run a cricket club let alone an events business. "Adding to that, in terms of the design the architects we employed, their speciality is sport pavilions."

The club has a licence until 1am but says it is rarely used and that the events held usually stop serving alcohol at 11pm. It said it did not see this changing in the future. Among the objections however include the increase in traffic around the green belt area,

noise that would come from an expanded pavilion, and the determination visual impact it would have.

One objector wrote that the scale of the two-storey building was "far too large" and would "ruin the village feel" of the site. He felt the current buildings were perfectly adequate and would support plans that improved and updated the facilities within the same space.

The Local Democracy Reporting Service spoke with another resident who has also written in to object. Robert Garbut lives off Park Road, near the club, and challenged the size of the plans, its impact on traffic and neighbourhood fears the site could become a late-night venue.

He said: "It's massive. It's a 350 per cent increase over two floors, on another field that had never been built on before. Earthmoving trucks that will have to move into the park – I'm sure people just don't realise what is happening. Having said all of that, the cricket club has been there for a hundred years, it's hugely successful, they need more changing rooms.

"We assumed they would knock down the old clubhouse and build an all-singing all-dancing version of that. They also own the practice field adjacent to that – that's where they want to build, you can understand that as it makes sense to build it on your own land rather than land owned by Reigate and Banstead Council.

"All of our objections are about the superscale of this social venue, nobody but nobody wants to be mean spirited. We want the club to be a great building not the ramshackle thing they're in now."

The planning application is still with Reigate and Banstead Borough Council's planning team. A date has yet to be set for when it will be determined.

Image - visualisation of new pavilion and current inset.

New SEND school blocked by Nimby?

A group of Surrey parents say they are "devastated" and fear it is back to the drawing board after plans for a 'much needed' special needs school will likely be quashed.

Planning permission was approved by Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) in March 2023 for a state-run Betchwood Vale school on the site of the vacant Chalcraft Nursery and garden centre. Around 82% of kids with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) have to commute out of the district to go to a specialist school. One mum said she covers 80 miles a day on the school run to access education for two of her children

But a single claimant took it to the High Court to challenge the procedure on the way the decision was made on two grounds: application of the environmental habitat regulations and traffic flow. The court has said the first point is valid and thrown out the second.

Using his delegated authority, the council's Deputy Chief Executive decided not to defend the legal challenge, asking the court to quash the decision, given the legal costs.

Originally scheduled to open in September 2023, parents say they were thrilled to think there might 'finally be a school locally' to cater for their needs.

Elizabeth Marett, mum and campaigner for the school, told the Local Democracy Reporting Service that she feels education for disabled children is not being prioritised. She said: "I am disappointed, angry and upset with the local residents who have taken it upon themselves to oppose the schools because they are essentially saying the education of disabled children is unimportant."

"There are children who need schools, and if this isn't built, their future is very bleak. Is there any way we can convince these people that what they're doing is really damaging for the local children of the future? These schools are hard to come by. There are so many children in the county that need to go to this school." Other parents called it a "bitter blow" to the SEND community.

Elizabeth said some children in her son's class "have nowhere else to go" as mainstream school is not possible for children with anxiety and complex needs.

Betchwood Vale school is likely to be for high-functioning autistic children, who do not have other learning disabilities, if it goes ahead. It would teach children between seven and 19 years old, providing places for around 60 pupil in its first year and going up to 180 children over a few years.

Currently, more than 100 autistic children who live in Mole Valley and require a specialist place go to school out of their district,

meaning they spend a long time every day travelling large distances between home and school.

One mum said she covers 80 miles a day on the school run to access education for two of her children whilst another is transported 22 miles in the opposite direction.

Fighting against the application in the planning meeting (March 2023) was an unofficial group called Ladyegate Road Residents Association Ltd (LRRA). The group, named after a private road near the site, objected to the application because of the adverse impact on traffic flow and approach to Dorking, the negative effect on biodiversity and that no alternative options have been investigated for the site.

Planning documents reveal Surrey County Council (SCC) Highways warned of "minor" impacts to traffic on the A25 junctions as a result of the proposed school. It also added conditions of improving vehicle access on nearby Punchbowl Lane.

Cllr Joanna Slater (Conservative for Leatherhead South) said: "What is also troubling is that this has happened completely behind the scenes. Councillors did not know."

The council's Development Management Committee (DMC) meeting on 3 April heard that the team claim they were not informed of the SEND school decision being changed or is likely to change. A spokesperson for MVDC said it is not "unusual practice" for a decision to be taken by a senior officer under delegated authority. They said all local ward members were kept updated in the proceedings.

Cllr Slater added: "At best this is a delay to the SEND school opening. At worst, it will result in the whole project failing as the budget for planning permission has been spent."

Clare Curran, Lead Cabinet Member for Children and Families at SCC, said: "We are disappointed with Mole Valley's decision not to defend the judicial review. The proposed Betchwood Vale Academy is critical to achieving Surrey's ambition that autistic children are educated closer to home."

SCC have promised to deliver 2,440 permanent additional specialist school places in Surrey between 2019 - 2026 to create capacity for 5,760 planned places by 2030/31.

SCC said it has been advised by the Department of Education of their ongoing commitment to deliver Betchwood Vale Academy in full once a positive planning application has been confirmed.

A Mole Valley spokesperson said: "We are working as quickly as possible to get a decision from the Court. Once that is made, we will reconsult on the planning application and soon after – return the application to the Development Management Committee to make the planning decision."

It added: "This will allow us to ensure that there is no future potential for legal challenge and that once a new decision is made, if it is to again approve the application, then the delivery of the school can start swiftly."

The Department of Education has been contacted for comment.

The Ladyegate Road Residents Association is not an official body. The Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) tried to contact the group for additional comment but was unable to do so.

Related report:

Surrey to SEND £40m for special schools

 $Image: Betchwood\ Vale\ SEND\ school\ plan.\ From\ Design\ and\ Access\ statement.\ Credit:\ Jestico\ +\ Whiles\ Associates\ Ltd$

PM confident of success in Woking

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said he was "confident" that Conservatives will hold onto Woking in the upcoming local and general elections, when he was grilled about why people should vote for a party that allowed the local council to go bankrupt.

The PM was at Woking Community Hospital April 11th where he was grilled about the fate of the Conservative party by reporters.

The PM pointed to the UK economy in response to questions about why Woking residents should vote for a party that allowed the local council to go bakrupt.

Woking Council declared bankruptcy in June 2023 after it admitted a risky investment spree into hotels and skyscrapers by its

former Conservative administration.

Calling Woking's investments a "cross-party" decision, Rishi said local councils are "in control of their own finances", and urged they run their budgets "in a sensible manner to deliver to their residents".

Citing the national picture, Rishi said inflation has "more than halved" to 3.4% in February 2024, wages have increased ahead of inflation, taxes have been cut and free childcare has been expanded to working families.

He added: "While we have been through a tough few years as a country, that's been difficult for families in Surrey, I do believe that the start of this year we have turned a corner and we're now heading in the right direction.

"Our plan is working, if we stick to our plan we can give everyone in Surrey and Woking the peace of mind that there is a brighter future for them and their family."

Woking is set to go to the polls on May 2 to vote for a third of the council (10 seats) in the local elections. Since news first emerged about the borough's financial crisis, his party lost control of the council, and saw its share of councillors drop to four (from 17 in 2016).

MP Jonathan Lord won 48.9% of the vote in the 2019 election, with Liberal Democrat candidate Will Forster coming second at 30.8%. One poll from Electoral Calculus predicts Jonathan will win a narrow victory of just 30.8%, with Lib Dem and Labour closely at its heels with 27.6% and 23.6% respectively.

Although the Woking MP was present during the media pool, he made no further comment.

The PM argued central government has put more funding into councils, claiming local councils have on average 7.5% more funding than 2023. A further £600m has also been put into local authorities for 2024-25.

He said: "Central government is doing its bit to support [local councils] with considerably more funding." Despite the added funding Woking Council said it has to make £8.4m savings for year one of its five-year financial strategy. Closing most public toilets, ending grants to voluntary and community groups, reducing dial-a-ride services and losing up to 60 staff are some of the cuts the council has made to make ends meet.

Related report:

Sunak in Surrey