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For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

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Taxing question for Surrey’s private schools

23 June 2024



Labour’s proposal to add VAT to private school fees has ignited a fierce debate in Surrey, home to numerous prestigious independent schools. The policy, aimed at generating £1.5 billion to improve state education, has drawn both sharp criticism and staunch support from local residents, educators, and politicians

One Surrey grandmother explained that her grandchildren go to private school and says she thought it is a “ridiculous” policy on “hard-working people”.

Labour has said that if it wins the general election it plans to remove tax exemptions that private schools enjoy, generating around £1.5billion. The most significant of these is scrapping VAT exemptions on private school fees.

Critics say taxing private schools does not hit the super rich but hurts middle-income parents. Cllr Kate Fairhurst (Conservative/ Reigate) said: “I am very concerned that Labour’s plans will punish families striving and investing for a better future for their children.”

Private schools could make cuts to absorb the added VAT cost, Labour Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves has said, so it is not passed on to parents.

Profoundly objecting, Roger Jones, a previous Conservative candidate for Dorking. said: “Private schools would have to axe a third of its [departments]”, causing the most affluent of pupils to move to other fee paying schools” or in the public sector. He added the suggestion of cuts as an option is rooted in the Labour’s envy of the privately educated.

With the money raised, Labour said it will improve standards in state schools by employing 6,500 teachers, improving schools and careers advice, as well as helping pay for mental health support staff in every secondary school.

Surrey has around 140 private schools: including primary, secondary and special schools. Fees vary between schools, but the cost of independent education in Surrey is above the national average.

They range from £18,975–£38,367 per year for day pupils and from £25,290–£47,535 per year for boarding. With an addition of 20% tax, this would hike the figures to £22,770- £46,040 annually for day pupils and £30,348- £57,042 for students at boarding schools. To those who can just about squeeze £18k for a year of schooling, the added VAT may make the private sector unaffordable.

“It would be a huge backward step for the county,” added Roger Jones He said: “Should Labour find themselves in government, then this policy will disadvantage every single child of school age and those yet to come.” He argued that taxing private schools would cost the state more than it is projected to generate as more children would move to the public school system.

One woman, who wished to remain anonymous, expressed concerns that the influx of previously private schooled children in the state sector could put strain on already struggling public schools. “Walloping private schools isn’t going to make the state schools better and the money raised will be a drop in the ocean compared to the financial needs of the sector,” she added.

Concerns were raised about the tax not affecting prestigious schools, like Eton, where the woman claimed the pupils are from very wealthy families. She said: “The imposition of 20% VAT won’t even begin to affect the attitude of [those] who are brought up by such schools to believe that they are superior to everyone else.”

Twenty-three-year-old Grace, who went to a comprehensive school in leafy Esher, said raising fees could increase elitism in private schools, making bullying and student dynamics worse. She said: “It’s no secret that private schools have a self-proclaimed elitist culture, and increasing VAT will mean the super rich will be more prolific in these schools.”

The vast majority of independent schools are classed as charities or non-profit making trusts. For-profit schools are not allowed in the UK so funds go towards running and improving schools.

Speaking to people on the doorstep, Guildford ’s Lib Dem candidate Zoe Franklin told the LDRS how a woman in Stoughton made “very careful and conscious spending decisions” to pay for a private school. She said the woman did not have foreign holidays and lived in a modest house to afford private schooling as they were unable to get into the local school of their choice that they felt would best support their child with special needs.

Labour’s policy would exempt private SEND schools Ms Franklin said: “It’s especially hard to hear people who say they feel they have to pay for private education for a child with SEND, because the right support just isn’t there in the state sector.”

Labour first announced this policy in its 2019 manifesto, under Jeremy Corbyn, but was brought back into the news limelight in 2023 by Keir Starmer. Worried parents started a Change.org petition against plans, attracting 145,446 signatures at the time of writing.

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Starting in Berkshire, the petition argues parents who currently pay school fees on top of taxes used for school funding will be “adding to the state’s burden rather than opting to relieve it” by choosing an independent school. Critics have argued it is “reasonable” for a service provided by a business, like private schools, to be taxed in the same way as other goods and services. One person commented: “Both are voluntary choices when the state provides a free alternative.”

IPSOS polling, published November 2023, showed the majority of the public (57 per cent) support the Labour party’s proposal., with just under one in five (18 per cent) opposing the policy. Research found that even among 2019 Conservative voters, nearly half (47 per cent) support it, compared to a third (32 per cent) who oppose it.

Speaking on behalf of the party, Labour candidate for Reigate Stuart Brady said: “Introducing VAT on school fees is a tough choice being made against the backdrop of a very difficult economic and fiscal position Labour would inherit from the Tories. Labour wants to drive high and rising standards in all our schools, so that we can break down barriers to opportunity across our country.

“I’ve listened to stories from Reigate Constituents and am aware of the variety of economic and educational positions of those paying privately for education, including parents of children with additional needs. I know that most are not the super-rich. [But] Labour in government will spread opportunity to all parts of the country at every age and every stage.”

Mark my words for Labour candidate

23 June 2024



Epsom and Ewell Times is publishing the appeals of the Parliamentary Candidates standing in the General Election for the constituency of Epsom and Ewell. This is the appeal for **Mark Todd** the **Labour Party** candidate.

Mark Todd has lived with his family in Epsom for the last fifteen years. He runs and cycles locally, so he knows how bad the roads are, you’ll often see him at Nonsuch parkrun on a Saturday running or volunteering, or at the Wells Centre helping out.

He has committed to not take a second job if he is elected as MP; instead concentrating all his time on the people, businesses and charities of Epsom, Ewell, Ashtead and Leatherhead. So, you’ll get a full time MP with Mark not a part time one as previously.

Mark’s very active locally and as your MP he will fight to:

FIX OUR BROKEN ROADS:
The Lib Dem Tory coalition slashed Surrey’s road budgets to unsustainable levels. Our roads are broken and dangerous. Mark has successfully fought to get some of the worst repaired. He will call for extra funds for the constituency and demand Surrey County Council up their game.

REDUCE SEWAGE IN LOCAL RIVERS:
Mark led a cross-party group demanding Thames Water stop dumping sewage into the Hogsmill, our local stream. Having gained support from Feargal Sharkey, Thames Water met with Mark and have promised to reduce sewage overflows into the Hogsmill by 80% by 2030. Mark will continue the fight in Parliament.

MORE NOT LESS COMMUNITY FACILITIES:
Community centres and youth centres are being cut across the country. Mark is a trustee of The Epsom Wells Community Centre which Epsom & Ewell council shut and wanted to demolish. As Treasurer, he wrote the business plan with other trustees that convinced the Council to give the centre, now re-opened, back to the community.

MORE HOMES WHILE DEFENDING THE GREEN BELT:
We need more homes, but most people want to keep our green belt. Mark is a strong supporter of preserving our green spaces and green belt. Labour plan to build more homes, particularly smaller affordable units, on brownfield sites and in New Towns to provide homes while saving the green belt.

BETTER SCHOOLS & HOSPITALS:
The NHS is on its knees and waits are enormous. Labour has committed to rebuilding our local hospitals at St. Helier and Epsom, if elected. Labour also have a fully costed plan to improve the NHS and state schools by providing 17,500 more doctors and nurses, more weekend clinics, 6,500 more teachers and free breakfast clubs for primary school children so parents can get to work.

RE-TAKE OUR STREETS:
Crime is almost decriminalised under the Conservatives with the Police and Court systems so inefficient. Anti-social behaviour and shoplifting is rife, and many women don’t feel safe to walk the streets. Labour will provide 13,000 more

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police officers and reform the criminal justice system so that more crimes are solved, and criminals punished.

REALLY TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE:
Labour will take the climate crisis seriously. Labour will work with the private sector to double onshore wind, triple solar power, and quadruple offshore wind by 2030. We will invest in carbon capture and storage, hydrogen and marine energy, and ensure we have the long-term energy storage our country needs. These measures will reduce carbon but also reduce bills.

ABOUT MARK:
 Graduated in Politics and Economics at Oxford University and also has a Master's degree from Birmingham University
 co-founded one of the UK's largest energy price comparison companies at 28 years old that, recommended by Martin Lewis, and powering comparethemarket's energy service, it organised 10
million energy switches and employed 350 people.
 a leading voice in energy, he campaigned tirelessly to ban rip off energy tariffs and was successful convincing Amber Rudd and her civil servants to bring in the energy price cap in 2018.
 after the election, win or lose, Mark will be part of the All-Party Group on Energy Costs at Parliament as one of the UK's leading experts in energy.
 given Mark's very strong academic and business background, and his strong work ethic, he is perfectly placed to make a big impact in Parliament for our local area and for the whole of the UK.
 A Labour MP would be a great fit for the area as we really need our public services to improve in Epsom and Ewell.

The other candidates:

Conservative who promises to serve "with integrity"

Lib Dems' Helen Maguire – "Getting Things Done"

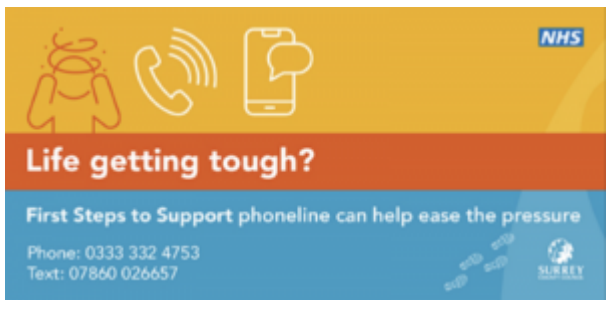
The Green promises

Reform candidate for Epsom and Ewell

A True and Fair view of the world

First steps for mental health

23 June 2024



The National Health Service (NHS) has introduced "First Steps to Support," a new service which is designed to help residents aged 18 and over manage their mental health. This comprehensive facility is accessible via telephone, text, and email, offering early intervention and guidance through a single conversation with a dedicated wellbeing advisor.

Whether you're feeling stressed, irritable, or down, facing financial worries or sleep issues, caring for others with little to no time for yourself – "First Steps to Support" will help you delve and face these issues. They seek to help you improve your mental wellbeing by providing support not only for individuals but also for their friends and family members. The welcoming staff aims to understand what's
troubling you and attempts to explore ways to guide you to the right resources, in order to ease your burdens and help you enjoy life again.

Residents will receive tailored guidance on self-help strategies and have early access to talking therapies. In addition, the service offers referrals to various support services that tackle wider determinants of wellbeing, including financial difficulties, housing issues, employment concerns, isolation, and bereavement. The overarching objective is to enhance long-term wellbeing by connecting residents with local community organisations and support hubs, ensuring sustained assistance and
resilience.

Service Availability:

Residents can reach out to the "First Steps to Support" service through the following
contact methods:
 Telephone: 0333 332 4753
 SMS: 07860 026657
 Email: dohel.firststeps.surrey@nhs.net

The wellbeing advisors can be contacted during the following hours:
 Monday: 8am to 3pm
 Tuesday: 9am to 4pm
 Wednesday: 10am to 5pm

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 Thursday: 9am to 7pm
 Friday: 10am to 2pm

Further Information
For more information, the NHS encourages residents to visit the “First Steps to Support” webpage on healthysurrey.org.uk

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Lib Dems’ Helen Maguire – “Getting Things Done”

23 June 2024



Epsom and Ewell Times is publishing the appeals of the Parliamentary Candidates standing in the General Election for the constituency of Epsom and Ewell. This is the appeal from **Liberal Democrat** candidate **Helen Maguire**.

My Army training gave me focus, my police work gave me a determination to maintain good order, while being a working mum of three in Claygate taught me a great deal about my local community.

It’s these and other aspects of my career that led me to become a Liberal Democrat and to stand for Parliament to serve my local community – and to get things done to make the constituency of Epsom & Ewell a better place.

While there are many issues the Liberal Democrats want to tackle in the next Parliament, there are three big issues in Epsom & Ewell close to my heart. I want to see them fixed. I have been campaigning on these for the last 18 months and I want to take them to Parliament as your local representative and get them resolved.

My first concern is health and social care. Previous Conservative governments have run the NHS into the ground, and as far as Epsom & Ewell is concerned, have consistently failed to resolve one of our biggest issues, which is the overcrowding at Epsom and St Helier hospitals.

Our health care professionals across Surrey came up with an exciting and practical plan to build a third hospital which would be designed to treat the most difficult emergency cases, so that local people could get world class care in an emergency. The building of this new critical care hospital at Sutton would then free up Epsom and St Helier to be upgraded to significantly better district hospitals, caring for all
other aspects of medical care.

The Conservatives have consistently promised to build the critical care hospital, but nothing has happened. As a result, our pressurised NHS workers are having to deal with overcrowding and poor facilities – even getting into Epsom to park can be an issue!

At the most basic level successive Conservative governments have failed on health and social care. So many people can’t get to see their GP when they need to. The Lib Dems want to give everyone the right to see a GP within seven days, or within 24 hours if they urgently need to – and we’ll train another 8,000 more GPs to deliver this.

Finding NHS dental care can be as difficult as finding hen’s teeth. The running down of NHS dentistry is causing great concern and so the Lib Dems will guarantee access to a NHS dentist for urgent and emergency care, putting an end to the dental deserts we see emerging across the country.

Mental health services need shaking up so we will push for mental health hubs for young people. We also must produce better results in terms of cancer survival rates and want to introduce a guarantee that all patients will start treatment for cancer within 62 days for urgent referral.

Successive Conservative governments have promised to do more to resolve the social care crisis, but nothing of any substance has happened. We have come up with a raft of fully costed measures aimed at making people’s lives much easier than they are now. We want to introduce free personal care based on the model we introduced in Scotland in 2002, so that provision is based on need, not ability to pay.

We also want to establish a Royal College of Care Workers to improve recognition and career progression and introduce a higher Carer’s Minimum Wage. We want to establish a cross-party commission to forge a long-term agreement on sustainable funding for social care. A subject very close to our leader Ed Davey’s heart is to give unpaid carers a fair deal so they get the support they so desperately need, including paid carer’s leave and a statutory guarantee of regular respite breaks.

Everyone in Epsom and Ewell will benefit from better healthcare provision, but perhaps even more fundamentally is the need to build a stronger economy enabling us to shake off the cost-of-living crisis. One of the greatest opportunities is in the booming ‘green economy’ where the Liberal Democrats want to invest in renewable power and home insulation to

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drive a strong economic recovery, bring down energy bills, and create clean, secure, well-paid new jobs.

This means we need to develop an industrial strategy that will give businesses certainty and incentivise them to invest in new technologies to grow the economy, create good jobs, and tackle the climate crisis. In Epsom & Ewell we need to boost small businesses and empower them to create new local jobs, including abolishing business rates and replacing them with a Commercial Landowner Levy to help
stimulate our high streets.

The mismanagement of our economy and public services by the Tories extends to the inability of government to sort out the water companies who have been for too long polluting our rivers and waterways with raw sewage. Instead, they have pandered to the water companies in whose interests are best served by doing nothing other than the bare minimum about pollution.

I, and my fellow Liberal democrats, will hold the water companies to account by giving them a duty to protect the environment, including banning water companies from dumping raw sewage into rivers, lakes and coastal areas. Trashing our environment is totally unacceptable.

We want to make homes warmer and cheaper to heat. We will introduce a ten-year emergency upgrade programme, starting with free insulation and providing low-cost heating – heat pumps for those on low incomes.

We want to extend this to solar generation by expanding incentives for households to install solar panels. We will invest in renewable power so that 90% of the UK's electricity is generated from renewables by 2030.

All these issues can be resolved providing we plan well for the future and elect politicians whose life experiences are about taking on problems and solving them, this is what I have been trained to do, and I wish to do so to the benefit of everyone who lives in Epsom, Ewell, Ashtead & Leatherhead.

The other candidates:

Conservative who promises to serve "with integrity"

The Green promises

A True and Fair view of the world

Reform candidate for Epsom and Ewell

Mark my words for Labour candidate

The Green promises

23 June 2024



Epsom and Ewell Times is publishing the appeals of the Parliamentary Candidates standing in the General Election for the constituency of Epsom and Ewell. This is the appeal from **Green Party** candidate **Stephen McKenna**.

Britain is a wealthy country. Yet underinvestment the last 14 years has adversely affected the country. We have a series of ongoing crises notably in the health care system and in terms of cost of living impacting millions of people. In housing, transport and our energy and water bills, costs are rising to levels that are unaffordable for many. All of this set against a backdrop of growing climate crisis and it's impacts on, drought, flooding, rising food prices, declining biodiversity and so on.

The Green Party manifesto proposes that to "fix Britain" we need to invest significantly more that might otherwise have been the case if proper investment had been undertaken. We do not apologise for being honest about the problems we face and the fact that our plans involve raising taxes.

However it is clear that a lot of investment now will bring solid benefits for the whole of society and avoid further worsening of the situation. We want to progress towards a fairer, greener society.

The main parties are in denial about the scale of these challenges. There is a "conspiracy of silence" about funding what has to be done which amounts to a policy of "no change" for the next five years. This would be disastrous. Independent reports say the NHS will decline further under Labour's plans.

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Labour say they will involve the private sector at a time when we spend a lot less per head on health services than other European countries. This is a further step towards privatisation which the Green Party rejects. We need a proper Investment Plan for the whole NHS. Our tax and spend plan is about investing long term in people and capital assets. So for instance recruiting more home grown talent to fill vacancies
will be vital. “Earn while you learn” apprenticeships will incentivise our young people to study whilst full time students should benefit from maintenance grants. The end of tuition fees will help but universities will need to be properly funded as well.

Having said all of this, the state has broad shoulders to carry this weight – after all over £400 billion was raised during the pandemic without the sky falling in and the Institute of Fiscal Studies has made supportive qualified comments about our tax and spend plans. More importantly IFS has not suggested there are any risks to the economy as a result of our proposals. Don’t forget, much of what we propose is about spending now to save later.

No party should enter Government without a commitment to ending the housing emergency. Our programme will generate greater tax receipts and will save on things like subsidies to landlords and developers. We want to create 150,000 council homes a year nationally across the country including
conversions, refurbishments, buying empty or houses in disrepair as well as new build. All Councils should produce a five year plan to provide Council or social housing in their areas which should also reduce their current extortionate emergency and accommodation spending.

One of the biggest threats facing this area is the weakening of the planning system proposed by the main parties. Rather than address the core issues of our broken housing market they engage in a numbers game about who can build more unaffordable homes! “Unblocking” the planning system would enable further destruction of our supposedly sacrosanct Green Belts, without reference to any constraint. Nationally building 300,000 homes per annum would amount to two cities the size of Birmingham over a five year period!

This is not sustainable and is unnecessary. Imagine all the consequences that flow from this – new roads and a loss of tranquility is the least of it – traffic congestion, air pollution, noise, water and sewerage discharges into streams and rivers and impacting on biodiversity, a lack of GPs, hospitals, dentists,
school places. This at a time when our Government is supposedly signed up to delivering protection of nature on 30% of our land by 2030. At present only 3% of our land is protected.

So if elected, what would my main priorities be as your MP?

● Protect and expand Green Belts and integrate these with nature recovery and community health based strategies, banning any development in such locations
● I will prioritise NHS and social care funding including an upgrade of Epsom Hospital and community based healthcare
● In education I would advocate for more places for special needs (SEND) children in Surrey and encourage funding for “earn while you learn” apprenticeships
● Support public ownership of water and energy companies
● Secure better integrated public transport with enhanced service delivery, lower fares and a scrappage scheme in Surrey to support transitioning to ULEZ compliant vehicles

● Support the national programme of retro fitting homes to deliver energy efficient homes and lower energy bills
● Epsom and Ewell has no Council housing and I would require all Councils to produce an annual target for provision of Council/social housing –
● Support our High Streets – such as grants to increase live-work places on upper floors above shops, enhanced broadband in centres to support small businesses find space, providing help to park with
charging points for electric vehicles, environmental and other improvements – of course business rates should also be scaled back to help compete with online offers.
● Help our farmers to grow quality food for the home market with a large expansion of the horticulture sector and nature friendly farming,
● Create green manufacturing jobs in renewables, green technologies and related sectors.

Finally I urge you to ignore the opinion polls. In this election, more than any other in my lifetime, there is no scope for tactical voting. In Epsom and Ewell, for so long a safe Tory seat, a surprise result is definitely on the cards and cannot be predicted. The Green Party is the only party offering a decent and
deliverable vision for the future backed up by realistic spending plans.

Therefore I ask you to vote with your heart and your head for a better fairer country, vote Green on 4th July!

The other candidates:

Conservative who promises to serve “with integrity”

Lib Dems’ Helen Maguire – “Getting Things Done”

A True and Fair view of the world

Reform candidate for Epsom and Ewell

Mark my words for Labour candidate

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Justice Stops Oil

23 June 2024



A Surrey campaigner is “over the moon” after a landmark legal decision found that planning permission given to drill for oil at Horse Hill is unlawful.

The Supreme Court has found that the environmental impact of burning fossil fuels must be taken into account when granting planning permission.

Sarah Finch has been fighting Surrey County Council’s decision to approve UK Oil and Gas’s oil drilling site in Horse Hill, south of Reigate, for years – having first brought the case to the High Court in 2019.

On Thursday (June 20) the Supreme Court ruled, by three judges to two, that planning permission for fossil fuel production should not be granted unless the climate impact of the project – specifically downstream greenhouse gas emissions from the combustion of the fuel – have been fully assessed.

It means Surrey County Council’s decision to grant planning permission for oil production was unlawful, her lawyers said at the end of the five-year battle.

Mrs Finch said: “I am absolutely over the moon to have won this important case. The Weald Action Group always believed it was wrong to allow oil production without assessing its full climate impacts, and the Supreme Court has shown we were right.

“This is a welcome step towards a safer, fairer future. The oil and gas companies may act like business-as-usual is still an option, but it will be very hard for planning authorities to permit new fossil fuel developments – in the Weald, the North Sea or anywhere else – when their true climate impact is clear for all to see.

“I thank the Weald Action Group, Friends of the Earth and everyone who has been part of our long journey through the courts. And I thank my lawyers for their commitment and hard work.”

The Court found the council’s reasons for refusing to assess the impact of burning the fuel was inadequate, her lawyers said, adding that it made the “common sense point” that combustion emissions were unavoidable and no other controls could be relied upon to reduce their impact.

They added that for similar reasons, the court also dismissed an argument that refining the oil somehow excused a failure to assess its impact at the earliest possible stage.

The decision means planning authorities in England and Wales must now assess the total climate impact of any proposed fossil fuel developments.

Stephen Sanderson UKOG’s chief executive said: “The court’s rather perplexing retrospective ruling, which is counter to all prior judgements, further underscores why the company’s focus over the past few years has shifted away from oil and gas and firmly towards creating and delivering strategic underground hydrogen storage, an essential element of the UK’s future low carbon energy system.

“These projects have the potential to create far greater sustainable value for the company and the UK than any small onshore field such as Horse Hill. They also have the added benefit of making a positive contribution to Net Zero.

“However, although Horse Hill is a small part of our portfolio, it still has a role to play in both the company’s and UK’s future transitional energy mix and thus we look forward to working closely with the local planning authority to rectify this retrospective change to EIA requirements.”

The proposed expansion at Horse Hill Developments would have created five drilling cellars, four hydrocarbon production wells, four gas-to-power generators, a process, storage and tanker loading area, seven 1,300-barrel oil tanks, and a 37-metre drill rig to allow large-scale production of up to 3.3 million tonnes of crude oil for sale and use as transport fuel for 20 years, Mrs Finch’s lawyers Leigh Day said.

UKCOG has said it plans to work closely with Surrey County Council to “promptly rectify the situation”, either via an amendment to the original 2018 planning applications or a new retrospective planning submission, for which there is recent planning precedent within Surrey.

A spokesperson for Surrey County Council said: “The long awaited judgement of the Supreme Court in the case of R (on the application of Finch on behalf of the Weald Action Group) v Surrey County Council and others has found that the Environmental Impact Assessment undertaken for the planning application at Horse Hill to extract petroleum did not assess the effect on climate of the combustion of the oil to be produced.

“Council officers at the time of the planning application assessment believed that they acted in compliance with the law. The judgement makes it clear that local planning authorities must have regard to downstream emissions. The council was unsuccessful in defending its decision.

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“The planning permission remains to be determined in due course.”

Image: Redhill climate campaigner Sarah Finch at Horse Hill rally 5 Nov 2021. Credit Denise Laura Baker

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A True and Fair view of the world

23 June 2024



Epsom and Ewell Times is publishing the appeals of the Parliamentary Candidates standing in the General Election for the constituency of Epsom and Ewell. This is the appeal from **The True and Fair Party** candidate **Gina Miller**.

My name is Gina Miller and as an activist for fairness and justice for 34 years, a successful businesswoman over 28 years, mother fighting for my now adult disabled daughter, and a survivor of domestic violence I feel compelled to step into the political arena.

Many think of me as being “that bloody difficult woman” who took two Conservative Prime Ministers to the Supreme Court and won – securing historic constitutional victories and stopping these PMs from putting themselves above the law. But my motivation has always been the same – to speak out when things are blatantly wrong, dishonest, and hurting people.

My years of campaigning has led to successful changes in the areas of special education provision, modern-day slavery legislation, campaign for laws to tackle online abuse, and bringing about changes to stop rip-offs in financial services. My work in the charity sector over the years has also helped improve governance, sustainability, and safeguarding.

The FT called me a wrecking ball – but unfairness, our broken institutions and systems need to be called out. Without integrity, morality, and common decency from leaders we all suffer.

My vision is for a thriving, healthy, happy community. So how do I plan to achieve that?

Health and Wellbeing:

Faced with debilitating pressures on our health and social care services, bringing early intervention, alternative therapies and services, medical MOTs, and mobile services onto our high streets is key. Services to tackle the growing demands on our mental health services, elderly in the community, long term sick, special needs and respite services, people unable to feed or house themselves. Collective community actions that translate into kinder communities.

Enhancing the Local Economy:

As a successful businesswoman, I’m passionate about supporting small businesses, entrepreneurs, and responsible businesses. Creating a vibrant, partnership-led local economy that attracts investment, creates jobs and local supply chains and boost prosperity and community cohesion. For example, encourage our Local Authority Pension Fund to invest into local businesses, infrastructure, and projects. Petitioning the next government for a Local Business Development Fund which would offer grants and low-interest loans. Replacing business rates with a fairer transaction tax for online and bricks and mortar businesses.

Environmental Protection:

Urgent action is needed to protect our environment which is why I am calling for ecocide to be put law, making it a criminal offence for organisations not to take steps to mitigate their environmental damage. Robust challenges to building on greenbelt, protecting our waterways and biodiversity. The Hogsmill River is a place of local pride, however, it has been subject to repeated sewer spills by Thames Water, who continue to make inflated profits whilst local people bear the brunt of these actions.

Under my proposed ecocide law, polluters would be held legally responsible and face fines or prison.

I would also legally challenge the planned development on the Green Belt via a ‘People vs. Planner & Property Developers’ action. The Green Belt is essential in protecting against urban sprawl out of London, air quality and the wellbeing of local people.

Tackling the Housing and Homelessness Crisis:

Contrary to conventional wisdom, increasing housing supply alone won’t solve the housing crisis. I am committed to addressing the housing and homelessness crisis with a human rights-based approach. In my local manifesto I set out a coordinated set of policies to tackle our housing and homelessness crisis. Making homeownership a reality instead of just an aspiration via mortgage reforms, stamp duty and building on brownfield sites.

Our proposed ‘Housing First’ model would give unhoused people the security of a home, providing them with the support

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necessary to reintegrate back into society, work, and accommodation.

Education:

I am a fervent believer in the power of education as the key to success, compassion, and aspiration. To unlocking social mobility and innovation. But our education system is also broken and is unfit to meet the demands of our rapidly changing world.

We are committed to inspiring students, supporting teachers, and creating a fairer, more effective education system by developing a more flexible curriculum which emphasises confidence, critical thinking, and creativity.

I understand the range of challenges facing children and parents and propose standardising the length of terms, and creating a short summer term that focuses on the arts, sports, wellbeing and building resilience. This would also alleviate costly childcare over the summer, minimise negative influences over children and ensure they are 'school ready' when they enter the September term. Creating new T-levels from 13 years old, and a Loan Write-Off Scheme for graduates working in crucial public services such as the NHS, education, civil service, and police.

Crime:

Seek to reestablish a local police station and have more community police out in the community. Introduce more street lighting so women and girls feel safer. Tackle the plague of young people on motorbikes at night, and the growing drugs and alcohol problem – provide places, activities, and clubs for young people to go.

Safer Roads and Pavements:

The state of local road and pavements is abominable, with the UK having the worst road quality in the world – indeed we experience this every day. I want to work with the councils to ensure higher standards or repair and inspections, and on closing legal loopholes that allow them to get way with the shoddy standards that exist.

A vote for me, is a vote for an independently minded, woman of action as your MP – not afraid to fight for you. To be represented by a determined, principled, experienced person with the national profile and experience to heighten awareness and support of this wonderful constituency of Epsom, Ewell, Ashtead, and Leatherhead.

I have never been known to stay silent in the face of wrongdoing, injustice, and unfairness. I won't stay silent when things need to be done to protect you, your family and community. I would work to champion this constituency and make it a place you are proud to call home.

To be YOUR strong voice in Parliament – nationally and locally, would be my honour and privilege.

The other candidates:

Conservative who promises to serve "with integrity"

Lib Dems' Helen Maguire – "Getting Things Done"

The Green promises

Reform candidate for Epsom and Ewell

Mark my words for Labour candidate

King awards Epsom's refugee resettler

23 June 2024



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council are very pleased to share that their Community Development Manager **Rachel Kundasamy** has been recognised in the King's birthday honours this year. Rachel has been awarded a Medal of the British Empire (BEM) for her services to Refugee Resettlement.

Rachel said, "It was lovely to discover I'd been nominated, and I genuinely never expected to receive the award.

"Working to support the refugee community is incredibly rewarding. I've been really privileged in meeting and working with some of the refugee community, and their resilience shown in the face of such adversity is nothing short of inspiring.

"It's a great thing to receive a BEM for a body of work that I feel immensely proud of – and it goes without saying that I wouldn't have won anything had it not been for the incredible support of the community development team and the housing team at the council. I also want to extend a huge thank you to Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network (EERN), with

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whom the council has built an incredible partnership over the years. I'm truly grateful to everyone at EERN for the support they have shown the council in helping provide services to those refugees who have settled in Epsom and Ewell."

Chief Executive **Jackie King** has said "We are all very proud of Rachel for achieving this great honour, which is due to her tireless work in the area of Refugee Resettlement. Rachel designs and delivers innovative projects and strategies that provide the help and support local refugees need to adjust, settle and be able to live fulfilling lives in our borough. I know Rachel is supported by a brilliant team in this work and we are very grateful to them, too.

Our purpose as a council is to make a positive difference to the lives of those in our borough. Through her dedication, passion and partnership working, Rachel has made a huge difference to the lives of many people who are going through extreme hardship and challenge, and this award is testament to that."

Ewell Teachers who go further awarded

23 June 2024



The Creative Media Teaching Team at Nescot college in Ewell, Surrey, has been recognised with a Silver Award for **Further Education Team of the Year** in the Pearson National Teaching Awards. Now in the running for the coveted Gold Award, the team was selected from thousands of Pearson award nominees due to its inspirational approach. The tutors not only teach students skills for a career working in the media, but also shape young lives by partnering with charities and weaving issues like inclusion, mental health and awareness raising into their projects.

Recognising a lack of work experience opportunities for students, the Creative Media Teaching Team has partnered with charities to create bespoke projects. This provides students with hands on experience and increases the reach and impact of the charities involved. The team have initiated projects on Black History with The Black Curriculum, on suicide in young men with Olly's Future and on healthy relationships with Everyone's Invited. Students have developed videos on poems about race, have created animated films on mental health awareness and have produced video stills about toxic masculinity. The charities involved use these resources across social media and within education programmes to boost awareness and make a 'real life' difference.

Julie Kapsalis, CEO and Principal at Nescot said "I'm so proud of the Media Teaching Team, who consistently produce exciting, challenging, and impactful projects. They've been creative about getting Nescot students work experience and have worked hard to embed and champion inclusion in their work. Those on the course are offered real world, credible experience which will help them when they move into the workplace. The team are also moulding young people who understand their community, have empathy, speak up and feel heard. I hope they'll clinch the Gold Award later this year – it would be so well deserved."

This isn't the first award the team has received. They have an enviable tally of success at the World Skills Awards over the last decade – 5 Gold (including 2023), 2 Silver and 2 Bronze awards – a credit to their commitment, hard work, and dedication to their students.

The National Teaching Award announcement comes as students, schools and colleges across the UK are today paying tribute to all those who work in education to mark National Thank a Teacher Day, which celebrates the whole education community and shines a light on the exceptional impact they have on shaping young lives.

Sharon Hague, Managing Director of School Assessment & Qualifications at Pearson UK, said

"We're delighted to recognise this year's Silver Award winners on their outstanding achievements. The contributions they make and the impact they have on young people's lives every day is truly exceptional. We're extremely proud to support the National Teaching Awards and mark the achievements of all our very worthy winners. Thank you for your continued work and congratulations!!"

National Thank a Teacher Day and the Pearson National Teaching Awards are run by the Teaching Awards Trust, an independent charity established over 25 years ago to celebrate the transformative impact of education, shining a spotlight on the pivotal roles teachers, support staff, colleges, schools and early years educators play in inspiring young people, every single day.

Two antidotes to politics coming up in Epsom

23 June 2024

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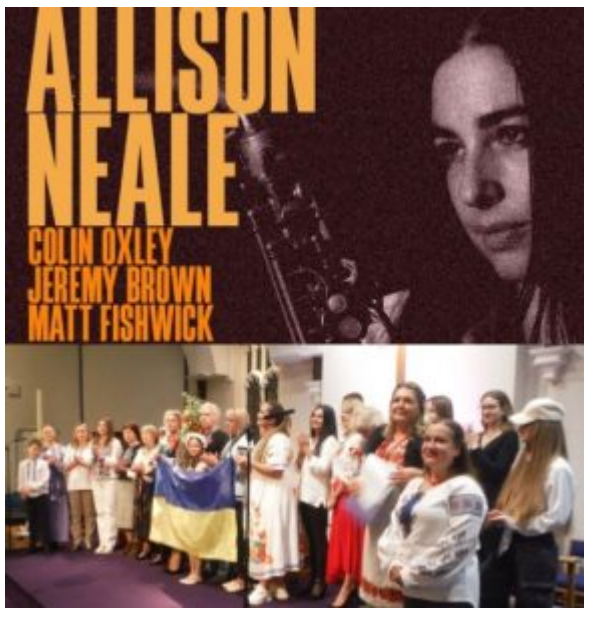

Need a welcome break from election campaigning, canvassing and TV debate political bickering?

In the heart of Epsom classy professional live jazz comes to the Comrades Club, The Parade Epsom on Thursday 27th June at 7.30pm. Epsom Jazz Club presents Allison Neale and an evening of West Coast jazz with Colin Oxley, Jeremy Brown and Matt Fishwick. Click here for details. Flat rate ticket price of £20 buys you a comfortable seat at a cabaret table and bar. Compares with £30 for Ronnie Scotts and you don't have to commute to London.

On Saturday 29th June at the Epsom Methodist Church an evening of Ukrainian music: brass ensemble, violinist, opera singer and Ukrainian refugee choir and more. Entry is FREE. The evening opens at 6pm with a finger buffet (you may bring a plate to share) and the entertainment begins at 7pm ending about 8.30pm. Come and support professional Ukrainian musicians and enjoy first class music. Ashley Road, Epsom. Epsom Music (a charity) comes together with partner local charities The Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network and Surrey Stands With Ukraine in organising and supporting this event.

King's Gongs for Surrey leaders

23 June 2024



Tim Oliver, Conservative Leader of Surrey County Council and **Rachael Wardell**, Executive Director of Children, Families and Lifelong Learning at Surrey County Council have both been awarded OBEs in The King's Birthday Honours list 2024. Mr Oliver receives his Honour as Councillor and Leader for services to Local Government, and Rachael Wardell for services to children's social care.

Commenting on his Honour, Tim Oliver said: *"I'm delighted that the King recognises so many people's contribution to public service in this way, and it's an honour to receive an award. During the last six years as Leader of Surrey County Council nothing could have been achieved without the dedication and skill of those colleagues who put public service at the heart of everything they do. So, I'd like to say a big thank you to all those who have supported me, and to the people of Surrey who I've had the privilege of leading in this great county."*

Commenting on her Honour, Rachael Wardell said: "*I was pleased and touched to be honoured in this way. As with any kind of public service, any of the achievements or successes attributed to me are really the work of dozens, if not hundreds of people, pulling together in the interests of children and their families, so I am grateful to all the teams I have been privileged to work with over the years whose skills and strengths are reflected in this recognition*."

Joanna Killian, Chief Executive of the LGA and former Chief Executive of Surrey County Council, said: *"I'm delighted to see that Tim has been recognised in the King's Birthday Honours. That recognition is hugely deserving for an exemplary and dedicated public servant. Tim is a shining example of the very best of local government leadership."*

"I'm also hugely proud of Rachael Wardell to be honoured with an OBE. Rachael has always been totally focused on delivering the very best for children under her care and Surrey is lucky to have such a strong and skilled Director of Children's Services."

In relation to Rachael's OBE, Michael Coughlin, Interim Chief Executive of Surrey County Council said: "*On behalf of everyone at Surrey County Council, I would like to extend our heartfelt congratulations to Rachael. Her exceptional leadership and dedication to public service throughout her career has been unwavering.*

"*Rachael has played a critical role in the lives of children in a number of Councils, including at Surrey, which has been recognised in the award of this thoroughly deserved OBE in the King's Birthday Honours.*

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In relation to Tim's OBE, Simon Edwards, Chief Executive of the County Councils Network (CCN) said: *"On behalf of the County Councils Network, I would like to congratulate Tim on this richly deserved honour; a recognition of his many achievements in a long career in local government.*

"Having served on both Elmbridge Borough Council and Surrey County Council – becoming leader in 2017 – Tim has worked tirelessly to champion Surrey for over two decades. As chairman of the County Councils Network since 2021, Tim has been a strong advocate for improving local services for the 26m people who live in county and rural areas."

Tim Oliver career history
Tim has been an Elmbridge Borough or Surrey County councillor for nearly 25 years. He took on the role of leader of Surrey County Council in 2018 at a challenging time for the organisation and embarked on a wholescale transformation project with the Chief Executive that has provided financial stability, leadership across Surrey and had a clear positive impact on residents.

Formerly CEO and then Deputy Chairman of a legal and professional services business, Tim was extensively involved in driving operational delivery and business development. He is a qualified solicitor and the author of three legal text books.

He has held many non-executive roles including on a wide range of not-for-profit boards. Tim is actively involved in the Charity sector as Vice President and previous Chair of Shooting Star Children's Hospices and Chair of the Weybridge Land Charity.

He is currently the Chair of the County Councils Network and Chair of the Surrey Heartlands Integrated Care Board.

Rachael Wardell career history
Rachael Wardell has held the position of Executive Director of Children, Families and Lifelong Learning at Surrey County Council since 2020 and is currently also the Vice President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS). In addition, Rachael is the Executive Director sponsor for Surrey County Council's internal network for ethnically diverse staff.

Rachael has dedicated her career to helping those most in need with nearly 30 years of public service, having previously served as Director of Children's Services in the London Borough of Merton, and as both Director of Children's Services and Director of Adult Social Services at West Berkshire Council, and she also held posts at Wokingham Borough Council and Ofsted. Rachael's background in children's services began in Early Years inspection and regulation and one of her happy places will always be a daycare setting or a reception classroom.

Before becoming Vice President of ADCS in 2024, Rachael, at various times, was also a Board Member/Trustee of The Staff College, Skills for Care and Become (the charity for children in care and young care leavers).

During her time at Surrey County Council, Rachael has driven significant improvement in children's services which was recognised by Ofsted in a recent focused visit. Balancing the other professional demands on her, Rachael spends as much time as possible meeting children, families, schools and staff to hear their experiences and shape services with their best interests and outcomes at heart.

Image: Buckingham Palace licence details Tim Oliver and Rachael Wardell SCC

Council unaware it was Mental Health Awareness Week?

23 June 2024



Former **Epsom and Ewell** Mayor **Rob Geleit** (Labour Court) has accused the Council of removing references to his schizophrenia from his final speech. Cllr Geleit argues that the action reflects prejudice against mental health issues and constitutes improper censorship. The occasion was the Annual Mayor making meeting of the Full Council on Tuesday 14th May. Notably this was during **Mental Health Awareness Week**.

In an interview with the **Epsom and Ewell Times**, Mr Geleit revealed that he had planned to end his speech by saying, "It has been an honour and privilege to serve as The Worshipful The Mayor Cllr Rob Geleit for the past year. Schizophrenia or no schizophrenia. If you are all up for it, perhaps we could vote me in for another year?"

However, this section was removed. Mr Geleit stated that he was informed of the change by Mr **Piero Ionta**, Head of

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Legal and Monitoring Officer, prior to the meeting.

Mr Geleit added that he had already mentioned his schizophrenia in his acceptance speech when he was made Mayor. He stated he believes that while the visibility of mental health issues has improved, chronic mental health problems remain a taboo subject.

He was not particularly surprised by this, as he has become accustomed to such situations. However, he is now working with his leadership team to file a formal complaint against the conduct of a council officer. He hopes the complaint will result in an apology and assurances that such incidents will not happen again.

In response to these allegations, a council spokesperson stated, “In the course of preparing for council meetings where the Mayor will make a speech, it is the normal course of business for officers and the Mayor to discuss speech content, and for officers to offer any advice and guidance, which is what happened on this occasion. Officers do not decide on any changes to the speech, they purely advise, and it is the Mayor’s ultimate decision on whether to act on the advice. Officers do not recognise the conversation had in this instance as being reflective of the allegation that has been made.”

The council also further emphasised its commitment to mental health issues: “The council is aware that poor mental health is a big challenge for many of our residents. As a result, the council has made mental health the top priority in our work with our NHS colleagues in the Epsom and Ewell Neighbourhood Board. We also have a cohort of trained Mental Health First Aiders within the council to assist and support our own staff and councillors.”

Councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) expressed strong disapproval of the incident, stating, “The removal of the reference to schizophrenia was a shocking and wholly outdated expression of the type of stigma and prejudice that many of us have worked to move on from. It was also totally outrageous censorship of an elected official who has served the Borough with dignity and distinction during his year as Mayor.”

Despite these challenges, Mr Geleit remains confident and hopeful about the future. He revealed that he will continue to contest for the West Ewell Division of Surrey County Council and that his experience as Mayor has inspired new ambitions to join Parliament.

Image – Cllr. Robert Geleit at the Derby when Mayor of Epsom and Ewell.

Cleanliness is next to Godliness

23 June 2024



On Sunday, June 9th, around 30 volunteers from ASEZ WAO UK, a local young adult volunteer group inspired by the World Mission Society Church of God in Epsom, gathered to clean along the stream at Longmead Road. The event, joined by Howard Gregory, Chairman of the Epsom & Ewell Tree Advisory Board, aimed to prevent plastic pollution in local waterways.

This litter pick was part of the group’s Blue Ocean campaign, which strives to reduce pollution in streams, rivers, beaches, and seas. In just two hours, the volunteers collected a total of 37 bags of litter, removing mainly plastics to prevent them from entering the waterways. Passersby at Longmead Road were pleased and cheered the volunteers, expressing their gratitude.

ASEZ WAO UK conducts cleanups like this almost monthly, fostering a positive mindset and a sense of community.

The World Mission Society Church of God, located on East Street in Epsom, is a global church with over 7,500 branches and approximately 3.5 million members. The church teaches about God the Father and God the Mother through the Bible.

The group remains committed to keeping the waterways in Surrey plastic-free.

ASEZ WAO UK

Miniature railway set to get bigger

23 June 2024

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There will be a new train line coming to Surrey – for enthusiasts, engineers and eager families looking for a day out.

The Surrey Society of Model Engineers has been given planning permission for a revised inner track complete with a new bridge across a man made pond.

The site, in green belt on Fetcham Springs, Mill Lane, just outside Leatherhead, has long been established as a model railway.

It was considered acceptable for development because it was being used for outdoor recreation and the pond would add to the biodiversity of the area.

Councillor Chris Hunt said: “I think this is an excellent proposal and the policy grounds for approving it are very clear.

“My hope will be that the pond is maintained.

“As you might know we’ve had some issues with the main pond in Ashtead in terms of some of the species were too aggressively growing and led to a loss of biodiversity in the end until it was cleaned out.

“Perhaps if there were to be an extra informative about the maintenance of the pond would be just as important?

“Planting is a condition already – but obviously the engineers might not be biodiversity experts and maybe they could approach the council for some hints on long-term care for the pond. – or Surrey Wildlife Trust?”

Leatherhead Miniature Railway is run as a non-profit, members’ club, and “unites those with interests in model and miniature engineering, particularly but not exclusively trains” planning documents presented to Mole Valley District Council’s Wednesday June 5 planning committee read.

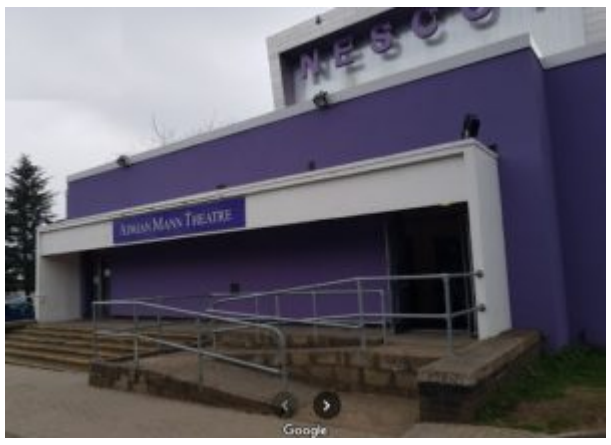
The club has about 11 open days this year usually falling on Sundays and Bank Holidays, including a Santa weekend in December.

One of the open days is in association with the fire station open day. The fire station is adjacent to the site, and train rides take visitors to and from the fire station open day.

Tickets are sold for rides on the miniature trains at £2 per ride.

Epsom and Ewell General Election Public Hustings

23 June 2024



Epsom and Ewell Times, in collaboration with NESCOT, will host a public hustings for local voters. Your opportunity to question Parliamentary Candidates on Wednesday 26th June at 7pm. The hustings will be held in the Adrian Mann Theatre, NESCOT, Reigate Road, Ewell, Epsom.

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