

FOCUS



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COUNCIL TAX TO RISE 3.3%

Council Tax in Epsom & Ewell will rise 3.3% in April, due to a 2.9% increase for Surrey County Council, 4.9% for Surrey Police and 3.9% for the borough council.

Service cuts for Surrey residents - but not until after the elections

The unusually small tax rise in Surrey this year is welcome, but it has been achieved by cutting next year's budgets for bus services, pot hole repairs, gritting and road gully cleaning.

Road Maintenance

There has been a flurry of work repairing pot-holes following the recent snow, but from April the funds available will be reduced below last year's inadequate level.

With the county election due this year, there has been far more work than usual recently on road re-surfacing. Nothing like enough, but very welcome. This is expected to continue in April and May, but after that it is due to be cut back below the previous abysmal level.

The budget for road improvement schemes next year has also been cut.

Bus Services

The cuts in subsidies for evening and weekend buses will take effect when contracts are renewed later in the year, after June's elections.

Surrey County Council is controlled by the Conservatives. The Liberal Democrats are the official opposition.

Value for Money

Lib Dem county spokesperson **Diana Coman** said: "*The Tories' budget fails to give value for money for Surrey residents. The emphasis should have been on increasing and improving services whilst reducing administrative costs. This budget does the opposite. It cuts services and increases the number of administrative staff.*"

The Lib Dems called for a reduction of costly agency staff and consultants to release more funds for road maintenance, youth facilities, and better funding for the voluntary sector.

Surrey Police

Surrey Police Authority have set a 4.9% tax rise to avoid having to cut the number of actual Police Officers, after getting a government grant of less than half the national average, despite London criminals now targetting Surrey.



Evening and Weekend bus services will be cut after the county council elections in June are safely out of the way.

Above-inflation tax rise for Epsom & Ewell

Despite constructive proposals from the Lib Dem opposition for a smaller rise, the RA-led borough council have set an above-inflation increase in Council Tax of 3.9%.

Cllr **Anna Jones** said: "Our proposals were to limit the tax rise to 2.9% through a freeze on IT expenditure for the coming year, a freeze on civic and ceremonial expenditure and cap on pay rises. Our savings would also have allowed the council to make far less use of its financial reserves."

"We also proposed spending more of the money received from Developers to fund much-needed capital projects, instead of hoarding it in the bank."

NATIONAL, COUNTY AND BOROUGH-WIDE NEWS ...

*A Lib Dem campaign to persuade the council to deal with **derelict buildings in the borough** has been partially successful : work is needed on Gibraltar Recreation Pavilion in order to make it DDA compliant. The derelict Sefton Arms pub in Court ward will at last be demolished, Court Rec Pavilion will also be demolished and a new modular facility constructed in its place. The main Pavilion in Alexandra Park will be refurbished but the top Pavilion remains virtually unusable. Horton Chapel is still awaiting a use, despite the fact that the council has accrued in £163,000 in interest payments from money given by developers specifically for use on Horton Chapel! The old water tower (under private ownership) also in Court ward, awaits renovation. The Hollymoor Lane shops on Longmead cannot be redeveloped in the immediate future because investors pulled out, but the council has agreed to improve security on the site.*



Julia Kirkland, candidate in the recent by-election in Court ward, took photos of derelict buildings and addressed a meeting of the council, pleading for action. Julia narrowly missed victory in the by-election.

Three point gap between Labour and the Lib Dems is the narrowest since 2003

A ComRes poll in February, conducted for The Independent on Sunday published support for the main parties as follows :

Conservative 41% (no change from previous poll on 18th January), Labour 25% (-7%), LibDem 22% (+7%), Others 12% (no change).

On Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, there are

23 Residents' Party councillors, 10 LibDem, 4 Conservative and 1 Labour councillor.



IN PRAISE OF OUR COUNCIL

It's not often FOCUS commends our borough council, but in the case of the recent snow, the staff from Operational Services Department were positively heroic! Surrey county council in responsible for "gritting" - but actually it's not gritting, it's rock-salting. When they didn't appear, our refuse collectors went out in vans armed with salt already in store. More salt was then bought in at £50 per tonne because the county couldn't supply any, when that was used up more was ordered at £68 per tonne and when that ran out the price had jumped to £99 per tonne. By then, conditions were a little better. A splendid service from a dedicated bunch of people, but why should we have to prop up a service we already pay for from the county council?

CRIME GOES DOWN

Surrey Police now operate a "common sense" policing policy. It's a new approach in which professional judgement is used to provide effective solutions - to the satisfaction of victims and in pursuit of justice – but not always by way of formal criminal action. The scheme puts satisfaction of the public first rather than chasing national targets. At a meeting with councillors to talk about Epsom and Ewell policing, Surrey Police reported that our notifiable offences had reduced by 15.8%, serious acquisitive offences were down by 14.2%, serious violence down by 52.9% and serious sexual offences down by 10% The Police will begin a "street a week" campaign this year and focus on a wider range of issues over the next few years : lighting, parking, litter, youth robberies, burglary, bogus callers and youth anti-social behaviour. Good news!

REPORT BACK ON PUBLIC MEETING ON EPSOM HOSPITAL

Anyone who attended the meeting on 4th March hoping to hear a clear statement about the future, came away disappointed, but at least there was no bad news! It was confirmed that there is no plan to close the hospital and there will continue to be an A&E. There will probably be a new Stroke unit and the future of Maternity also seemed secure, but both of these are subject to final confirmation. Separation of Epsom from St Helier is still being considered, though indications were that it seemed unlikely. The Trust is going ahead with rebuilding St Helier, phase 1 of which will cost £150 million. Epsom will also need rebuilding, but where the money will come from is unclear.

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AND AROUND COLLEGE WARD ...

RESULTS OF TRAFFIC SURVEY IN COLLEGE ROAD

The following summarises the views of questionnaires returned, the first from people living in College Road, the second from people living in cul-de-sacs off College Road.

From College Road residents : a large majority agreed there are excessive speeds and a large majority don't think there is a problem with commuter parking. The majority would like to see traffic calming measures but speed cushions (like Burgh Heath Road), humps, road tables (like Mill Road) and rumble strips were all unpopular. A small majority was in favour of a residents' parking scheme and a small majority against yellow lines or other parking restrictions.

From residents living in cul-de-sacs off College Road : the majority of respondents feel there is a problem joining College Road, road tables were the preferred traffic calming measure and an even number of residents were for and against a residents' parking scheme.

Conclusion : Residents would probably support some kind of traffic calming in College Road, with road tables probably the preferred option. A residents' parking scheme also has support but the Local Committee refuses to fund this at present. Cllr Anna Jones will be reporting to the county council on the findings of this survey and suggesting a feasibility study takes place. She also has the full analysis of the survey - ring her if you'd like more details.

Thanks to all residents who returned the questionnaire.

Cllr Julie Morris asked for a sign to warn large articulated lorries turning right from the one way section of **Mill Road** into **Bridge Road** because these huge vehicles often get stuck on the junction and can't complete the manoeuvre. The county council says it's parking which causes the problem and wants to paint yellow lines - which seems to be its answer to everything - and only a warning sign was needed.



Still on parking restrictions, the next phase will include double yellow lines in **College Road** around the entrance to Andrews Close. More single yellow lines in **Ashley Road** near Atkins. Single yellow line on south side of **Downs Hill Road** and at junction of **Hillcrest Close** and **Treadwell Road**. On traffic calming, some speed cushions laid in **Downs and Treadwell Roads** have already been dug up and re-laid because they were too small. FOCUS thinks some are still too small the situation is being closely monitored!



L-R, Cllr Christine Key, comedian Tony Hawkes, council Committee chairman Clive Woodbridge, and Julie, at the launch of Tennis for Free in Alexandra Rec in January

TENNIS FOR FREE

Tennis for Free was started by comedian Tony Hawkes and a colleague, to encourage people of all ages to play tennis. It has sponsorship to operate for two years in **Alexandra Rec** (and Court Rec.) Anyone can join in - just go along with your racquet to Alexandra Rec at 10am on Saturday (or Court Rec at 1pm on Saturdays). Ring Cllr Chris Key for details of Tennis for Free or if you'd like to join the Friends of Alexandra Park group.

NEW DOORSTEP COLLECTION ON THE WAY

Part of College ward (the area north of **Alexandra Road**) will get the new doorstep collection service at the end of March. Other roads have to wait until May, for phased introduction of plastic bottle and cardboard collection, collection of food waste (non-compostable and compostable) and fortnightly collection of non-recyclables. Details of the new service are available on www.epsom-ewell-libdems.org.uk ('news stories'), or www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk, or ring Julie.

NEW SPEED LIMIT FOR REIGATE ROAD

Car accidents around the junction with **Longdown Lane North** has prompted the Local Committee to agree to change the speed limit to 30 mph. The new limit between the Ewell by-pass and 100m south-east of Longdown Lane North will be advertised by "gateways" and a vehicle-activated sign flashing 30 mph.

THE GREEN and EWELL DOWNS ROAD

A lively debate on the proposals for electric gates (to replace the manual gates) took place at January's planning committee. Residents had objected and supported the proposals in almost equal numbers and the committee had to be told to stick to the planning considerations, rather than the more emotive arguments, and supported the proposals. The borough councillor for the ward did not vote, presumably confused because of his recent defection to the Conservative Party!

PARKING PROBLEMS IN ALBERT ROAD

Christine is the person to talk to about unauthorised parking on private property in Albert Road. She's in contact with Rosebery Housing, Surrey Council Council and the borough council's enforcement officer and can update you on what's happening.



MOVE BY LIB DEMS FOR DEVELOPMENT BRIEF ON THE DURDANS

Anna is asking the council to prepare a Development Brief for The Durdans (which includes

Lavandou Stables and Jodie's Yard), along the lines of the Brief prepared for the "hypermarket site" in Upper High Street. The council is setting up a working party to find a way forward after refusing development plans for the site (owned by Lord Halifax). Anna

says "though a Development Brief carries no legal standing, consultations with local people and businesses during its preparation offer the community a chance to have a say - developers then know what's likely to be acceptable to the general public and will have a better chance of getting planning permission."

USE THIS SPACE TO SEND US YOUR IDEAS AND GRUMBLES

Epsom & Ewell Liberal Democrats (College), FREEPOST, POBox KT3525, Epsom KT19 9BR). No stamp needed.



(l-r) Councillors Christine, Julie and Anna

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