

Councillor update – Liz Frost

Hi

This is an update on some the Council matters, and activities I have undertaken in recent months.

The calling of the general election meant that for legal reasons most meetings had to be cancelled and re-arranged for after the election. This was quite involved, as cancelling one meeting often impacted on following meetings and led to delays in some work programmes – not to mention the difficulty of working around diary commitments.

Following the change of Government, we are still in a time of uncertainty about future funding, policies etc. Although some announcements have been made, many are broad proposals that still need to be fully formulated. We cannot be sure what will be required until the wording of the relevant legislation has been published and agreed by Parliament.

Council

Our Annual Council meeting was held on 14th May. This is 'Mayor Making' where the mayor for the previous civic year steps down and the next mayor is appointed. The mayor for 2024-25 is Cllr Steve Bridger (Stamford Ward – RA Cllr). Proposed appointments to Council Committees and Panels for the new civic year are ratified at this meeting. I took over as chair of the Environment Committee (having been vice chair last year), am a member of the Financial Strategy Advisory Group, sit on the Health Liaison Panel and am an Epsom & Walton Downs Conservator.

Environment Committee.

Surrey County Council (SCC) hosts several county-wide environment forums that I attend. These include a Waste Strategy Group (looking at the proposed legislative changes relating to waste collection / re-cycling and sharing ideas for reducing waste and increasing re-cycling); and a group working together to encourage a reduction to our carbon footprint and other environmental improvements. As part of this, there are schemes that residents can sign up to that provide hints and you can track your activities and earn points for incentives. See [Surrey Environment Partnership - Reduce Waste & Get Rewards](#) for waste and re-cycling and [BetterPoints - Surrey's Greener Future](#) for travel options.

The 2020 emergency pandemic legislation saw pavement licences introduced to enable premises selling food and drink to operate outside their premises (e.g. on parts of the pavement not owned by them). Over the years there have been extensions and minor modifications to the legislation. The opportunity for arrangements to become permanent was made in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 and we have adopted such a policy.

We are pleased to have introduced a number plate recognition scheme at the Ashley Road car park, which went live on 23rd October. This will end the previous use of the tokens there (so easily dropped / lost) and is designed to be a more efficient process.

Last year our Allotments Working Group had reintroduced site reps' meetings, following their suspension during the pandemic and these are continuing.

Our first Climate Change Action Plan ends this year, and a further 5-year Plan has been developed and adopted, with an ambitious programme. There is more information on the Council website ([Climate Change | Epsom and Ewell Borough Council \(epson-ewell.gov.uk\)](https://www.epson-ewell.gov.uk)).

During the summer school holidays, we provided free morning tennis sessions in the Council-owned courts. We are introducing free Saturday morning group 'park tennis' coaching sessions at three of our parks – see - ([Epsom & Ewell Parks Tennis | Epsom and Ewell Borough Council](#))

Health Liaison Panel (HLP)

At the July meeting we heard from a charity supporting men's mental health and wellbeing in the borough. This enables men to get together to walk and talk, with the target of improving their mental (and physical) wellbeing and reducing the likelihood of them taking their own lives.

A discussion paper from SCC Public Health was also presented. This focussed on the issues around the poor uptake of MMR and Whooping Cough vaccines, the reasons, and the consequences.

Local Plan

We need to update our local plan. Preparing an updated one involves a huge amount of work and a great deal of evidence must be presented to the National Planning Inspector to show that the plan is 'sound'. We are in a particularly difficult position here because of the conflicts - we have very little "brownfield" land that is readily available and suitable for house building.

Many argue that the number of new homes set by the previous Government is higher than our actual need, but that is the target that we have to work to; we want to protect and enhance our valuable green spaces; overdevelopment could destroy the character of the borough, a character much valued by many residents; and we also have to make provision for employment, retail, businesses, sport and leisure in the Plan. However, we are a long way down the path and one of our next steps will be a public consultation of the draft plan - a process called Regulation 19. We are currently on target for this to take place in early 2025, and achieving this is a key priority for the Council. The new government wishes to increase housing numbers (from the current 576 / year required to 817 / year) and we are now waiting the result of their consultation. They proposed that councils nearing submission have until the end of Jan 2025 to submit their plan under the existing NPPF but unfortunately, we will not meet that deadline. I understand that all councils in Surrey have pushed back on that deadline stating it does not give existing plans nearing submission enough time. Some of our residents have been trying to push us to submit our plan early to meet that deadline but this is just not feasible. Expediting the process to try and circumvent the new NPPF and any higher housing target for the Borough is almost certainly doomed to fail. If we submitted a plan without all the evidence and following the prescribed legal requirements, then it would almost certainly be returned "unsound" and cause us more problems. Timings are very tight.

Whilst details of the Government's proposed planning reforms have not been finalised it seems clear that Epsom and Ewell may have to accept higher housing densities and look at all options if it is to provide a new plan that is acceptable to the Inspectorate.

Planning

Planning applications were submitted for new properties in Bucknills Close, with the access for cars etc. via a driveway into Whitehorse Drive. The first application was for six properties. This

was refused last year and went to Appeal to be assessed by National Planning Inspector. A revised planning application for five properties was submitted. I spoke against this at the Planning Committee as there are significant concerns about the safety of vehicles and pedestrians from additional properties using this narrow driveway to access the already busy and congested Whitehorse Drive. The application was refused. The appeal against the first refusal has been decided – the Inspector dismissed it. The applicant has now appealed the refusal of their second application, and we await the outcome.

Hospital

The Residents Society (WERS) Committee recently held an open meeting to enable people to hear about the developments at the hospital. James Blythe, Managing Director of the hospital trust and Chris Rivers, the Director of Estates, Facilities and Capital Projects spoke and answered questions. A report is at [Woodcote \(Epsom\) Residents Society - Local People Looking after Local Interests](#)[Woodcote \(Epsom\) Residents Society | Local People Looking after Local Interests](#).