

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 county council elections are safely out of the way.

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

Value for Money

The Lib Dems reluctantly agreed with the 2.9% county council tax rise, but strongly objected to the details of the budget. Cllr **Colin Taylor** 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 Dem 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.



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 **Colin Taylor** 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

DERELICT BUILDINGS CAMPAIGN

A Lib Dem campaign to persuade the council to deal with **derelict buildings in the borough** has been partially successful:

- Work is needed on the **Gibraltar Recreation Pavilion** for it to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act;
- 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;
- The old **Horton Water Tower** (under private ownership) in Livingstone Park still awaits renovation;
- The **Hollymoor Lane shops** in Longmead cannot be redeveloped in the immediate future because investors pulled out, but the council has agreed to improve security on the site;
- **Horton Chapel** is still awaiting a use, despite the council accruing £163,000 in interest payments from money given by the developers specifically for use on this chapel!



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

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!

Three point gap between Labour and 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%), Lib Dem 22% (+7%), Others 12% (no change).

EPSOM HOSPITAL MEETING

Anyone who attended the recent Town Hall meeting about Epsom Hospital, hoping to hear a clear statement about its future, came away disappointed. There was very little hard news - but at least none of it was bad.

There is no plan to close the hospital - it will continue to provide free NHS treatment and there will continue to be an A&E. There will probably be a new Stroke unit and the future of the Maternity department also seems secure, but both of these are subject to confirmation.

The possible separation of Epsom from St Helier is being considered, but seems unlikely. However 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.

Talks with the Denbies Trust continue, but it was not clear how their proposals would fit in.



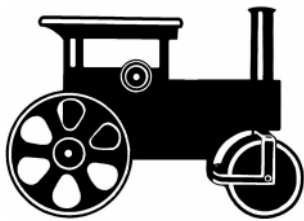
Cllrs Colin Taylor and Julie Morris outside the new Bradbury Wing of Epsom General Hospital.

TOWN WARD NEWS

GRAFFITI

The graffiti on the **Playhouse** has been removed using contractors. However the insurance payout for the "cherry picker" has not been finalised. This means that the graffiti on the **Old Bank** in High Street cannot be removed until a vehicle is hired again.

Meanwhile we continue to report graffiti as it appears - for example on the NTL box in **Grove Road** and at the back of the **Ebbisham Centre**, where it is visible from the railway.



HIGHWAYS

*The footway in **Rosebank** has been repaired and is surviving well with the new Bollards and the increased road width, but the yellow line needs repainting to maintain access for refuse lorries.*

*Consultation is complete on the plans funded by **County Cllr Colin Taylor's** allocation for additional parking spaces outside 31 to 64. Construction is awaiting funding by Surrey County Council.*

***Hook Road** has been completely resurfaced from East Street to Longmead Road, the only road in Epsom & Ewell to get this treatment in 2008-2009.*

*Steel posts funded by **County Cllr Colin Taylor's** allocation are being installed to prevent heavy lorries etc from mounting the footway, instead of the bollards he originally proposed.*

YELLOW LINES

The yellow lines agreed last year which were due to be painted in February got delayed by the snow.

These do not address the problem of **Residents Parking** and in the short term may make parking harder for locals and commuters alike. Both this issue and enforcement of existing lines is regularly raised by **Cllr Kelly** at the Local Committee.

Meanwhile new lines have been asked for on the corners of **Andrews Close**, **Delaporte Close** and **Grove Avenue** (where there is currently white hatching) and there is a request from shop-keepers to allow waiting in a part of **Waterloo Road** outside the rush hour.

The **Local Committee** is due to consider a Residents Parking Scheme in the autumn.



PLANNING

Due to the economic downturn a number of sites that were granted planning permission are not going forward, including the housing on the **Rosebery** playing fields. Despite this there are a number of large developments being planned in the town centre that are due to be considered by the planning committee.

The two most significant are Tesco's request to reinstate the old planning permission granted on appeal for **Upper High Street** and the **URC Church** in Church Street, where the redevelopment plans include student flats, which has now been withdrawn.

The student flats at the **Lintons Centre** are also not going ahead at present. Other sites are being considered. An alternative use as sheltered accommodation is possible.

Meanwhile Gladedale have appealed against the refusal at the old **Magistrates Court** which was turned down due to its bulk.

There is some building work in progress on **South Street**, where work is being carried out on a listed building, but progress is slow.



DOORSTEP RECYCLING

*The recent snow delayed the first phase of extended doorstep recycling, including the **Middle Lane** and **Hawthorne Place** areas.*

*This is now planned for late March, whilst the rest of **Town ward** is due to receive a food waste caddy and a bin for recycling cardboard and plastics in May or June.*

***Flats** and warden assisted homes are not due to get theirs until September, after they have been visited by the recycling officer to determine the best way to accommodate the new bins.*

HOW TO CONTACT YOUR LIB DEM FOCUS COUNCILLORS

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COUNCILLORS' SURGERIES

Lib Dem Councillors' advice surgeries are held in the Rosebery Room in the Ebbisham Centre on the second Saturday of every month, from 10.00 a.m. to 12.00 noon.

These sessions are free of charge and open to all. No appointment is necessary.

The next three surgeries will be on:

- 11th April,
- 9th May,
- 13th June.

Come and meet us!

MOBILE STREET SURGERIES

We continue to do street surgeries around the ward. These are when we walk down your street and deal with any issues that you want to raise.

We have dealt with trees, blocked drains, poorly parked cars, speeding motor bikes, graffiti, litter and neighbourhood issues.

Cllr **Charles Wood** said "Street surgeries are an excellent way for us to walk down every road in the ward and see what the real problems are!"

If we miss you why not visit us in the Ebbisham Centre on the second Saturday of each month. We look forward to meeting you!

GOT A PROBLEM? *Please use this space for any problems, complaints or ideas that you want the **FOCUS** team to take up. Continue on a separate sheet if necessary.*



NAME

ADDRESS

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