

CHAIR'S STATEMENTS TO COUNCIL

Councillor Neil Dallen

Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee

Town Hall relocation to East Street

Further to the December 2023 Full Council decision to relocate the Town Hall to 70 East Street, the planning for the Town Hall move is progressing. This includes establishing a cross-party Member working group who are considering all Member related aspects of the move, for example, Member facilities and Council Chamber options. Other officer working groups are working through the details of the relocation.

Town Hall site

The cross-party working group has met with the consultants, JLL, who are working on a number of options for the site. Members will be updated in September on this work.

Chuter Ede Grants

Grants from the Chuter Ede fund were reintroduced last year. This academic year we are once again contacting secondary schools to identify possible applicants. The grants are small and are aimed at assisting with expenses for students hoping to attend university.

Utility Site

A regeneration of the Utility Site (the old gas works) is being planned by Zenith Land to include desperately needed housing. There is an option to include new state of the art headquarters for Laine Theatre Arts and any financing of this are still being worked through.

A Members briefing was held by the developer at Epsom Methodist Church and a public consultation is under way and closes on 30th July. This is expected to be followed by Zenith submitting a planning application.

Purchase of a house in the borough

The purchase of a 5 bedroom house in the borough is progressing having been funded by the Residential Acquisition Fund, which is for this purpose. This purchase offers the council a longer-term solution to help to alleviate our temporary accommodation issues and homelessness spend.

Armed Forces celebrations

Congratulations and thanks to Cllr Graham Jones, our Armed Forces Champion, who arranged a very successful commemoration of D Day with a short ceremony at the Clock Tower on Thursday 6th June. Everything went ahead smoothly in his absence!

Next was a recognition of Armed Forces Day on 24th June with a 'Fly the Flag' ceremony in the Market Square.

More recently was the Freedom parade in Ewell when the 135 Geographic Squadron marched 'with bayonets fixed' to celebrate 75 years since their formation and take advantage of their 'Freedom of the Borough' entitlement.

Councillor Peter O'Donovan

Chair of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee

Local Plan

Nothing to add from previous Chairman's statement. Work continues on the next more detailed version of the local plan, regulation 19, which will come to LPPC in November 2024.

Members have had 3 briefings on the what the officers have to consider when putting the plan together including;

1. Housing: need, mix, types
2. Economy: the importance of industrial sites. Could also cover Town Centres / Racehorse Industry etc.
3. Infrastructure and the Local Plan
4. The 'Environment': lack of green space identified as a problem; problems with impact of heat.
5. Design

There will be a further briefing after the summer break.

CIL

The committee agreed members of the CIL working party who will be looking at all applications for funding over the coming months.

Epsom Town Centre Master Plan.

This work will be finalised shortly and will come to an LPPC meeting in Sept/Oct 2024. It needs to be completed to form part of the evidence base to be included with the Regulation 19 version of the local plan.

Local Validation Requirements

The Council is obliged to review its Local Validation List every two years.

The Local Validation List has been updated to adopt recent legislative changes and agreed and accepted at the last LPPC meeting.

Enforcement Plan

A new enforcement plan was agreed and adopted at the last LPPC meeting. The Council's Planning Enforcement Plan outlines and explains how the enforcement service is delivered. It includes such matters as the definition of development, the principles of the enforcement service, how to report a breach, processing and prioritisation of cases, how it deals with breaches and the service standards it intends to meet.

<p style="text-align: center;">Councillor Liz Frost Chair of the Environment Committee</p>
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Tennis

The Wimbledon fortnight often motivates people to get out onto the tennis courts. We are keen to encourage more people to keep fit and take part in sports. Council-run tennis courts will be able to be booked at no charge during the mornings from 23rd July till 26th August. We hope this will encourage more people to play tennis and help provide activities for youngsters during the school holidays.

Working Groups

The Environment Committee has agreed the following working groups for this civic year –

- Allotments Working Group – to ensure that the allotment provision in the borough is fit for purpose, efficient and sustainable. Members consist of members of the Environment Committee with a personal interest in Allotments, regardless of party affiliation.
- Car Park Working Group – to look at the borough’s car parking provision. Membership is cross—party. The Environment Committee does not have a Labour representative; therefore, a non-Environment Committee member has been appointed.
- Environment and Sustainability Working Group – to support the delivery of the Council’s commitment to addressing climate change. Membership is cross—party. The Environment Committee does not have a Labour representative; therefore, a non-Environment Committee member has been appointed.

The working groups report their work progress and recommendations to Environment Committee.

<p style="text-align: center;">Councillor Clive Woodbridge Chair of the Community & Wellbeing Committee</p>

Housing and Homelessness

Unfortunately the final year revenue outturn figures for homelessness were worse than anticipated. For the 2023/4 year as a whole the homelessness / housing budget was £440,000 over spent, mainly due to a sharp rise in the number of households in nightly paid accommodation, with the figure standing at 91 at year end, up from 78 at the end of Q3. The C&WB committee recently received a report on the Homelessness Action Plan, reviewing various initiatives taken and others planned, to try and keep these costs to a minimum. The report highlighted progress made in a number of areas, and the fact that we are now fully staffed in our housing team. But while we are successfully preventing homelessness through interventions, we are in effect running just to stand still.

Over the coming year, with the number of households in Temporary Accommodation still above 90, against a budget figure of 75, the outlook is not positive and this will remain one of the biggest - if not the biggest - cost pressures on the council. Without any improvement in those numbers we are heading for a further budget deficit, possibly of over £300,000, for housing and homelessness in 2024/5. The shortage of available and suitable accommodation in the Borough is a major constraint in addressing this issue.

More positively under the C&WB remit, the financial performance of the venues in the past year was generally positive. The Playhouse bar was £22k above budget and performances above budget by £19K, so overall the Playhouse was £39k positive against budget.

The Community and Wellbeing centre was down by £72k compared with the original budget, largely due to the demand for High Needs services not returning to pre-lockdown levels. However Meals and Wheels/Route Call/Community alarm services income was a positive of £32.5k compared to what was originally expected.

Bourne Hall revenues for venue and room hire were above budget by £40k, while the cafe, following its revamp, achieved revenues of £125k, compared with £62k the year before.

The Catering hub previously at the Community and Wellbeing Centre is now based at Bourne Hall and is generating increased revenues, with demand for outside catering growing quickly.

Arts, Culture and Heritage Strategy

The introduction of the council's Arts, Culture and Heritage strategy has proved very positive, with a number of projects and initiatives completed over the past year, aligning with the overall strategic plan and goals as a council. Highlights of 2023/4 included creation of a free digital tour of Nonsuch Gardens; Kids in Museums; the community mural in Upper High St; various co-curated arts projects; and the creation of a dog sculpture from a fallen redwood in Bourne Hall Park (the same artist is now working on four more sculptures in Horton Country Park). Looking ahead to 2024/5 we are planning another six community murals, weather permitting, including in The East Street alleyway; Stoneleigh Clarendon Close; Blenheim Road; and the Playhouse. These will be run as joint projects with community groups. For example the East Street mural will feature distinguished women from Epsom and Ewell's history and will be undertaken together with Girlguiding Epsom.

Also planned are a walking tour of Epsom; interactive sculptures in green spaces; a winter light festival in Bourne Hall; Dementia hub art classes; and a digital tour of Horton Light Railway. The Arts, Culture and Heritage officer, Lucy Buckland, now has an assistant, on a year's placement from UCA, and that will assist with delivery of these projects.

Rainbow Centre

In recent months we have gone out to the market to secure the services of a specialist sports development consultancy to help with the retendering process for the Rainbow leisure centre and after a competitive process FMG Sports and Leisure Consultancy was successful. Members have been invited to a briefing on July 31st on the process from the lead consultant, Damien Adams, who is a director of FMG. The Rainbow Centre contract with GLL expires in September 2025 and while that might seem a long time away the process is a long one and so there is a need to start now. The briefing will give councillors an opportunity to learn about the retender process and also to input into what members want a leisure service for the council to look like in future, which could for example be more than operating a leisure centre.

Epsom Playhouse

A UKSPF funding allocation of £250K will be used to remodel the downstairs bar area of Epsom Playhouse, generating more opportunities to sell refreshments during the intervals, as well as to create a more welcoming daytime space as a cafe and possible venue for arts performances and museum displays. The aim is to use the spending to generate additional income and improve the long term sustainability of the Playhouse. A lift will be installed to open up the upstairs 'Members Bar' area which is essentially unused, and which will also be refurbished, and a new mezzanine floor overlooking the atrium will be created.

Most of the main structural work will have to be carried out in August, when the Playhouse is less used, and so there is a tight time scale. Some of the finishing off and decorative items will be carried out as soon as possible thereafter. It is quite a complex contract which Tony Foxwell is supervising. But I believe it will make a considerable difference to the financial performance of the theatre as well as the overall visitor experience.