

February 2023

Liberal Democrats

FOCUS

From your **College Ward FOCUS team**



COUNCIL'S SCRUTINY SCANDAL

Councillors Not Told about Bad Review from Govt Body

Liberal Democrat councillors are trying to get to the bottom of a Town Hall scandal in which councillors have been kept in the dark about serious problems in the Residents' Association-controlled Council.

They have unearthed a letter containing the Local Government Ombudsman's (LGO) latest annual review sent to Epsom & Ewell Council last July. The LGO is a government body that investigates complaints about local councils. Its review stated that:

"your council failed to respond in time to our correspondence during three investigations. On each occasion, we had to escalate the matter internally and were forced to consider issuing a witness summons and a public report



Is the council keeping secrets that would affect its reputation?

for non-compliance. Such delays in our investigation undermine our role and can result in further distress to complainants."

Yet the council's own Scrutiny Committee, which has a specific responsibility to "receive and review the Local Government Ombudsman's annual report", **was not told about this letter.**

"The council's processes are not working," said Cllr. **Julie Morris**, "and, more importantly, even the council's Scrutiny Committee has not been told about that."

At a recent meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, the Residents' Association Chair was asked if he had been kept informed of all such communications, but he refused to answer the question at that time.

DID YOU KNOW?

You could need photo ID to vote in May



To tackle the potential for voter fraud (thankfully virtually non-existent in the UK), the government is forcing voters to show photo ID when they go to vote at polling stations.

The most common forms of photo ID include passport, driving licence (must include photo), blue badge and senior bus pass. If you don't have accepted photo ID, you can also apply for a Voter Authority Certificate at www.gov.uk or via the Town Hall for a paper application form.

But by far the easiest thing to do is to vote by post! If you don't already have a postal vote, you can apply on the council website or contact us and we will assist you.

OUR ROADS. Your FOCUS team have reported some of our worst-affected roads to Surrey County Council (SCC) including Burgh Heath Road which **Julian Freeman** (pictured) describes as "virtually undrivable". Anyone can report potholes or highway problems – just go to www.surreycc.gov.uk (the Report option is on the main page).



Julian Freeman inspects the dreadful state of Burgh Heath Road



James Lawrence at the existing dojo in Alex Rec

ALEX REC DOJO. £170,000 has been allocated to demolish the existing dilapidated and unsafe dojo in Alexandra Recreation Ground and to install a new fit-for-purpose portable building. **James Lawrence** (pictured), a former dojo user in younger days, says "this is a wonderful opportunity to make the dojo available to a wider audience".

KEEPING IN TOUCH AND WORKING HARD ALL YEAR ROUND

MAKE SURE YOU HAVE YOUR SAY

The borough council's proposals for the new Local Plan are finally available for public comment. The consultation ends on 19th March, so make sure you have your say before then. Details are on the council's website at <https://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/local-plan>.



remove all Green Belt sites from their Local Plan but is awaiting information from central government before doing this.

The Local Plan is about more than just *where* we build houses. It's also about *how* we build them - design, the surrounding infrastructure, the right mix of social, affordable and private housing. A new Local Plan provides a golden opportunity for the council to develop housing policies that address our climate emergency, insisting on measures that include renewable energy and new homes which are carbon neutral.

The public consultation is made more difficult at present as we still don't know the government's position regarding building on green belt land (as reported in the previous edition of **FOCUS**.) The Liberal Democrat council in neighbouring Mole Valley is proposing to

Residents may have recently heard of a scheme being promoted by our MP which suggests 5000 homes could be built on the **Kiln Lane and Longmead** industrial areas. As initially attractive as this may seem, this solution has already been discussed and discounted. It would inevitably require a displacement of local businesses, leading to a loss of jobs in the borough, much of the land isn't owned by the council or is on long leases, and it simply couldn't be achieved within the Local Plan period. The draft Local Plan therefore suggests that it will support mixed use development **ONLY** in the event that there is no loss of employment floorspace.

Our Conservative MP would be better employed in lobbying his own government about the green belt. At first, the **Tories decreed that councils would have to build on green belt** in order to fulfil the unreasonable housing targets that they themselves had imposed on local councils. Now they're saying they're not so sure. **No-one wants to build on the green belt, so**

it's time that the Tories stopped dithering, made up their minds and stopped blaming everyone else for the mess they themselves have created.



Remember this FOCUS headline from 3 years ago?

The Council has at last decided to update its rules for members of the public to ask questions at council meetings. Once again, you can ask questions about matters that are on the agenda of that committee (except Planning committee). You must still submit your question in writing before the meeting, but now only three days before rather than ten days before.

Despite these improvements in democracy, the RA majority threw out of the current review further changes proposed by Cllr. **Julie Morris** to make petitioning the council easier.

NEWS AND ACTION

SEWAGE SUCCESS

Nationally, Liberal Democrats have finally worn down the Government on sewage. The government has accepted a Lib Dem proposal to ensure that it will not invest in water companies unless they produce a costed and time-limited plan to end sewage discharges into local rivers. **Helen Maguire**, our parliamentary spokesperson, who has campaigned against sewage dumping, is delighted by the news. "I hope this signals an end to sewage being dumped in the Hogsmill and nearby River Mole," she said.

MORE PAY AT THE TOWN HALL

Cllr. **David Gulland** voted against a pay increase for councillors this year but was outvoted by the Residents Association. All councillors will receive an annual allowance of around £4,000. Council staff will receive a 3% increase this year (but probably deserve more). The pay scale for the Chief Executive is increasing by more than 15%.

UPGRADED CCTV IN EPSOM

The council will be using a Safer Streets award of £128,000 to replace the CCTV cameras in Epsom. Other measures to make streets safer for the night-time economy have also been approved.

LLOYDS PHARMACY TO CLOSE

Lloyds Pharmacy will be closing its outlet in the Kiln Lane Sainsbury's sometime in 2023 along with 236 further outlets in Sainsbury's stores nationwide.

CAR-PARK CHARGES TO RISE

Car parking charges are to rise by an average of 6%, but the short-stay charge in most Epsom car-parks will stay the same as now.

COLLEGE WARD LOCAL SURVEY

Survey Inside - Tell Us Your Views Today



The FOCUS team has been calling on residents to ask their views on various local and national issues. If we haven't called on you yet, or if you were out when we called, you can fill in our survey of residents' views online by going to www.epsom-ewell-libdems.org.uk/your-views, or you can use the QR code above.

MEET THE TEAM:



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