

# Esher Matters

The Esher Residents Association Newsletter for Esher, Hersham  
Riverside & Lower Green Autumn 2020 No.101



Esher Place House  
under threat



Jenrick takes over  
Sandown decision



Hersham by pass  
controversy

## SURREY CC'S OFF-ON PLANS TO ABOLISH ELMBRIDGE COUNCIL

**Surrey CC, best known for our appalling roads, dangerous cuts to fire services, damning Ofsted reports and inadequate financial management, still wants to deliver all your local services.**

This is in spite of Robert Jenrick, Housing, Communities and Local Government minister apparently abandoning his proposals for a swathe of all powerful 'unitary councils' across the country as part of his autumn 'Recovery and Devolution' White Paper.

Tim Oliver, Surrey County Council's Conservative leader and former leader of Elmbridge BC, originally said Jenrick's U-Turn 'effectively kills our bid'. However, he later backtracked on this, promising 'to determine the best system of local government for Surrey'. For this read a unitary authority.

**This would mean the abolition of Surrey's highly effective eleven district and borough councils, including Elmbridge BC - only three of which are under Conservative control. Gerrymandering anyone?**

Currently, Surrey CC provides adult and children's services, highways maintenance, education, libraries and the community recycling centres. Elmbridge BC delivers the much valued, more localised services - organising your refuse collection, overseeing planning and the creation of the new Local Plan, providing meals on wheels, running social housing, parks and open spaces, environmental health and licensing.

# Surrey CC to kill off Elmbridge BC?

The leader believes a 'unitary authority', running all these services from one centre, would "deliver more value for money and a simplified and more accountable system of local government for residents".

**We disagree. Surrey CC has an appalling record of failure. Our roads are a disgrace, libraries are disappearing, its Fire & Rescue Service has been rated unsafe, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) has been critical of its failings in Special Education Needs and Disabilities, its Youth Offending Services are rated inadequate and it has performed poorly in Ofsted reports on Children's Services. This is not an authority fit for purpose and certainly not one to be taking on the responsibility of our valuable local services.**



Ironically, it is during this epidemic that the borough and district councils have shown their true value – supporting local people and businesses with speed and agility. In Elmbridge's case that means paying out £24.6M in business grants, distributing £50,000 to food banks, delivering 30,000 meals on wheels, moving 28 rough sleepers into settled accommodation, making 19,000 calls to vulnerable residents.

Borough and district councils are decision makers with in-depth knowledge of their area, who understand the concerns of residents. For instance, by taking over responsibility for planning, decisions in a unitary authority may be made by a group of councillors not local to Esher, who may lack any knowledge of our area or have an understanding or even care about the impact of their decisions.

The closeness and connection of district and borough councils to their communities is even more important as we enter an economic crisis as a result of lockdowns.

At the time of going to press, Surrey CC's leader remains determined to press ahead with his proposals. If you are concerned about this, then we urge you to take an active part in the #Residents Against Surrey Unitary - you can sign the petition and find out more at [www.rassu.org.uk](http://www.rassu.org.uk)

# Hersham bypass controversy

2019's petition of 2,892 signatures, following the unfortunate road death of a resident, demanded a crossing on the A244 Hersham bypass.

As a response, Surrey CC took advantage of the Government's Active Travel scheme (which favours pedestrians and cyclists) and removed one lane of traffic, putting in an enlarged cycle lane and three pedestrian refuge points.

Surrey CC's lack of consultation and the heavy congestion caused by construction of the scheme, provoked much anger and a petition was raised, opposing the works. This resulted in Surrey CC pausing the final stages of the scheme until a re-evaluation could be made of peak hour traffic flows.

The Esher Residents' Association continues to support this scheme because it seems to be the only way to get Surrey CC to make the road safer.

We will monitor the results of the changes, but it's worth noting that not everyone in Hersham, nor in the wider local area objects, as has been suggested by this second petition.

It is already apparent that, on a road notorious for speeding, traffic speeds have dropped, crossing the road is already safer and traffic noise has decreased considerably.

Surrey CC has agreed to adjust the scheme, or drop it altogether, if it is felt to cause too much congestion and the ERA endorses this approach.



# Esher Place House under threat



**Esher Place House** is being sold by *Unite the Union* to developer Birchwood Homes, who have lodged planning proposals for the conversion of this historically significant house into twenty-two, two bedroom apartments, with an extension block providing eight additional apartments and a further seven (possibly sixteen) houses to be built in the grounds.

The house was listed Grade II in 1975 but no interior descriptions were included, nor were the grounds which include a grass amphitheatre and sunken garden by Sir Edwin Lutyens, a statue of Crouching Venus, the Pelham Urn (the only other listing for this property) and a 335 year old Tulip Tree, reputedly the oldest specimen in Europe.

In 1805, the Esher Place estate was bought by stockbroker John Spicer. At that time, the house (now Wayneflete Tower) was located on the banks of the River Mole having provided a retreat for Prime Minister, Henry Pelham.



*Lady Helen Vincent and Pelham's Urn in Esher Place garden. (L. Rothschild, 1904)*

Spicer stripped away all the additions that noted architect William Kent had made for Pelham. The materials and interiors were salvaged and used for the new building of Esher Place House to the Grecian design of Edward Lapidge. Lapidge was another noted English architect who held the post of County Surveyor of Surrey and was the designer of Kingston Bridge.

In 1895, Sir Edgar and Lady Helen Vincent bought the property and commissioned Achille Duchene, French landscaper and George Thomas Robinson to design a country estate residence in the French chateau style. 18th century interiors were even brought from Paris. The surviving 19<sup>th</sup> century interior architecture is easily comparable to Waddesdon Manor and also perhaps to some of the interiors of Mentmore Towers.

It would seem that Birchwood Homes has assumed, quite inaccurately, that the existing Esher Place House is simply a late Victorian refurbished and extended version of the original 1805 Spicer residence, dismissive of the works carried out in the intervening years and of its earlier significant past.

Unquestionably, the renowned architects responsible for the evolution of Esher Place House determine its fine credentials and national historic interest. However, the endless catalogue of eminent visitors that include royalty, aristocracy, diplomats, prime ministers, cabinet ministers, business leaders, authors, actors and even a Russian ballerina make it an equally remarkable part of English social history too. The Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII (Duke of Windsor), King George VI, Herbert Henry Asquith, Winston Churchill, Cecil Rhodes, Jane Austen, Henry James and Anna Pavlova are included in this impressive procession of guests.

Elmbridge BC must address the historic significance of Esher Place House before considering any development proposals. Permitting the current plans will be a national travesty as highly important interiors and the grounds will be destroyed forever.



Source: Historic England Archive

# St. George's Church repainted

Grade 1 listed St. George's Church is one of the oldest buildings in Esher. It remains consecrated and is now in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust with continuous support from the local Friends of St. George's group.



Like many older buildings, maintenance is an ongoing issue. Recently there has been concern regarding the decorative state of the windows and doors. Fortunately generous support from the Friends group has enabled these elements to be repaired and decorated. This work was undertaken by Paul Fielding, who is also chair of the Esher Residents Association.

Just off the High Street, behind The Bear, the church and churchyard provide a quiet, calm environment and are always worth a visit. A date for the church's reopening will be posted on the ERA website.

The Friends of St. George's Church is keen to attract new members with an interest in the continued preservation of this historic building. If interested please contact Michael Phillips (who is on the Friends committee) via the ERA website.

Thanks must go to all those who have helped bring this work to fruition: this includes ERA Chairman Paul Fielding whose skill, enthusiasm and dedication has ensured a high quality result and the Friends of St. George's Church, in particular, Clive Thompson who has overseen the project.

Thanks also to councillor Richard Williams who drew it to the attention of Jon Kilner the Elmbridge Conservation officer whose endorsement was required by the Churches Conservation Trust in order for work to proceed.

...and finally, thanks to **Brewers Surbiton** who helped with paint matching (it's Wimborne White by the way) and paint supply.

# What's going on in your area?

## Funding delay for Cobb's Arch path

Our plans for the pathway from Cobb's Arch to Lower Green Road have had to be put on hold due to the Covid epidemic. We had planned to put in for CIL funding to construct two paths, but all bids were stopped as the Council froze all but its most essential activities. The moment CIL funding bids are reopened, we will resume our efforts for this important piece of work.

## West End's unwelcome gates

A gate was recently installed across the small lane that allows access from Park Close to the Moore Place footpath to Esher. Residents have complained to the ERA about this, as the only way to the footpath now is via the right of way on West End Lane which can be dangerous in winter.



We are looking into what can be done to restore access via Park Close. It would help a future appeal if anyone who uses this route could let David Bramley (07899 874372) or Doug Fryer ([dougfmeadowcot@hotmail.com](mailto:dougfmeadowcot@hotmail.com)) know how long they have been doing so.

Most long term (20+years) users have already contacted us, but Surrey CC has advised that appeals **will be considered from anyone using the route in the last 20 years.**

## Sandown Park update

Following Elmbridge BC's rejection of the Jockey Club's application to build 318 luxury apartments and a 150 room hotel on Sandown Park, the Jockey Club has appealed and an 8 day public inquiry with the Planning Inspectorate will go ahead in November. However, Housing Minister Robert Jenrick has called in the application and he alone will decide if it goes ahead. We secured a half page in The Times, revealing links between the Jockey Club and prominent Conservative members and donors, in the hope that Mr Jenrick will keep his hands clean.



# What's your vision for Esher?

The ERA has worked hard to protect Esher's heritage and hold back the tide of over-development for many years. But we want to make sure that our policies are still in line with the views of the majority of the residents we represent.

We also want to gather your ideas for how Esher could develop in the post-Covid world. Some questions we want to address include:

- Does the town centre meet your needs? How could we improve it?
- What local services need improving?
- Do Lower Green, West End and Hersham need additional services?
- How should we balance the conflicting demands of vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists?
- What are your biggest local concerns that we should prioritise?

A link to the survey can be found at [esher-residents.com/survey2020](http://esher-residents.com/survey2020)

Please share your views with us.

## Introducing David Young our candidate for May 6th

David Young will be standing as our ERA candidate for the local elections in May 2021. He is passionate about protecting the Green Belt, improving air quality, re-vitalising the town/village centres and making our area safer for families and local residents to walk or cycle. David opposes the current raft of high-density housing plans and will push to encourage re-development plans that are more sustainable and in keeping with our current environment.



## Support the ERA...join the ERA

Unlike the national parties, we are run entirely by volunteers and this newsletter, our website and all other activities are paid for by donations from people like you. If you've enjoyed this newsletter and would like us to continue our work, please do contribute - we suggest £10, but if you'd prefer to give less, (or more!) that's fine too. Donate online: Esher Residents Association Sort code: 20-90-56 Account no: 00232025.

**We welcome residents** who would like to join our Committee to help us understand their needs, represent a particular area of the Ward or to contribute to policy. You can devote as little or as much time as you wish - just email us at [helloesher@icloud.com](mailto:helloesher@icloud.com)

