

Ashtead Independents

NEWSLETTER



Issue 33
March 2023

WHY THE INDEPENDENTS ARE GOOD FOR ASHTEAD

As you might expect I am grateful for the support the Ashtead Independents get from all our residents at the elections. We all work hard to try and improve the village in any way we can.

We might not always get it right but we always have the good of our residents and the village at the centre of our thinking.

We liaise with the Ashtead Residents Association (ARA) on a monthly basis and I have attended their monthly meetings in the APMH for many years now, providing information of interest to the committee on issues and projects occurring in Ashtead both recent and in the future.

We both have the same objectives and these need to continue to ensure Ashtead has both the

voice and the presence in key meetings of both councils.

The Ashtead Independents have influence in Mole Valley DC, having members sitting on all committees, whilst I am part of the Independent / Residents Association Group at Surrey County Council which is currently the official Opposition to the Tory administration, and I can assure you all of us speak up for Ashtead whenever possible.

Ashtead, having that Independent voice, is vital in these fora enabling us to counter the National Parties represented elsewhere and ensuring local residents views are heard.



Chris Townsend

County Councillor Chris Townsend

ASHTEAD HAS CLOUT AND USES IT WHEN IT NEEDS IT

Has it occurred to you how often Dorking or Leatherhead get mentioned in Council communications, yet Ashtead - the largest settlement of people in Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) - is seldom mentioned and hardly ever recognised as the largest community?

And why does MVDC insist on only advising those residents closest to a problem when often many other houses are affected?

Which brings me to the recent petition organised by local resident Steve Kershaw which attracted more than 1500 signatures – almost double the quantity required – in a very short space of time.

Knocking on doors and talking to residents restored my faith in the will of the people – that will must prevail at all times.

Councillor Alan Reilly

ASHTEAD LOSES ONE COUNCILLOR AS WARDS MERGE



David Hawksworth

The LibDem controlling party at Mole Valley District Council decided to reduce the number of Councillors from 41 to 39, and continue to have elections in three years out of four.

As a consequence of this and the requirement of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to have roughly the same number of electors per Councillor, the number of wards in Ashtead is reduced for the May elections from three to two, and the number of councillors representing Ashtead residents from seven to six.

"This could have been avoided if the Council had adopted the alternative single-Councillor Ward model favoured by the Independents."

Councillor David Hawksworth

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ASSTEAD COMMUNITY COMES TOGETHER TO SAVE YOUTH CLUB

In response to budget reductions in 2017, parents, the Ashtead youth worker, Ashtead councillors & Rotarians, began the process to establish a new charity to fundraise in support for our longstanding provision for young people. We then heard from Surrey Council Council in 2019 that due to funding pressures, they would no longer be supporting youth work in communities. The Friends of Ashtead Youth Club charity stepped in to take on the running of the building and teamed up with East Surrey YMCA to deliver our youth work.

Following the Covid lockdowns, we relaunched our Youth Clubs in July 2021 and I believe there is a lot for us to be proud of.....

- Rally Karting is back up and running, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (sponsored by Ashtead Rotary) has returned after being absent for a number of years, we have delivered exciting opportunities in the School holidays, and Youth Clubs are busier than ever with over 60 regular youngsters every week.
- Across the different groups that use the building we offer something on four nights in the week to those aged 11 to 18, and recently Chris Townsend (Surrey County Councillor), paid for our new sofas to update the venue.
- The club caters for over 200 different young people a week across all age groups and we also have the Inclusive Social Club and two wellbeing groups that serve our adult community.



Councillor Mary Cooper

"This is something we should all be rightly proud of.

Thanks to Ashtead Rotarians & all the groups who help keep the projects financed, we are managing to hold our own.

We would like to say thank you for all your support."

Follow us on Facebook:
Friends of Ashtead Youth Club.
Web: www.aycfriends.org

Councillor Mary Cooper

"THE MESSAGE IS CLEAR - YOU CANNOT TRUST THE LIB DEMS"

At a time that all are facing increased bills and limited income, the Dorking-centric group of Lib-Dems currently running the Council have just decided to increase council tax bills by the maximum 2.99% - any higher amount would have needed a local referendum.

But the real sting in the tail is their ballooning budget which will see millions of pounds poured into council owned buildings in central Dorking. Such capital expenditure can be funded by either borrowing or selling other assets.

The Lib Dems used their whipped vote which means there will either be borrowings of over £3.7 million, costing around £300,000 a year in interest, or community assets will have to be sold.



Councillor Chris Hunt

"It is crazy to commit to expenditure without having a clear plan for where the money is coming from. Not only does their day to day revenue budget have £3.5 million of 'budget balancing measures to be identified for 2024-2026', but their big spend capital budget has further millions of pounds of spending, with £1million plus on consultants.

"Either they want to saddle everyone with debt or they can read the writing on the wall that they are going to be removed at the next elections. They have been consulting residents in Dorking about selling off the community football facility there and residents are aghast. It seems the political party currently running the Council is so desperate to raise money they are willing to sacrifice a key modern facility so they can pour money into council buildings.

"In some of the cruellest ways of extracting money from residents at the current time, Lib Dems are putting up the cost of meals at the Fairfield Day Centre by 10% and penalising schools who want to recycle by increasing the cost of a bin collection by a whopping 11.8%. The message is clear – you cannot trust the Lib Dems with caring for our elderly or our young, let alone managing to control the impact of their ideas on your finances."

Councillor Chris Hunt



Patricia Wiltshire



Volunteers clearing overgrowth at Ashtead Park.

ASHTEAD PARK RENAISSANCE UNDER WAY

Ashtead Park's renaissance is underway with the Ashtead Independents, together with other local associations, launching its refurbishment late last November.

Frustrated by the lack of proper management The Independent group's two world renowned biologists, Councillors, Prof. David Hawksworth CBE and Prof. Pat Wiltshire, persuaded Mole Valley District Council to create a new post of Tree and Countryside Officer, to take responsibility for developing long-term management plans, enhancing the wildlife, and undertake restoration for the benefit of wildlife as well as ensuring enjoyment of these lovely places by local residents.

There is every hope that the vision will now begin to be realised. At the start of this year volunteers returned to the Park to start clearing away the undergrowth in an effort comparable to the work done on Ashtead Common and the Rye Brook Meadows.

In the longer term, your Ashtead Independent Councillors would like to launch an Ashtead Park User Group, to help guide the development of the long-term management plan and ensure it meets the needs of a wide range of users.

Ashtead Park is an important biodiverse site which is why we have campaigned for the last three years to encourage the Council staff to put in place a long-term management plan which is the first step in reversing the neglect. But the Council cannot do everything, so it was really encouraging that Deepdene Volunteers, Ashtead Common Volunteers, representatives of the Ashtead Residents Association, and the Leatherhead and District Angling Society have all rolled their sleeves up and pitched in to help. Any further volunteers will be most welcome.

Further information about the history of Ashtead Park and the work being done there can be found at our website: www.ashteadindependents.org

Councillor Patricia Wiltshire

BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR ASHTEAD POND

During the heat of last summer, the water in Ashtead Pond virtually disappeared, leaving fish gasping and floundering on the surface of the black silt. Then worrying growths of blue-green algae colonised the exposed silt and the whole surface became smelly and toxic.

The greatest worry was that children could fall in and drown in the sloppy deep mess. I therefore insisted that the Council cordon off the area and dredge the basin so that we could get deeper water back into the pond. Over 200 tons of silt were removed but it was not possible to take it all away with the budget allowed.

I also asked for the scrub and brambles and remaining reeds, sedges, and willows to be removed, and for the trees to be pollarded. The Tree and Countryside Manager of MVDC was very helpful and this was all carried out to plan.

The very good news is that we have now secured Council funding for carrying on dredging this year. Hopefully, most of the remaining deep silt can now be taken away and we can expect a greater volume of water accumulating in the basin.

With the trees severely pollarded, the pond's future looks brighter than before. The waterfowl have already decided to come back, and we can look forward to getting back our lovely village pond once more.

But remember to feed the birds with peas and sweetcorn and not bread!

Councillor Patricia Wiltshire



While the trees around the pond, photographed here last April, may look nice, they did considerable damage by dumping tons of leaves into the pond over the years and sucked scarce water out of the pond, particularly during the dry season. The Council has since cut back the trees and pollarded others to avoid future problems.

DELAYED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN PUTS BRAKES ON GREEN BELT BUILDING AT ERMYN WAY

Mole Valley District Council has reacted to Minister Michael Gove's recent pronouncement that Green Belt should not be used for building to meet unmet housing targets, and that housing targets should be determined locally rather than centrally, by asking the planning inspector to modify the draft local plan by deleting all Green Belt sites.

For Ashtead, the major concern was the proposal to put housing on the Ermyn Way site, so enraging those local residents who, among other things, felt the infrastructure could not cope with the scale of development in the area.

However, the Inspector has said 'no' to MVDC's request as the current National Planning Policy Framework has not yet formally changed and so the status quo remains. That said, the Inspector has indicated that the process of formulating a local plan can be paused until the Government's new position is formalised. This suggests no further action until after the May elections by which time, the Government's position will become clear.

So, we wait.....

Councillor Garry Stansfield

RECREATION GROUND PROPOSALS - DECISION DELAYED

Ashtead Football Club's proposal to install a new artificial pitch surrounded by 4.5–5m tall wire fencing had already been granted planning permission, but a decision to proceed rests with the Mole Valley District Council as landowner.

Many residents had been unaware of this proposal, and when it came to their attention last summer there was an outcry by residents resulting in a public meeting and 1,166 petition which qualified for debate by the full Council.

In addition, residents were invited to e-mail Chris Grayling MP with their views for or against; he received over 200 e-mails of which 95% were opposed to the proposal.

As a result, the Council's Cabinet postponed making a decision. It is now unlikely that this will now come to Cabinet until after the May election.

The basis of the public concern is not for any desire to limit the good work of the Ashtead Football Club which is well recognized, but arises from the siting of the new pitch, the public being excluded by an obtrusive high fence, a reduction in the area open for other children to play, impact on Ashtead Village Day, floodlights and noise, obstruction of a public right of way, and the use of an artificial plastic turf over which there are health concerns.

Councillor David Hawksworth

Your Councillors:

Common Ward



David Hawksworth

councillor.hawksworth@
molevalley.gov.uk

07551 773640



Patricia Wiltshire

councillor.wiltshire@
molevalley.gov.uk

01372 272087

Village Ward



Mary Cooper

councillor.cooper@
molevalley.gov.uk

01372 273489



Chris Hunt

councillor.hunt@
molevalley.gov.uk

07725 174146



Alan Reilly

councillor.reilly@
molevalley.gov.uk

01372 802489

Park Ward



Garry Stansfield

councillor.stansfield@
molevalley.gov.uk

07544 102119

Surrey County Council



Chris Townsend

chris.townsend@
surreycc.gov.uk

01372 272076

www.ashteadindependents.org

Councillor Harper

Councillor David Harper, who had been elected as an Ashtead Independent candidate for Mole Valley District Council's Park Ward in 2016 and 2021 was removed from membership in August 2022 following the revelation that he was a member of the Conservative Party. Paragraph 6 of the Ashtead Independents constitution requires that membership is "open only to persons who are not members of any national political party".

COUNCILLOR SURGERIES

Ashtead's Independent councillors are restarting monthly surgeries at which residents can meet their County and District Councillors to discuss any issues of concern.

The surgeries will be at Ashtead Library (Woodfield Lane) from 14.00-16.00 on the first Saturday of each month, starting on 4 March 2023.

At least two Councillors will be present each time, and the Library Service is making an office available so any discussions can be in confidence.

No booking is necessary - and there is on-site parking - just drop in anytime during the two hour slots.

We are grateful to Surrey County Council and the Ashtead Library for making this venue available to us.

HELPING THE ASHTEAD INDEPENDENTS...

We are all residents of Ashtead, concerned about the character and well-being of the Village, and committed to engaging only in local issues and to taking national party politics out of local government. We form the Informal Independent Group within the Council separate from either the Conservative or Liberal Democrat Groups.

Our constitution recognises that all members are totally independent, and we have no whip or single manifesto, and do not always vote the same way at Council meetings.

We elect a minimum of officers to ensure smooth-running of the group, at an AGM held each May, but the officers are not authorised to interpret or dictate policies or principles without the total consent of all members.

We have a revitalised website where we post items of topical and local interest from time to time - see:

www.ashteadindependents.org

If you support our aims and would like to become more involved, do come and chat to any of us!

