

Ashtead Independents NEWSLETTER



Issue 37
Spring 2026

Facing the future:

'East Surrey Council' to replace Mole Valley and Surrey County Council

With effect from April 2027, both Surrey County Council and Mole Valley District Council will cease to exist. For our area there will be a new 'Unitary' Council – East Surrey – which will cover all of Mole Valley plus neighbouring Elmbridge and Epsom & Ewell, as well as Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge.

In May this year there will be elections to a 'shadow' East Surrey Council. This new body will begin to take over responsibilities from Surrey County Council and Mole Valley District Council, eventually assuming full control of local government services in April 2027, replacing both SCC and MVDC completely.

Ashtead will have just two places on this new East Surrey Council, and it is vitally important that Ashtead is represented by experienced councillors with an understanding of local government. Our representatives will need to be able to work with other groups on the new council to ensure that Ashtead's interests are properly represented. It is also essential that they are local people who are aware of local needs.

The Independent group has chosen **Cllr Chris Hunt** and **Cllr Andy Smith** as our candidates for the two places on the new Council.

Ashtead votes no to a parish council

Following a confusing 'Community Governance Review' consultation held by Mole Valley Council at the end of 2025, a postal ballot was held at the beginning of this year in which Ashtead people were asked if they wanted to create a parish council for Ashtead. On a turnout of just 24.74%, a majority of voters (1,562) rejected the proposal, with 1,235 voting for it.

Those in favour of a parish council had pointed to the democratic deficit they felt would result from 'Local Government Reorganisation' and the reduction in the number of elected representatives Ashtead will have from 2027 onwards. Those against the proposal expressed concerns about the cost implications and additional bureaucracy, the rushed consultation process and the lack of clarity in Council communications. Many residents were left confused as to what difference it would make to Ashtead. Ours is not the only community to reject the idea of a parish council, as voters in Leatherhead and Fetcham have also voted against.

Success! Playground investment is on its way

Ashtead Independent councillors have secured a major new investment – more than £900,000 – to refurbish and upgrade the children's play area in the recreation ground off Barnett Wood Lane. This follows continued representations by Ashtead Independent councillors who met the Council's Parks and Environment Officers on-site to discuss options for improvements.

The money for the rebuild of Ashtead's playground will come from the Community Infrastructure Levy. Rather than being taken from your Council Tax, this money comes from builders and developers seeking planning permission. To ensure that the new facilities meet the needs of local people, Ashtead Independent councillors have secured a commitment from the Council to hold a public consultation on the proposed changes.

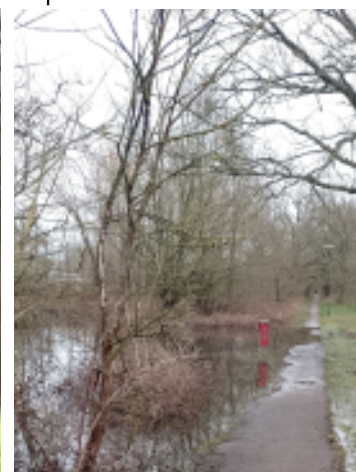
Your Independent Councillors have also assisted community groups in obtaining grants totalling £200,000 from the Community Infrastructure Levy for projects including: tennis court resurfacing, Scout hall flooring, cricket pavilion refurbishment, Green Lane Crossing footpath, Ashtead Peace Memorial Hall insulation and LED lights, and upgrade of the car park toilet facilities (with provision for baby-changing).

An end to Woodfield flooding?

For many years, large areas of the Woodfield near Ashtead station have been submerged in water during much of the winter. The path running alongside the station carpark has often been impassable. On advice from a respected local historian, Cllr Patricia Wiltshire located a drain covered with brambles and asked the Council to cut back the vegetation to expose it. Further investigation revealed that drains owned by Network Rail and APCOA (the carpark operator) were blocked. Thankfully, most of the water has now drained away, so we know there is a remedy and hope that flooding at Woodfield will be a thing of the past.



Flooding across footpath



Draining in progress

County Council Budget 2026

In February, Surrey County Council met to agree its final budget before the move to two new Unitary Authorities (East Surrey and West Surrey) in April 2027. The Independent Group, which includes Ashtead Cllr Chris Townsend, proposed a series of amendments, engaging constructively with other groups and parties on SCC and securing agreement on these amendments which include: expansion of autism friendly school initiatives, a comprehensive review of SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and mainstream school places, and a review of SCC-funded school buses and Home to School Transport to identify opportunities for more integrated provision. This is an example of how Independent councillors can influence and change things for the better.

'Spend, Spend, Spend!'

Ashtead Independent councillors have continued to challenge the LibDem ruling group at MVDC and their continued high spending of local taxpayers' money. At the February Council meeting, Ashtead councillors voted against the administration's proposed budget, which included making financial commitments that go beyond the April 2027 merger of Mole Valley with neighbouring districts and boroughs.

Budget overspends on LibDem pet projects such as Dorking Halls (total £14.7million) and Pippbrook House (more than £2m) means revenue expenditure will increase by 23% this year. This will have to be funded by increased net borrowing. We have highlighted when budgets are poorly managed, costs running into millions incurred on dilapidation and missed rent reviews, and questioned why Dorking should gain most from capital investment. There have also been rising costs on the so-called 'Transform Leatherhead' joint venture with developers Kier.

LibDems vote to put up parking charges

At Mole Valley Council's Budget meeting in February, Cllr Gerry Sevenoaks proposed a motion on behalf of Ashtead Independents to freeze the parking charges at MVDC-owned carparks. The ruling Liberal Democrat group opposed the motion and voted it down, choosing to increase parking charges by 5%.

Cllr Sevenoaks commented: "We wanted to keep down costs for shoppers who are struggling with the consequences of the cost-of-living crisis, and to support our local shops and businesses at this difficult time." It would only have cost the Council £47,000 but the LibDems said it was unaffordable, despite the fact they have just agreed to spend a further £3.7million on refurbishment of Dorking Halls.

Your Mole Valley Councillors Ashtead Lanes and Common Ward



Andy Smith



Patricia Wiltshire



Chris Hunt

Your Mole Valley Councillors Ashtead Park Ward



Mary Cooper



Gerry Sevenoaks



Garry Stansfield

Surrey County Councillor Chris Townsend



Ashtead Independents website
www.ashteadindependents.org

Save the Post Office in The Street!

The post box in The Street has recently been sealed up by Royal Mail in preparation for installation of a 'Digital Post Box' (to allow prepaid small parcels and letters to be deposited without going into the Post Office). This would seriously affect Raj and his team as it could make our village Post Office economically unviable. A petition to Royal Mail has been started and we would urge residents to sign it and save our local Post Office – an important community asset.

EAST SURREY COUNCIL ELECTION

7 MAY 2026

You have two votes. Please use both votes to allow Independents to continue working hard to protect Ashtead.

**Vote for Chris Hunt
and Andy Smith**



More threats to our local countryside

Following the LibDem ruling group at Mole Valley Council pushing through approval for a large housing development on green fields off Ermyn Way, LibDem councillors also voted to approve a scheme for a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) on Green Belt land off Barnett Wood Lane. This was despite strong opposition from local residents and environmental groups, and from ward councillors Andy Smith and Patricia Wiltshire. Cllr Smith spoke against the BESS proposal at the planning committee meeting, but the LibDems pushed it through, overriding local objections.

Cllr Smith comments: "This shows how vulnerable our local countryside has become under a LibDem-controlled council. Not only have they voted to allow building on Green Belt countryside in Ashtead and Leatherhead, against the wishes of the local community, but the LibDem administration is promoting a hideous development with enormous tower-blocks on Bull Hill – which means yet more loss of green space."