

# Ashtead Independents

## NEWSLETTER



Issue 30

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### Working on Your Behalf

Your Independent Councillors have all had a busy time dealing with residents' problems, issues, and queries – and have been able to help substantially as you will see elsewhere in this Newsletter. However, the rigidity of Council protocols often frustrates our aspirations, irrespective of the strength of feeling and the amount of time we spend. We keep informing, persuading, insisting, and trying. It is an uphill struggle at times, even though we do have our successes.

#### Planning Department

Complaints are often made against the Planning Department, but Planners do operate within strict guidelines and policies. Some decisions may seem irrational, and certainly upsetting to some, but we have diligently attended training sessions that have provided much insight into the statutory constraints imposed by planning law. Whenever a development is proposed, someone will consider themselves to be potentially disadvantaged. This is a difficult aspect of Council business, but there is little doubt that we do need to change some planning policies under Council control, and this is something we vigorously work for.

#### Tree Preservation Orders

One controversial aspect of planning is Tree Protection Orders (TPOs), or rather the lack of them. We have certainly rescued some notable oak trees from being felled by insisting on a very rapid placing of TPOs in the nick of time, but this should not happen, especially as we all now realise the importance of trees in mitigating air pollution and carbon dioxide enrichment of the atmosphere. We are arguing for more resources to be put into tree protection.

#### Air Quality

The quality of air in Ashtead is one of my major concerns. We are between two major airports fully intent on increasing their numbers of flights, the M25, and other major roads run alongside and through our village, and we are exposed to high levels of nitrogenous and particulate pollution from traffic and all other forms of combustion such as gas boilers, wood burners (without catalytic converters), and open burning. There is now sound scientific evidence that all forms of combustion produce noxious gases and particulates that can enter the bloodstream and major organs. Many of the particles (PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub>) are the same size as those in a respiratory inhaler and so can go straight into the smallest cavities of the lung. But, there are also highly toxic micro-particulates, the amounts of which cannot be measured because they are so small, and yet they enter our bodies and linger in blood vessels and organs. Whatever happens, your Independent Councillors will be ferocious in fighting any plan to build new houses and schools along the filthy roads, or anywhere near them.

#### Climate Change

We need to engage in all the ways we can to stop contributing to climate change, but we need to do this sensibly and in a practical way. As a member of Cabinet until last May, I initiated the bottle refill initiative, and reduction of single use plastic, and am pleased to see these now being rolled out. Such measures are essential, but we need to think on a much bigger scale if we are to make meaningful differences in our quality of life, and to the well-being of our whole environment. We are pressing the Council to be more courageous and think as expansively as it can as to how it should address the Climate Emergency adopted by the whole Council, and not just to fiddle around the edges in responses to public concerns; our future on the planet is at stake.

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Patricia Wiltshire  
Council Vice-Chairman 2019-20  
Common Ward



## Plan Delay Endangers Green Belt

Wherever we live in Mole Valley, we care about how it will be developed through the new Local Plan. We know there are some difficult choices, but Mole Valley residents want to be engaged and consulted. Many in Ashtead remember how much work went into preparing the Ashtead Neighbourhood Development Plan (ANDP) which was adopted following a referendum in 2017. Your Independent Councillors want to make sure that time and effort was not wasted.

In June, the new administration, elected last May, decided to delay the planned public consultation for the new Mole Valley Local Plan, originally scheduled to start in June. In September they rescheduled it for October, and then again until February 2020. This means the Plan is unlikely to be finalized until after this coming May's local elections.

You may think this delay will help 'save the Green Belt', but the opposite is true. Without an adopted Local Plan, in reaching a decision on a new development proposal, an Inspector is required to consider the 'tilted balance' which means if Mole Valley is behind in delivering housing numbers required by Government (which it is), the Inspector has to approve any application unless there is 'material damage'. Who decides material damage? That is down to the inspector.

Any *ad hoc* development may not comply with the housing mix/type that policies in a new Local Plan would demand, and might not do anything to implement local policies on parking, or the densification of parts of Ashtead that the ANDP pushed for. This resulted in an Inspector approving the Woodfield Lane flat development, and more recently that on the former Royal Oak site in Leatherhead.

Your Independent Councillors would not have allowed this delay, vigorously opposed it, and called an Extraordinary Meeting of Council in October in the hope of getting the process accelerated - but disappointingly this was not agreed. There will be very tough discussions, but we'd rather allow residents to express their views, exert some influence, and get some benefit from well-considered housing, parking, and densification policies. This must be preferable to allowing *ad hoc* applications for development to be decided on a 'tilted balance' by opportunistic entrepreneurs and examiners who may not care too much about our unique environment. You need to have your say, and this should be done without any more delay.

David Harper  
Park Ward

## Green Lane Crossing

### Busy right-of-way

Ashtead Residents' Association and Ashtead Independents have been working to retain this key crossing as a public right of way since Network Rail started to question this and raise the prospect of closure in 2016. The then Ashtead Independent Councillor Paula Hancock organised a public e-petition with Surrey County Council which had around 500 signatures, and since that time your Independent Councillors and the ARA have been in discussion over the matter. It is crossed by around 200 people each day, and with an average 221 trains per day is exceptionally busy giving rise to safety concerns.



### Geo-fencing technology

There have been several meetings between representatives of SCC, Network Rail, the ARA and ourselves over the last three years, and at last we can report some action. Following a recent near-miss involving a young person walking in front of a train while engrossed in listening to music through headphones, we are pleased to learn that Network Rail are at last to install Geo-Fencing technology which will start to give a series of increasingly intense warning sounds to anyone streaming music or involved in social media as they approach the crossing. The noise will only be heard by those using their phones at the time.

Your Ashtead Councillors will continue to monitor any further proposals regarding the use of the crossing.

David Hawksworth  
Common Ward

## Improving Security

### Unauthorised encampments

You may recall that the District experienced several unauthorized encampments during the summer and autumn of 2018, including the major one on the Ashtead Recreation Ground. As the responsible Cabinet member, I immediately worked with MVDC officers to introduce measures to prevent future encroachments onto Council land. Large concrete blocks were first installed as a temporary measure to block entrances to our open spaces, notably the Recreation Ground and the Wood Field, while long-term measures were put in place, including secure gates, height restrictors, metal posts, a ditch and bund, and replacement of missing or damaged wooden posts.



The works were all completed by the Spring, and the only unauthorized occupation experienced in Ashtead since was two vehicles in the Ashtead Peace Memorial Hall car park that were closely monitored and soon moved on.

### Anti-social behaviour

In addition, the proposal to establish a Joint Enforcement Team (JET) to address anti-social behaviours of all kinds across the District, and developed while your Councillors were in the joint Cabinet administration last year, is now fully operational. We managed to get their number increased from two to three officers, two of whom are ex-police, and they have dedicated electric vehicles partly funded through the Police and Crime Commissioners budget. To date, I have been impressed by their speed of response in dealing with situations in Ashtead.

The JET team work in close co-operation with the police and can be contacted through

**asb@molevalley.gov.uk**  
**molevalley.gov.uk/jet**  
or **01306 879100**

David Hawksworth  
Common Ward



## Making Ashtead Roads Safer



### 20 mph limits

We have continued our programme of actively improving road safety in Ashtead. We secured a 20 mph zone with traffic calming humps and yellow lines to restrict parking on Dene Road (for St Giles school). Surrey County Council (SCC) requires traffic calming in order to implement any 20 mph zone. All other schools in Ashtead are on a forward programme to implement similar schemes as soon as funding can be made available; this may well be a couple of years off due to the County's funding issues but we continue to monitor and press for action.

### New pedestrian crossing

Following the need for a safe crossing across the busy A24 near the entrance to Bramley Way expressed in a petition from residents, which was supported by your Councillors and the Ashtead Residents' Association (ARA), a new pelican crossing (PEdestrian Light CONtrolled Crossing) was constructed and opened in September which will facilitate those crossing the road to get to the Greville School.

### A24 Flooding by Downsend

The long-standing problem of flooding on the A24 outside Downsend school, which most residents will have experienced at some point, has now been investigated and a solution found following site meetings with your Councillors. The remedy is complex, and if not already completed by the time you receive this Newsletter, it should, weather permitting, be completed in the first months of 2020. The work will inevitably cause disruption to the A24 traffic, and the need for Barnett Wood Lane to be clear during these works will be paramount. Other flooding issues in Farm Lane and Barnett Wood Lane continue to be monitored and investigated with a view to solutions being found as soon as possible.

**Chris Townsend**  
County Councillor

## Working Together

### Private pond maintenance

In May 2018 Mr Charles Cowley, a resident of The Murreys (Ashtead Village Ward) contacted us regarding serious issues with the clearing of the balancing ponds bordering his property. He had tried to identify ownership and responsibility for maintenance of the ponds but had met a 'brick wall' in terms of discussion with the developer and Thames Water. The ponds were installed to alleviate drainage water in the development and were a requirement of the planning approval given to the developer, Taylor Wimpey. The ponds had become seriously overgrown, with fences not being maintained, and residents had become concerned for their personal safety and flooding.

Ward Councillors Mary Cooper and Alan Reilly worked with Mr Cowley and the MVDC legal department over the next 18 months, and eventually determined the ownership of the ponds and pursued remedial action from the developer. We are delighted to report that clearance by Taylor Wimpey is almost complete as we go to press, and Mr Cowley commented: "I think the more knowledge of how difficult it is to get these things done, the better".

We could not have achieved this without collaboration between all parties, and I'm proud to say that MVDC legal colleagues and Ashtead Independent Councilors worked with Mr Cowley and his fellow residents to achieve a positive outcome. Our next job is to ensure ongoing maintenance!

**Mary Cooper**  
Village Ward



### Street clutter

Mr Roy Seamen, an Ashtead Village Ward resident, drew my attention to an amazing 'monument' at the northerly end of Darcy Road. It transpired that this eyesore was an electricity box that appeared to have been either vandalised or hit by a vehicle. To protect the public an elaborate arrangement of grills had been affixed around the green box. We needed to ascertain what sort of a box it was and who owned it. Following enquiries by your Councillors, we eventually established ownership with the help of OpenReach, and secured its removal; the box was replaced by a buried junction and the verge quickly recovered. Job done!

**Alan Reilly**  
Village Ward

## Keeping Ashtead Alleys Clean

Concerned that the alleys of Ashtead were rather neglected, and that financial constraints prevented SCC from maintaining them, with the support of my fellow independent Councillors and the ARA I decided to ask for volunteers. We now meet for a couple of hours on the first Saturday of each month at a pre-designated point, and gather in bags unwanted vegetation and litter.



It is surprising how many bags can be filled in just two hours, and these are piled in a pre-arranged place and collected first thing on the following Monday morning by the MVDC waste disposal team.

**Alan Reilly**  
Village Ward

*If you would be interested in joining the Ashtead Independents' Alley Squad, even occasionally, please call me on 01372 802489 and I will provide details of the next alley we will clear.*



## Thank You Ashtead!

The local election in May saw Chris Hunt, who had served as a Conservative Councillor for Village Ward since 2003, standing as an Ashtead Independent.

"As I explained to residents at the time, I had been thinking of joining the Ashtead Independents since we had been working so well together, but I don't believe in crossing the floor between elections. We therefore decided that the best way would be for me to stand as an independent at the election. That would allow residents to decide whether they wanted me to become an independent. The response on doorsteps was so encouraging, and the actual result was amazing, and I do thank residents for their support. To obtain two out of every three votes in Village Ward, and to have a majority itself of over 50% of the total vote was very humbling. I hope that I can live up to everyone's hopes, and pledge to keep on working hard to help residents across Ashtead.

"Since the election, this united group representing the whole of Ashtead, has worked so well. This includes securing a debate about the delay on our local plan (see page 2), which the new Lib-Dem administration has twice voted to delay consulting residents about, and we are at the forefront of seeking better care for our trees and improved quality."

**Chris Hunt**  
Village Ward

## Help Us Help Ashtead

We hope that this Newsletter gives you a flavour of the work your Independent Councillors are doing across Ashtead. If there is an issue that you want us to investigate, do not hesitate to contact us. Remember we are here to work for you in the interests of all of Ashtead

The fact that you have received this Newsletter is because a volunteer has kindly hand delivered it to you and your neighbours. We would like to thank all our network of helpers for all they do . . . but can you help in also delivering some newsletters? Ideally we would like 6-10 new helpers who could each deliver 50 - 100 newsletters. That would help to ensure that everyone in Ashtead receives a copy promptly and knows who their ward councillors are and how to contact them. If you think you could have a few hours to help a couple of times a year, please contact any one of us.

## APMH Car Park Refurbishment

As we go to press, the long-awaited refurbishment of the Ashtead Peace Memorial Car Park is almost completed. Plans for this work were developed by the joint administration last year, while car parks were within my Cabinet portfolio. The whole surface has been replaced and the drainage improved, with new signage and improved lighting, and bay demarcations renewed with some disabled places relocated. Cables for electric charging points to service 10 vehicles are in place, but there is some hiatus while the best kind of points is settled in consultation with the County Council. There was a move to try and remove the large refuse bins by the new administration, but we contested that and they have now been re-instated.



I had obtained agreement last year that green 30-minute free parking bays should be provided in all MVDC carparks when they were refurbished; by the time this Newsletter lands on your doorstep, these should have been marked out (there has been a delay over agreeing their siting). The issue of whether to include removable height restrictors is still under discussion. We are all pleased we managed to secure this refurbishment for you, and see it brought to completion. I trust it will facilitate your enjoyment of all that The Street and the Hall have to offer.

**David Hawksworth**  
Leader, Ashtead Independents

## From the Ashtead Residents' Association

Ashtead Residents' Association works closely with all of the Ashtead Independent Councillors on behalf of Ashtead, together striving to make Ashtead's case in the strongest possible way on both local and central government issues and policies. We very much value our relationship with our Councillors who keep us informed of matters in Council that may affect Ashtead, its environment, infrastructure and general wellbeing so that together we can work to ensure the best outcome possible for our residents and businesses. We continue to offer them our support in all that they do to safeguard and represent Ashtead's interests in Council.

**Glynis Peterkin**  
Chair, Ashtead Residents' Association



*The Ashtead Independents are an independent group of local Mole Valley District and Surrey County Councillors working for the good of Ashtead without National political party ties.*

### Our Contact details:

#### 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



**David Harper**  
councillor.harper@  
molevalley.gov.uk  
07483 278215



**Garry Stansfield**  
councillor.stansfield@  
molevalley.gov.uk  
07544 102119

#### Surrey County Council



**Chris Townsend**  
chris.townsend@  
surreycc.gov.uk  
01372 272076

[www.ashteadindependents.org](http://www.ashteadindependents.org)