



# The Esher News

Issue 3

Local issues, local action, local Conservatives | Visit our website: [www.esherwalton.com](http://www.esherwalton.com)

## Standing up for you, and Esher

**H**ELLO and welcome to this Spring 2017 edition of the *Esher News*, a community newsletter, written, printed and delivered by the Esher Conservatives (at no cost to the taxpayer).

I'm Peter Szanto a long-time Esher resident and your Conservative candidate for East Molesey & Esher at the Surrey County Council elections in May.

These are incredibly challenging times financially for the County, as it grapples with the soaring cost of adult social care (rising by around £12m a year) and a steep reduction in grant funding from central government.

You may have had heard that the Conservative administration running Surrey recently contemplated holding a referendum on whether to increase the council tax by 15% to balance the books and continue to care for the County's most vulnerable residents.

Thankfully this was called off after Surrey's leader, David Hodge, secured important assurances from the government. You can read the full story in the main article overleaf. We are not out of the woods yet and will need to



continue to make very substantial savings. That means clamping down on waste and inefficiency and taking a fresh look at all areas of council spending to ensure that taxpayers are getting value for money.

*I'm not a career politician. I worked for a major oil company for 33 years starting as a research scientist and ending as a senior international executive. I have wide experience of managing a large workforce and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of businesses and processes.*

I reorganised a global department to provide

a superior service while reducing costs by 75%. If Surrey County Council is to meet its objective of saving an additional £123m in the next financial year, then having councillors on the team with real-world commercial skills and experience will be invaluable.

I have lived in Esher for 23 years with my wife, a former ophthalmologist, and we raised our two daughters here. I know the area and its attractions and challenges very well.

The County Council seat is comprised of East Molesey and Esher and has been held by the Molesey Residents Association for the

past eight years. From 2015-16 I served on Elmbridge Borough Council as an East Molesey councillor, having defeated a sitting Residents Association member.

So I am well placed to serve both parts of our electoral area and would love to represent East Molesey AND Esher.

The truth is with Surrey County Council's finances in crisis, there will be less money for road improvements and other essential services. A Conservative councillor has a much better chance of securing vital investment for Esher from a Tory-run council than our rivals than our rivals.

I already work closely with our two Esher Conservative Borough Councillors, David Archer and Tim Oliver, as well as our local MP, Dominic Raab. As an integrated team, we'll ensure Esher has the strongest voice at every level of government.

The Borough council also has pressures on its finances. The Residents Association-led council is putting up the borough component of the council tax and raising charges for services. While expecting everyone else to tighten their belts RA councillors have awarded themselves a generous 12.4% rise in their allowances. Disgraceful.

*We need your help to ensure Surrey and Elmbridge elects councillors that will look after our community's interests, not their own. If you can spare a little time to help our campaign (by delivering literature to one or two streets), please email me at:*

*MoleseyEsherPete@gmail.com  
Every little would help! Thank you.*

## Esher street lights to be switched off

**STREET** lights are switching off in 47 roads in Esher from midnight until 5am starting in February.

This is part of cash-strapped Surrey County Council's efforts to reduce spending. It currently spends £3m a year to light the County.

Town centres and main roads will continue to be lit as will roads where there is traffic calming and pedestrian crossings.

Locations where the Council's Road Safety Team or Surrey Police believe that part-night lighting could have an adverse effect on either crime or road safety will also be exempt.

Peter Szanto said: "A public consultation was held last August, when of course a lot of people were away on holiday. Of the 850 responses, we're told that 75% agreed with switching off 'some lights'.

"Esher Conservatives accept that County faces a huge and urgent challenge in cutting spending. However if residents feel there is a strong justification for their road being exempted, and would like me to lobby councillors, please contact me, Cllr Tim Oliver or Cllr David Archer."

For more information and a list of roads affected, follow our shortcut link : <https://tinyurl.com/htc2yus>

## Funds for traffic study



**ESHER Councillors David Archer and Tim Oliver have secured £50k funding for a transport study into Esher gridlock.**

The study group will look at the flow of traffic through the town, where those vehicles are heading, what measures can be put in place to ease the flow and even whether the traffic could be diverted away from the town if it is simply being used as a cut through from Kingston to the A3. The group will meet regularly in the coming months with a report expected later in the year.

Cllr Archer has raised the issue of the potential development of Kempton Park for housing and the impact on Sandown Park and Esher traffic. Since Kempton Park is an all-weather track unlike Sandown Park, the ground would not take all of Kempton's races.

"It's early days and we shouldn't dramatise it" said David. The Jockey Club has stated that there would be substantial investment at Sandown, likely not just for ad-

ditional race meetings – they may be looking at other investments in facilities.

Tim Oliver added: "We will try to establish what this investment will look like. Is it revisiting a hotel or expanding the nursery? Any more growth will cause even more traffic issues. We need clarification."

Meanwhile, Surrey County Council recently completed a consultation with residents and businesses in Esher, Claygate and Hinchley Wood about parking. As part of this review Esher Conservatives have been pushing for improvements to the safety of local junctions, deal with parking outside Princess Alice Hospice and around West End and Haymeads Drive.

We have also proposed a consultation on whether to introduce Residents Parking in Hillbrow Road which gets blocked off on Sandown race days. Surrey's Local Committee will receive the proposals on 27th February and the *Esher News* will keep residents posted.

## Progress on moving war memorial

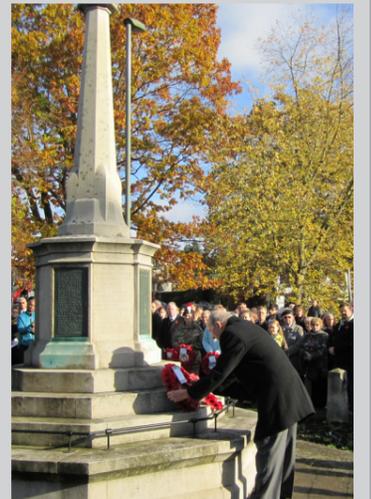
**ESHER** councillors David Archer and Tim Oliver have met with the War Graves Commission to discuss plans to move the memorial further up Esher Green.

David said: "In principle they understand why we want to move it and agree, subject to further details, that it can be moved.

"The key justification is to improve the safety as this busy junction, which is one of the most dangerous in Surrey."

The two Conservative councillors have brought together all the key stakeholders including Surrey County Council, Christ Church, the British Legion as well as the War Graves Commission.

They have agreed a way forward and the County Council's Highways and Safety officers are currently evaluating all different types of redesign of the junction, including speed humps, traffic lights, reverse flow, pedestrianisation of Church Road, chicanes and a roundabout.



Most if not all of the options would involve moving the war memorial to allow further space at the junction.

Your Conservative councillors and County candidate Peter Szanto will work with all parties to find a practical solution, which is long overdue at this junction.

## 'Flagship' sports hub project on track

**ELMBRIDGE'S** flagship Sports Hub is on track to open at Waterside Drive in Walton in September despite a setback.

In January the High Court decided the Council had not paid significant regard to the greenbelt elements of the site and quashed its planning permission.

But a new and revised planning permission was passed on the same day thanks to the support of Conservative councillors.

Esher Councillor and Tory group leader Tim Oliver said: "Astoundingly, Janet Turner the Residents Association portfolio holder for Leisure and Culture

abstained – how can you have a portfolio holder abstaining on the single biggest leisure project this Borough is ever likely to have? Clearly she is not committed to good quality leisure facilities – sitting on the fence is not acceptable."

The former waste site is being decontaminated and will become home to football and athletics.

■ In other news, proposals for a 1,024-home estate, including a school and doctors surgery, on the Molesey Road at Walton, were rejected by Councillors in November on grounds of it being on greenbelt and traffic impact.

**USEFUL NUMBERS:**  
Elmbridge Council's out of hours emergency number is 01372 466114. Surrey County Council Social Care out of hours emergency number is 01483 517898.

## Can we help?

Your local Conservative team will be pleased to assist you with any local matters relating to Elmbridge or Surrey County Councils. We are:



Elmbridge Borough Councillor for Esher, **Tim Oliver**  
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## Can you help?

We need deliverers to help us distribute the Esher News and leaflets. Could you spare some time to deliver your road or more? If so please email us.

# Relief as council tax referendum is called off

■ Eleventh hour breakthrough averts potential 14.99% council tax rise, but challenging times lie ahead

**W**E are pleased to report that Surrey County Council (SCC) has decided NOT to hold a referendum on raising the council tax by 14.99% to meet the soaring cost of adult social care.

Instead, Surrey Councillors meeting in February approved a lower increase of 4.99% of which three fifths will be ring-fenced for adult social care. This is a relief. Many families would have struggled with a £190 council tax rise, but even the lower amount is a challenge for many.

Our County Council candidate for the Division of Esher and East Molesey, Peter Szanto, recently met with the council leader, David Hodge (pictured right) to discuss the perilous state of the Council's finances.

Mr Hodge said that as a Conservative, he does not increase council tax lightly. However, Surrey is caught between a rock and a hard place at present. With residents living longer, the cost of caring for Surrey's elderly is rising by around £24m each year, yet the government has cut the council's revenue support grant by £170m since 2010!

In 2015 Surrey received £116m, last year just £67m, this year £28m and from 2019 onwards Surrey taxpayers will be expected to contribute £17m to the pot, the equivalent of 3% on the council tax.

Mr Hodge, confronted his own government publicly over the funding and said: "I was



not prepared to agree such an outrageous proposition." He added that ministers accept that Surrey requires £25m a year from the Better Care Fund to help meet its obligations to provide social care.

However, Surrey is receiving nothing this year or next year, and just £1.5m in 2019!

In addition, £70m a year is required to provide for residents with learning disabilities:

the government has cut this by £32m.

One of the reasons Surrey is so disadvantaged compared to other councils, is a 20-year-old Labour funding formula which allocates money to areas based on levels of social deprivation. Mr Hodge said it is unfairly skewed against more affluent areas like Surrey.

While ministers have said they will reform

the formula, this is not due to happen until 2019/20.

Mr Hodge said at the time that he had no choice but to proceed with plans for a referendum, asking voters to agree a 14.99% rise in the council tax, or authorise the council to make swingeing cuts to services, which he was not prepared to do.

Thankfully the government saw sense and, at the eleventh hour, agreed that Surrey will be a pilot for the new Business Rates Retention in 2018/19. Mr Hodge is confident that this proposal, and greater reassurances on adult social care funding, offer the prospect of more sustainable finances in the future.

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn complained that Surrey had been given a "sweetheart deal" - clearly no support from Labour for our hard-pressed council taxpayers.

However, even with the 4.99% rise this year, Surrey must find additional savings of £123m - a huge sum. In recent years, the Conservative administration has saved £450m, while opposed at every turn by Residents Association and Lib Dem councillors.

Peter said: "Cllr Hodge told me he 'makes no apologies for standing up for Surrey' and neither do I with respect to our residents in Esher. If elected in May, my top priority will be to identify further efficiencies, oppose wasteful spending and inflation-busting pay rises for officers or councillors so that we can defend local services."

## Mixed signals over building on local green belt



ELMBRIDGE has been instructed by the government to prepare for 9,480 new homes (plus offices and retail) to be built in the Borough by 2035.

The council is drawing up a new 'Local Plan' to set out where these homes will go, with its preferred strategy being to release "weak performing" green belt in Cobham and Long Ditton, rather than increased density of housing in urban areas.

A public consultation concluded on 24th February with another starting in the summer.

However the current consultation needs to be reviewed in light of the Government's recent White paper, which reinforced the protection for green belt areas. Any building on green belt must satisfy an "exceptional circumstances" test and any proposal to build houses does not pass this test.

Esher councillor and leader of the Conservative group at Elmbridge Council, Tim Oliver said: "We are asking the Government to clarify its approach, as we are strongly opposed to any green belt development for housing."

## Anger at Councillors' pay hike



RESIDENTS Association and Liberal Democrat councillors have voted themselves an outrageous 12.4% increase.

The two groups, who now run Elmbridge Council as a coalition administration, forced through the inflation-busting rise in their personal allowances at December's full Council meeting.

No Conservative voted for the rise and it was branded "indefensible" by Walton Conservative councillor Andrew Kelly. He proposed limiting the increase to 2%, which is what the council staff are getting this year, but this was rejected by RA/Lib Dem Councillors.

As a result, the basic councillor allowance will rise by £547 from the current £4,395 per annum to £4,942, with effect from May.

Pete Szanto, on behalf of the Esher Conservatives said: "At a stroke the Residents Association and its allies added £30,193 to Elmbridge Council's annual allowances bill,

paid for by your taxes. They wiped out nearly two thirds of the £50,000 yearly savings that were achieved by the last Conservative administration, which I served in, when we reduced the number of councillors from 60 to 48. Just months after taking control of the Council we find the RAs and Lib Dems voting to feather their own nests - they ought to be ashamed."

One Lib Dem had the cheek to blame the Conservatives for the size of the rise, arguing that if we had increased allowances every year instead of freezing them then a lower number would have sufficed.

■ At the same meeting, the coalition voted to increase the cost of services to the elderly. The price of day centre meals and Meals on Wheels was increased by 6% and community transport by 13%.

■ The Elmbridge cabinet is introducing charges for using tennis courts. Think of it as your contribution to their allowances!

Tim Oliver is a Councillor for Esher and leader of the Conservative group at Elmbridge Council. He writes:



## ESHER VIEW

With Cllr Tim Oliver

THE Residents Association and Liberal Democrat coalition running Elmbridge Council has proposed a 1.93% increase to the borough element of the Council Tax, which equates to an approximate £4 increase.

This takes effect from April and is coincidentally the same percentage rise as the Conservatives approved when we were in administration last year - which the cynical RAs opposed at the time.

Nothing has changed since then to bring about a change in attitude, other than the fact that they were in opposition then and in power now!

### Reckless

There is generally a theme of financial recklessness about this coalition. They've committed for example, to spend £6m on repairing car parks even though many of them are not in that poor a state.

As a Conservative group, we did previously consider building accommodation above the car parks and that is something that the administration should sensibly re-visit.

Then there is their decision to buy two warehouses in Weybridge for £13.81m, largely funded with a loan. While a useful rental income, the taxpayer would be exposed if the retailer John Lewis, which rents the warehouses decides not to renew its lease.

It breaks the golden rule of investment: don't put all your eggs in one basket.

Of course, the council tax needn't be as high had the coalition not pressed ahead with free Saturday parking in selected car parks and voted themselves a 12.4% increase in allowances.

Equally they haven't shied away from increasing the fees on garden waste collection, discretionary fees for leisure facilities and fees for registering a house name. All in all, we will continually make the point that there is a long history of both the Residents Group and the Lib Dems spending money, increasing Council tax and then walking away from problems.

### Greenbelt

Much interest has been generated by the consultation on releasing some greenbelt sites in Elmbridge to enable housing.

The Conservative group will be arguing that the consultation is now flawed following the release of a recent government 'White Paper' which reinforced its intention to protect the greenbelt other than in "exceptional circumstances".

We will continue to fight development on the greenbelt, but will also make the point that there will need to be higher density housing near to good communication hubs and officers should re-examine other suitable land for development.