

TATTENHAM & PRESTON

RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE



SUMMER 2025

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Dear Residents,

Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution (LGR) is happening in Surrey and it will affect all of us in one way or another. The Government wants to see a far smaller number of unitary councils each delivering all the local council services. This will mean that all 12 councils in Surrey will be abolished in their current form. It is expected unitary councils to have a population of around 500,000 and we will see two or three unitary authorities across Surrey, each covering a much larger area than current borough and district councils do. There will be no more Borough or County elections, the next election locally will be for the new unitary council in May 2026. Only time will tell if this will be a retrograde step, with local interests being swallowed up by a more centralised authority. For a more detailed analysis of these changes please read the article on page 6.



Banstead Athletic Football Club

Good news for the area that Banstead Athletic Football Club, after too long a break, will be playing from their home ground again starting in August. The schedule of matches has been published with the FA for the coming year.

The chairman of Banstead Athletic Football Club is Gary Grabban. He took over the role in May 2024. Proposals for the club include the reintroduction of a youth section, and hopefully female youth and senior teams.

The facilities require repair and modernisation which Gary has started. There has also been talk of installing an artificial turf as part of the improvement plan. However, such improvements take time. Really good to see the club back on its feet at their home ground.

Tattenham Community Group

Tattenham Community Group is looking for new members as Des Williamson is retiring/leaving and Liz Townsend, a stalwart member of the group has also stepped down. As the name implies it sets up and runs a variety of community events throughout the year including the placement and decorating the Christmas Tree at Tattenham Corner. If you would be interested in joining them please contact Peter Hope on tigersgr8@yahoo.co.uk.

Planning

Planning appeals for which we are waiting for decisions from the Bristol Planning Inspectorate are:

- 181/183 Great Tattenhams – Refused by the Council for the bulky and out of scale 3-storey houses proposed for the rear of the site.
- Shawley Primary School (Leo Academy) – Proposed astroturf pitch refused by the Council because of excessive community use hours evenings and weekends and parking issues.
- Plus a recently lodged appeal by Raven Housing on the garage site in Shawley Crescent which was refused by the Council as new dwellings would dominate and bear over neighbours in Claremont Gardens.

Planters

We have applied for a CIL bid to replace the planters at Tattenham Corner. If agreed by council we should have these in place over the next couple of months.

Subscriptions

At our AGM it was agreed for us to request a £5 voluntary contribution to help pay for the printing of the newsletter and assist with other initiatives we carry out. Various ways of paying are on opposite page.

Pump Track – Nork Park/Tattenham Recreation Ground

The pump (bicycle) track in Nork Park/Tattenham Recreation Ground opened in May and is proving incredibly popular with kids and their supporting parents.. Thanks to a huge amount of work by councillors over the last five years this project has been delivered. Teenagers using the track have nothing but praise for it.



County Council Elections – May 2025

We are pleased to confirm that Peter Harp won a splendid victory at the election on 1st May with 54% of the vote.

Peter Harp	Residents Association	2,084 votes	54%
Elizabeth Cooper	Reform UK	902	23%
Pamela Mary Freeman	Conservative	515	13%
Esme Lily Wright	Labour	167	4%
Mike Robinson	Liberal Democrat	106	3%
Alistair Morten	Green	93	2%

Thank You

I would like to thank our residents for voting for me in the May by-election to take over from Nick Harrison as your Surrey County Councillor. Nick continues as one of your three Borough Councillors. At my first meeting of the County Council, the leader of the Lib Dems stated that no councillor had a mandate (you may recall that the government minister had delayed the scheduled County Council elections). I was sorely tempted to pipe up and suggest that as I was the only councillor who does have a recent mandate, I should be leading the entire council! Early days! In the meantime I am now sitting on the planning committees of both councils. Thank you all, and I will continue to do my best for you all.

Cllr. Peter Harp email: peter.harp@surreycc.gov.uk

We congratulate Peter on his win and are sure he will do as good a job at County as he does representing Nork at Borough. It was no surprise that from nowhere Reform took 23% of the vote, pushing the Conservatives into third place with just 13%. It reflects the deep dissatisfaction locally and across the country with the main political parties. Although Reform is due congratulations on their achievement, we maintain our position that there is no place in local Government for national politics.

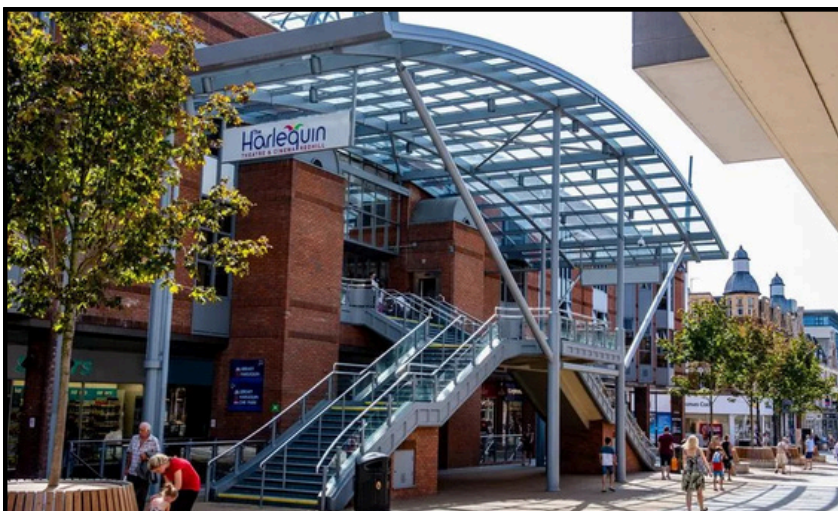
Kath Chattelle - TPRA Chair

Harlequin Theatre – Works Agreed

Reigate & Banstead Executive has agreed a way forward to bring The Harlequin Theatre in Redhill back into use. The theatre, like many public buildings, had been out of operation since September 2023 once reinforced autoclave aerated concrete (RAAC) had been discovered in the roof structure.

At the Council's budget setting meeting in February 2025 there was pressure to set a full budget commitment of up to £10 million for the works. This was opposed by Residents Association Councillors, regarding this has wholly premature – scope, design and costings had not yet been worked up. Cllr Nick Harrison said: "Something must be done with the Harlequin; it can't just be left abandoned in the centre of Redhill. However, it is essential that proper processes are followed and information is available before budget commitments are made. I hope we can do the works for substantially less – learning from RAAC works at the library next door.

He was right. The Council's Executive has now agreed a budget of less than half - £4.5 million - to remove the RAAC and carry out other essential works. Cllr Richard Biggs, Council Leader, said: "I am absolutely delighted we've agreed a way forward for The Harlequin. Deciding how best to deal with the RAAC has been very complex but now we can really push forward with getting the theatre back open as quickly as possible. I, like many of our local arts groups, cannot wait to see live performances back in our much-loved theatre".



In approving a decision to fully strip out the RAAC, the Executive rejected a strongly supported alternative from the Council's Overview & Scrutiny committee to repair the RAAC. The committee recommended repair as bringing the Harlequin back into use in the shortest possible time with the least cost, and was an option supported by the engineering reports and insurance advice. The Executive reasoned that only removal would completely resolve the RAAC issue and eliminate any future concerns and risks, and reduce theatre operating costs.

Subscriptions Update

Subscriptions

We respectfully ask residents for voluntary contributions. We have a suggested annual subscription of **£5** per household, or more if you wish, to help cover our printing costs and other project expenses. Your contributions always help us considerably.

There are different ways to pay.



Envelope

Where we have a nearby resident acting as collecting agent you may have received an envelope to return to the address shown on that envelope. Perhaps you still have that envelope?



Electronic Bank Transfer

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Paypal

Or simply **Paypal** your donation to **tattpra@gmail.com**, giving us the same details as above as a reference. Please could you use payment option **Friends & Family** since we are a non profit organisation.

T & P R e NEWS

We produce a monthly electronic newsletter **T&PR eNEWS**, which is circulated by email on the first of each month. It is totally free and ensures you keep up to date with what is going on in Tattenham Corner and Preston. We include any planning issues that may affect you, the residents. All you need to do is subscribe via our website. You can do this by scanning the QR code or go to:

<https://tattenhamprestonresidents.org.uk/e-newsletter/>



Committee Members

Chair	Kathryn Chattelle	11 Chetwode Drive KT18 5TL	kjchattelle@hotmail.co.uk
Vice Chair	Martin Beard	6 Sherborne Close KT18 5UU	01737 216655
Treasurer	Ian Mockford	1 Heathside Place KT18 5TX	barassie@gmail.com
	Nick Harrison	105 Tattenham Crescent KT18 5NY	01737 215405
	Asad Jamil	1 Oaks Way KT18 5PU	07544 939240
	John Kemp	82 Upland Way KT18 5ST	07941 672561
	Barry Nash	63 Dover Road KT20 5FN	07836 555888
	Tim Snuggs	31 Great Tattenhams KT18 5RF	07956 405063

Borough Councillors

Barry Nash	63 Dover Road KT20 5FN	cllr.nash@reigate-banstead.gov.uk	07836 555888
Tim Snuggs	31 Great Tattenhams KT18 5RF	cllr.snuggs@reigate-banstead.gov.uk	07956 405063
Nick Harrison	105 Tattenham Crescent KT18 5NY	cllr.harrison@reigate-banstead.gov.uk	01727 215405

County Councillor

Peter Harp	5 Green Curve SM7 1NS	peter.harp@surreycc.gov.uk	01737 356039
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Local Government Reorganisation

Have your say on the future of Local Government in Surrey

Residents across Surrey are being urged to take part in a consultation that will help determine the future shape of local government in the county. Central Government has now officially launched its consultation on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Surrey. This marks the most significant change to local government in the county in over 50 years. The current two tiers of local government are to be abolished with a single “**Unitary Council**” for each area responsible for all local government services. Both the County Council and all the eleven borough councils are to be replaced.

Now is your only opportunity to formally give your views to Government. You can make your views known about the size and geography of councils in the future. The Government is consulting on just two options:

A three unitary council model supported by Reigate & Banstead and eight other borough councils in Surrey.

Under this option, the new East Surrey council would cover the area currently served by Reigate & Banstead, Tandridge, Mole Valley and Epsom & Ewell councils.

This option is unanimously supported by all councillors at Reigate & Banstead.

A two unitary council model supported by Surrey County Council and two borough councils in Surrey.

Under this option, the new East Surrey council would cover the area currently served by Elmbridge in addition to Reigate & Banstead, Tandridge, Mole Valley and Epsom & Ewell councils.

This option is supported only by the Conservatives at the County Council.

Local councillors feel the three unitary option is a better fit with Surrey's geography and transport connections, and gives closer contact with communities, whilst close to the Government's population target of 500,000 plus. An earlier consultation by the borough council gave a 3 to 1 support for the 3 unitary option.

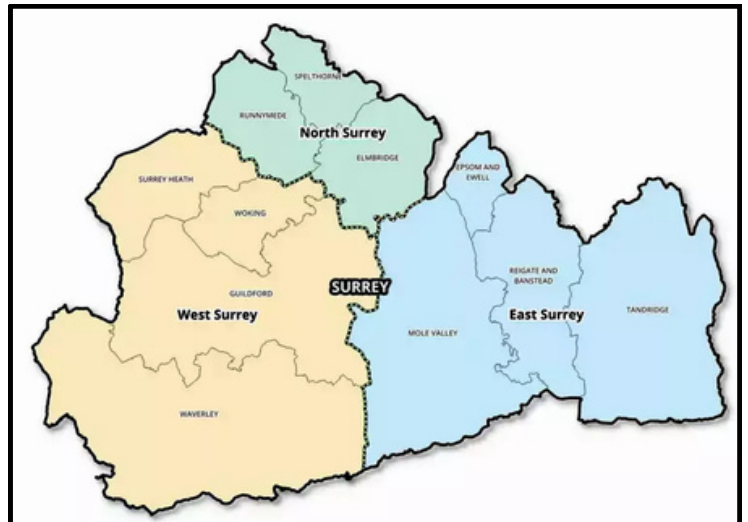
Visit for more info: <https://www.surreylgrhub.org/>

The Leader of Reigate & Banstead Borough Council, Cllr Richard Biggs said: “*In terms of local government reorganisation, we are now focused on trying to secure the best available model of local government in Surrey – which we continue to strongly believe is **three** unitary*

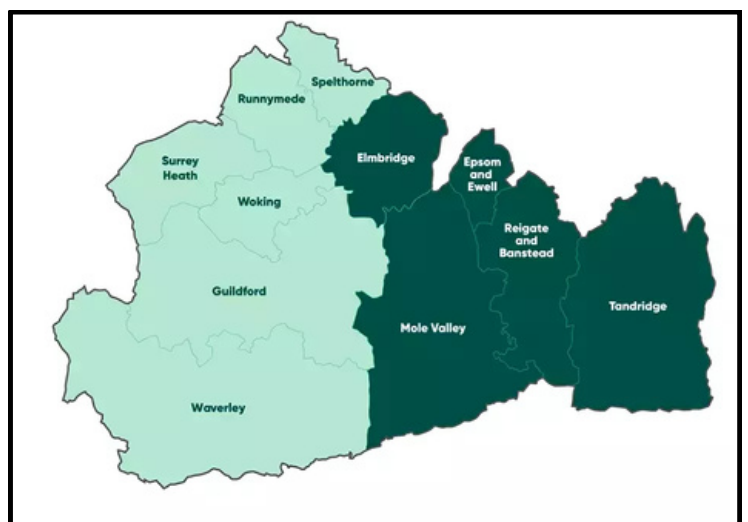
*councils. A **three** unitary model in Surrey will achieve the best balance of delivering value for money for our residents whilst maintaining strong local connections and identities and delivering high-quality service.*

“Please take time to look at the two proposals and provide your views. We have provided some information on the LGR Hub to help you answer the Government's questions should you want it.”

See page 8 to take part in the official government consultation.



Three Unitary Proposal



Two Unitary Proposal

Summary

The plan is to merge Borough and County Council functions and services for Surrey into two or three unitary councils, abolishing the current “two-tier” model. This will mean replacing borough and county councillors with unitary councillors, and there will be a single set of council staff. It is a Government initiative – keeping to the current structure is not an option available now.

There is an expectation that in a second phase some central Government functions, such as economic growth/ infrastructure strategy will be delegated to an elected Mayor. This Mayor would have different powers and responsibilities, and would not oversee and direct the unitary councils, but sit above them as a new layer (so back to a second tier).

Other nearby counties such as Sussex, Hampshire and Kent will be following, but Surrey is being fast-tracked at the request of the leader of Surrey County Council. He believes that as an “early adopter” there would be priority access to Government funding for infrastructure projects.

Objectives

Ministers think that putting borough and council functions in a single authority will avoid buck-passing and give residents a single authority and contact point to deal with all local services. The Government also believes larger authorities with a minimum of 500,000 residents are more efficient and cost effective.

It is a process which has been going on some time, but chiefly in large conurbations. It has only moved into the shire counties with two-tiers of both borough and county councils, when local politicians have requested or financial problems have emerged.

The Labour Government has made the move to unitary councils a national policy, and once they are in place, adding a strategic authority or elected Mayor. This will help them achieve the economic and growth agenda on which it fought the general election, believing that an elected Mayor will be more effective in delivering the growth mission it promised rather than operating through central government departments. The Mayor would likely become responsible for overall housing strategy, for Fire & Rescue, and for the Police, abolishing the separate Police & Crime Commissioner.

Concerns that have been raised include:

Loss of democratic accountability

- The new unitary councils will encompass large areas and populations, and will be more remote from electors. Local issues and concerns may get lost.
- There will be less local representation with fewer councillors for each area.

Reduced governance and efficiency

- Splitting county-wide services such as education, children and adult social services and highways into smaller groupings will inevitably increase costs and reduce efficiency. This is a significant factor as this is where most of the money goes.
- Combining functions, such as refuse collection and planning into larger groupings may even lose rather than gain efficiencies.
- Combining staff from the eleven borough councils and the county council into two or three unitary councils will take time – incorporating different working practices and IT systems, and dealing with redundancies.
- There will likely be issues with centralised services being devolved to unitary councils - for example lack of existing skills, transfer of staff.
- The experience of previous local government reorganisations shows that achieving savings can be elusive and marginal at best.

The problem of Woking Council's debt

- Through a series of calamitous investments, Woking has accumulated a debt of £2.3 billion which is growing monthly due to interest charges from Government. In contrast, Reigate & Banstead is the only council in Surrey with no debt whatsoever. So, will the rest of us be forced to share Woking's debt in some way? The Government has promised some relief for the “unmanageable” portion, at least in the early years.

The challenges in public services

- There is nothing in the proposals to tackle the big issues in local government – the demographic pressure of the elderly population, the crisis in child mental health and special education needs, nor even the repair of potholes.

Local Government Reorganisation

What happens next?

If all goes to plan, elections for unitary councillors will take place in May 2026. They will eventually replace county and borough councillors. We are not sure how many, but fewer than existing councillors.

For the following year, as the new unitary councils are set up, they will get ready and “shadow” the existing councils and, if all goes to plan, take over in May 2027. At that time, the county and borough councils will cease to exist.

Also, in May 2027 elections may be held for a Mayor. We would have the opportunity to elect this individual in the same way as London elected Sadiq Khan.

Link up with Crawley rejected

A third option, promoted earlier by Reigate & Banstead and Crawley Borough Councils, merging the two councils into one unitary council, has been rejected by Government. This option was supported only by the Conservative Group at Reigate & Banstead and opposed by the other groups including the Residents Association councillors. The intention was to develop the economic benefits of the “Gatwick Diamond.” Although rejected at this time, such a link could come forward when the geographic reach of an elected Mayor is finalised.

Want to know more?

You can read the detailed submissions of all three options here:

Two Unitary Authority Option

<https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/lgr/plans/final>

or link: tinyurl.com/2efatehd

Three Unitary Authority Option

<https://tattenhamprestonresidents.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Surreys-3-UA-option.pdf>

or link: tinyurl.com/x232bnur

How will this affect me ?

Initially it will be the same staff providing the same range of services. However as the transfer of services and responsibilities continues we should expect some disruption and loss of local knowledge, new names and new administrative systems. For example, in terms of bin collections there could be changes as the new council attempts to standardise the services (number and type of bins, material for recycling etc) across the old council areas. An area of contention – R&B bin men are employed by R&B and (we think) provide a superior service compared to the contractors used by other councils. Another uncertainty might be how the new authority manages local parks, open spaces, Banstead Commons, children's playgrounds, community centres and our Preston Community worker (some of the reasons why a Town/ Parish Council might be useful).

Some Conclusions from Residents Association councillors

The Labour Government is keen to promote growth and build more houses and to reorganise local government.

Of the three options, the three unitary council option would allow us to partner with neighbouring boroughs- Epsom & Ewell, Tandridge (to our east including Oxted, Caterham and Godstone) and Mole Valley (to our west including Ashted, Leatherhead and Dorking), with broadly similar geography, communications and economies. The population of these boroughs is 410,000. Compared to the two unitary option, it is more likely to retain more of our local identities and allow better contact between elected representatives and staff serving local residents.

The two unitary council option would include us with Elmbridge and increase the population to 550,000. Elmbridge includes the towns of Esher, Cobham, Walton-on-Thames, Weybridge and Molesey. This is probably the wealthiest borough in Surrey in terms of property values and residents' income, but could enlarge the unitary council to a level that might impact service levels and local representation.

Take part in the official Government consultation - deadline 5 August

Residents, businesses and local organisations can have their say by visiting the official Government consultation:

www.gov.uk/government/collections/surrey-local-government-reorganisation or link: tinyurl.com/mr3a3wdk

Responses may be made on the Government's online platform 'Citizen Space'

link: tinyurl.com/yc3dx7pm

or alternatively by email to: lgreorganisation@communities.gov.uk

or in writing to: LGR Consultation, Fry Building 2NE, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government,
2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF

Tattenham and Preston Residents Association

Should we have a Town or Parish Council?

Following on from the Government's consultation about merging the borough and county councils to form an East Surrey Council, Reigate & Banstead has started its own consultation on whether we should also have town or parish councils in our area.

A town or parish council (sometimes known as a local council) is the lowest level of council in England, operating under and within a borough area. Most of rural England and the whole south of Surrey have town or parish councils – some 85 in total.



A town council operates at the same level as a parish council, with exactly the same powers and elected volunteer, unpaid councillors, however only town councils may have a ceremonial mayor. Town councils, as the name implies, cover a larger and more urban area. In our borough we have Horley Town Council which serves 22,000 residents, about the same population as Banstead. We also have Salfords & Sidlow Parish Council between Reigate/Redhill and Horley which serves 3,000 residents. To correct a possible misconception, a parish council is a civil council and has no connection with the local church.

Besides Reigate & Banstead, Epsom & Ewell and Mole Valley (fellow members of the new East Surrey Council) are also looking at the possibility of town and parish councils.

Why a Town or Parish Council in Banstead?

The new East Surrey Council will cover a vast area and population, with many fewer councillors, and new council staff unfamiliar with local issues. A town or parish council could fill in the gap, giving a better sense of place and community, promoting local interests and giving the community a voice for concerns which may get lost in the new unitary council.

We could see the land, buildings and resources used by our community absorbed into the new unitary council and sold off to meet liabilities elsewhere. A town or parish council could be part of the solution.

A new town or parish council could be important in development and planning applications, ensuring focus is given to the new grey belt designation of our countryside. It could make well thought through representations to the new planning department as the powers of individual councillors on planning committees are expected to reduce, and in an environment where housing targets are being more than doubled.

A town or parish council has a statutory right to 15% of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) charged on all new development. This "Local CIL" could be used to pay for local initiatives.

Of course all this has to be paid for, and any additional council tax levy would have to be very carefully considered. In Horley there is a refund agreement with Reigate & Banstead to pay for some services, avoiding double taxation. It should be borne in mind that in areas of the country which are "parished", it is this most local level of local government which is most highly regarded.



Timetable

Mid July 2025:	Preliminary kick-off public meetings/briefings around the borough
24 July -18 Sept 2025:	Initial submissions from community groups etc invited
19 Sept – 6 Nov 2025:	Assessment of submissions – draft recommendations prepared
7 Nov 2025 –16 Jan 2026:	Consultation with public on proposals
19 Jan - 16 Mar 2026:	Consultation responses considered and final recommendations made
26 March 2026:	Final recommendations published
April – May 2026:	Resolution on Reorganisation Order
6 May 2027:	Possible Town or Parish Council elections

**The initial public meeting/briefing for our area is at
Banstead Community Centre at the Horseshoe Monday 21st July 6.00 pm.**

Tattenham and Preston Residents Association



When our CSW Group was formed just over 8 months ago, I had little idea of how endemic and almost institutionalised speeding was within our immediate locality.

We have gathered evidence using Police issued calibrated radar devices over the last 8 months that clearly shows our particular community has a significant speeding issue. Our Speed Watch Group have logged 2,760 vehicles, and 2,317 speeding letters have been issued (with a further 221 pending). 86 vehicles have been logged as speeding excessively (45mph and over), 134 registered keepers have received 2 letters, 9 have received 3 letters, and a further 2 are on their 4th letter, which merits a visit from the Police, taking up their valuable time at the tax-payer's expense.

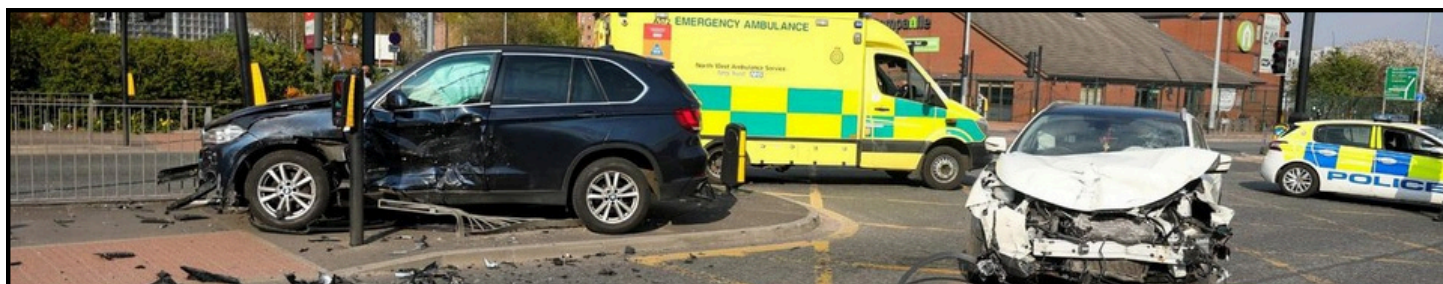
When we first started, we logged speeding motorists doing 36mph and above along our 30mph limited roads; this represents an up to 20% latitude for motorists to speed over the legal limit without being logged.

If I use the analogy of the story of William Tell and the apple on the boy's head, that 20% could be fatal: the arrow misses the apple, the boy is likely dead.

I don't have the statistical evidence for deaths or serious casualties on the roads in Surrey nor within our immediate locality, but I do know that our county has one of the highest traffic densities of any within the UK. Combine that with the proportionate disregard for statutory speed limits, and the mix becomes critical, in some cases, fatal.

Many of the current speed limits were introduced when cars were less powerful, when there were less distractions for the driver (hands-free, sat-nav, display screens), and when there were significantly less vehicles on the road.

On the residential road, Epsom Lane North, there are in excess of 3 million traffic movements annually. The single pavement running alongside is narrow, as is the road itself (hence not being on a 'bus route'), so there is little margin for error. When a vehicle hits a pedestrian at 30mph, there is an 80% chance they will survive. However, if a vehicle hits a pedestrian at 35mph (which is the speed we currently log from), there is a 50% chance they will be killed: at 40mph, that rises to 90%.



For each fatality, from initial collision to the completion of any investigation, the cost is estimated at £1million, although some sources suggest it could be up to £2million, and the suffering to the bereaved ones is incalculable. Along Epsom Lane North, from 1999 to 2022, 66 collisions were recorded involving 127 vehicles, resulting in 96 casualties and 2 fatalities. The cost of all this would have run in to many £millions !

We can say that at current rates, installing one average-speed camera costs £88k, and costs £5k per annum to maintain. This equates to a total spend of £203k per camera over the same time span as that of the accident statistics above. If more speed cameras are installed and serious accident numbers are significantly reduced you don't need to be a genius to see that there will be considerable overall cost savings.

If we cannot gain funding for more average speed cameras, we need to look at alternatives for traffic calming, although I am aware that Epsom Lane North is often used by the Emergency Services, and therefore speed humps are not a favoured option. Having effective and frequent police patrols on this road (and others in the vicinity) would certainly help, but costs would soon ramp up and outstrip that of static average-speed cameras.

Something needs to be done on an urgent basis before we end up with further serious casualties or fatalities, as even with the willing participation of the volunteers within the Group, the numbers just keep rising.

I have called for an urgent meeting with the Surrey Police Road Safety unit and our Surrey County Councillor to address the issues. We now have the statistics and will present them to all interested parties with a view to bringing about change.

Cllr. Tim Snuggs

The Local Red Squirrel Population is Growing

At 1st Tattenhams, our Squirrel Scouts – the youngest members of the Scouting family, aged 4 to 6 – are full of energy, curiosity, and enthusiasm. Each week, we come together for exciting activities that help them grow in confidence, learn new skills, and have fun with friends.

The Squirrel Scouts often team up with older sections in our Scout Group – Beavers, Cubs, and Scouts – for special events and joint activities. Whether it's building dens, learning about knots, creating giant marble runs, or getting involved in shared projects like caring for our headquarters building and gardens, these shared experiences help the Squirrels learn teamwork, resilience, and kindness.

Being a Squirrel, Beaver, Cub or Scout at 1st Tattenhams is about much more than just weekly meetings. It's about being part of a supportive, inclusive group where every child can shine. As they explore, create, and discover, and earn badges that recognise their achievements – from learning how to be a good friend, to trying a new food, or helping at home. It's about encouraging curiosity, confidence, and community spirit – all through play and adventure.



You might be surprised just how much our Squirrels get up to! From cosy evenings around a campfire (complete with songs and food, of course) to nature walks and trips to the local library, our programme is designed to spark curiosity and build a sense of adventure.

The introduction of our Squirrel Scouts seen growth in other sections with Beaver Scouts, aged 6 to 8 now also full, which is great news for the future of the Group

If you'd like to find out more about Scouts or how to get involved as an adult volunteer, we'd love to hear from you! <https://www.1sttattenhamsscouts.co.uk/contact>

Claire Aldridge Leader

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ALL CARS COLLECTED AND DELIVERED FROM LOCAL AREAS

Why we're fortunate to have the Banstead Commons and their Conservators

At this time when the current government's mantra is "growth at any cost" and relaxation of planning controls is seen as the means to that end with redesignating areas of Green Belt to "Grey Belt", we are incredibly fortunate that the common land around Banstead is protected by its own Act of Parliament passed in 1893. This created the Banstead Commons Conservators (BCC) tasked with protecting and maintaining the four areas of common land (now) in the northern part of the Borough of Reigate & Banstead. Two areas are on chalk downland so are called Banstead Downs and Park Downs, while two are on acid soils, and therefore called Burgh Heath and Banstead Heath.

In the medieval period these areas were used for pasture for livestock, such as cattle and sheep, or in areas such as Hogden Bottom woodland provided acorns for pigs. Cattle could be moved from pastures further south in The Weald towards the London markets via our commons. The two main commons, Banstead Heath and Banstead Downs, were joined by a "throat common" to help move the livestock, now a strip of woodland beside the A217.

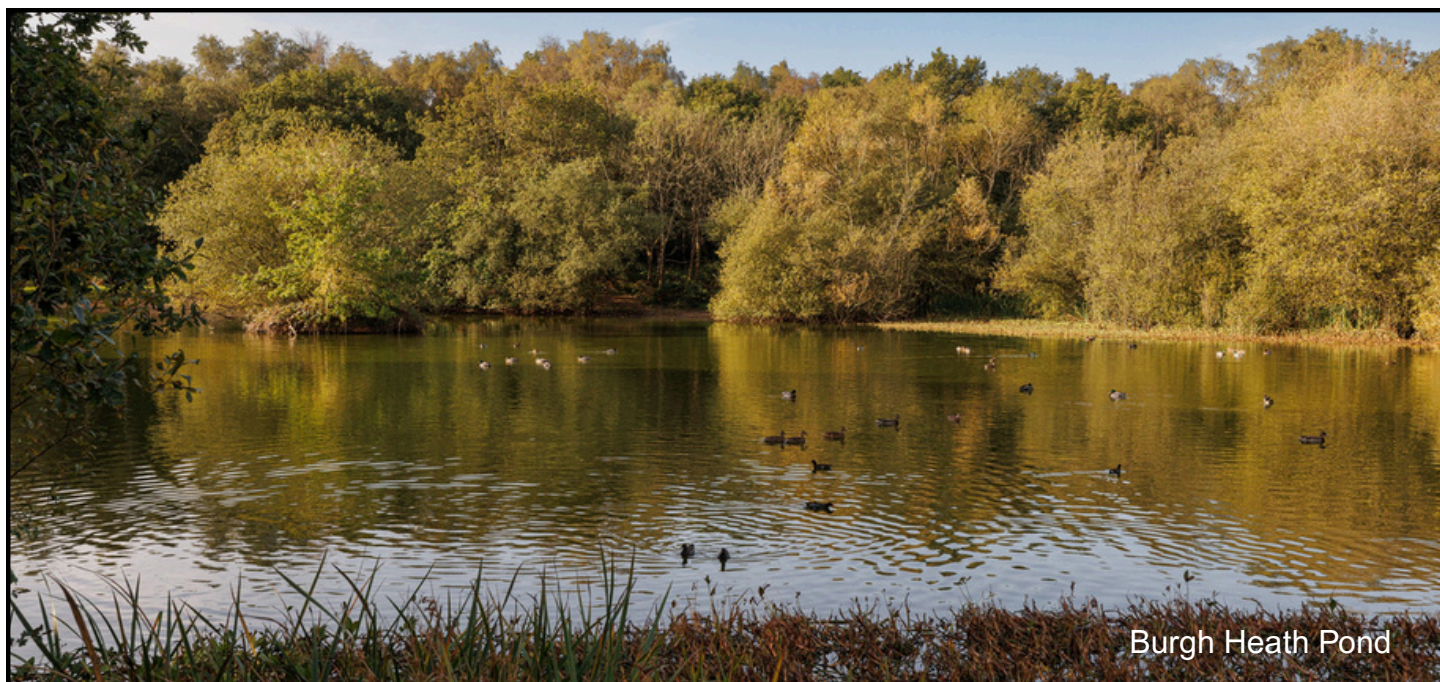
Early history

Railway lines were first built across Banstead Downs in the 1860s by the Metropolitan and South Coast Railway. Following this a Yorkshire landowner, Sir John Hartopp, saw an opportunity to buy up commoners' rights to the land, enclosing the area and then build on it to make a very large profit. He bought the lordship of the Manor of Banstead in 1873 and in 1876 building work started in Downs Road, Belmont. Local residents were appalled, acting against Sir John in the Court of Chancery. This led to the Corporation of the City of London formally preserving Banstead Commons for the benefit of the people. Nearby landowners continued to abuse the land, such as through the removal of turf, chalk, flints and soil, until the Metropolitan Commons (Banstead) Supplemental Act was passed in 1893.

Hartopp had argued that much commons had already been wrecked by the digging and removal of loam, chalk (for producing lime cement), vegetation (e.g. firewood) etc., producing for his case the "blood-red map of Banstead" as evidence of areas despoiled. Similarly, parts of Banstead Heath had seen extensive gravel extraction for building the local toll roads, Burgh Heath near ASDA had sand pits for the building expansion of suburban Sutton, while a huge medieval chalk pit already existed on Park Downs.

Notwithstanding these arguments the new Act created a group of "Conservators" and thus preserved the land. Unfortunately it did not provide for a funding process necessary for the Conservators to comply with the duties imposed by the Act, although recent legal advice states that the Conservators can generate funds through licensing some activities on the Commons. Banstead Commons are one of the very few areas of common land in England, along with the New Forest, that has its own specific Act of Parliament protecting it.

The Act requires that eight Banstead Commons Conservators (BCC) be created, two appointed by the owners of the land (Reigate & Banstead) to represent the interests of the landowner and six appointed by the Parish of Banstead.



Burgh Heath Pond

Banstead Commons Conservators

Modern history

In 1955 the local authority, Banstead Urban District Council, took over ownership of the land by buying the Lordship of the Manor of Banstead, and in 1974 the lordship (and therefore also the ownership) was passed to its successor authority, Reigate & Banstead Borough Council. Presumably, with the announced local government reorganisation in Surrey, that ownership will pass to the new unitary authority, "Surrey East", or similar, around May 2027 when our borough council is likely to cease to exist.

An agreement was created when the lordship passed originally to the council that the local authority would provide a grant to support the BCC's work, and this has continued since then with the eight Conservators being appointed and elected by the Council while some funding to help cover running costs is provided by way of a Council grant. Considering the area the Banstead Commons comprise, 1,350 acres, the Conservators and their very small number of staff are incredible value for money. Much of Banstead Downs is technically in Nork, including most of Banstead Downs golf course and car park. Elsewhere parts of Burgh Heath are in Nork and parts in Tattenham Corner and Preston.

Over the years, the Conservators have also sought and received funding from other sources than the council, including grants from the Rural Payments Agency and Natural England. Withdrawal from the European Union means, however, that one of these grants, the EU Single Farm Payment, was lost in 2024. The pandemic also put additional pressure on the Conservators because visitor numbers increased resulting in more maintenance work without an appropriate increase in funding.



The work of the BCC

The Conservators are not simply "conservationists" as is often thought, but their role is to manage the commons to protect nature (particularly the biodiversity of chalk grassland, lowland heathland, protected or endangered species such as juniper, adders and skylarks), to prevent encroachment of the land by neighbouring landowners, to try to keep the commons as far as possible looking like they were in the nineteenth century, to prevent commercial exploitation by the landowner or to limit its effect through regulation and licensing, to prevent, as far as possible, damage by unlawful activity such as littering, fly-tipping, metal-detecting, motorbiking and quadbiking, or the lighting of fires. This requires expertise in many disciplines, so the eight conservators represent a broad range of professional knowledge in law, finance, estate management, government, public relations, environmental science, ecology and fundraising.

Cllr. Peter Harp, Banstead Commons Conservator

“You’re Not Like a Normal Vicar”

In his last interview before retirement the Vicar of St Marks Church, **Des Williamson**, has opened up about his achievements and shares his thoughts on closing this chapter of his life and starting afresh in Weston Super Mare.

What will it be like when you close the church door after that final service? My first ever service was at 10am on a Thursday morning and my last shall also be on a Thursday at the end of July, so quite symmetrical and symbolic in many ways. I have never lived this long in any one place before. Home is now when I see Epsom Downs. It always reminds me of the time I came for interview. Could I find the church? Every road I took, I always ended up back at the Downs.

Did you have any plans when you arrived and have you achieved them? I didn’t set out to do anything in particular really, St Marks is a very organic church, I was allowed to make it up as I went along, apart from as we say in the business, hatching, matching and dispatching (christenings, weddings and funerals). If I saw a good opportunity I often ran with it. I responded to the needs of the people. St Marks has always been an outward looking church and I have just facilitated what I think they need at that time.

What was one of the first things you did? That would have been starting up the “Sing” choir, a great opportunity for community engagement,

Have you made a difference to the Church and community? I think and hope I have. I am very proud of the Food Bank. What it has done is to inspire people. What I mean by that is not only have they been helped out themselves, but by now turning to helping others, they have been able to give back. In essence it has helped good people to do good things.

I am extremely proud of the Community Garden, born out of Covid, this project is ongoing, slowly growing, giving people confidence to learn, engage with nature and others. There was a clear need for this and it has made good use of an underutilised area around the Church.

I hope I shall be remembered for other things too -the Bereavement Café and projects that others were to bring to life like the Cinema and the Indoor Market. I very much hope that these survive but it is for the next person to decide their direction and like all good community projects they always need fresh people and energy.

Retirement - what does that look like? Well, walking, Weston Super Mare is very flat so Heather my wife, who has had long Covid for over three years now, and I shall be doing a fair bit of that. I have got into gardening following my involvement with the Community Garden so I shall definitely be doing a lot more. Probably a bit of tech drawing and I am going to buy a Spirograph set - I loved that as a kid and could easily lose track of time doing both of these. We have two lovely grandchildren, one who shall be living with us, so they will be keeping me busy

My son-in-law asked me “How will you cope being a nobody?” Maybe a bit harsh, but I will miss the community, walking down the road, being noticed, engaging and knowing what’s going on behind front doors.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time at St Marks Church and will miss it immensely. I will especially miss Liz, my colleague, we made a good team and sparked each other’s creativity. It will take time to adapt after “vicaring”. Even when I took a vacation I wouldn’t totally switch off - you are always holding people in your mind and heart especially when they are suffering. I was once told “You’re not like a normal vicar.” What does a normal vicar look like? I wish the next incumbent well - just be yourself.

Our Winter 2022 magazine included an article about Des, and you can read more about his interesting life here:

<https://tattenhamprestonresidents.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Des-Williamson-Winter-2022-1.pdf>

or tinyurl: tinyurl.com/m37s28am



At the same time, Liz Townsend, who has worked at the church as Children’s and Families’ Worker for longer than Des, is also retiring and moving to Bognor Regis in West Sussex.

Liz trained at Moorlands College in Christchurch, Dorset as a Baptist priest and has a BA in Theology. Des tells the story that he once applied to take a degree at Moorlands but was turned down.

She was preparing for a job as priest when she saw her present role being advertised and decided she would prefer this job more than the priesthood. And she has been looking after children and families in the area for the past 17 years. Like Des, she has also been involved in the wider community working with the library on summer children’s activities and supporting Christmas activities and other local events. Liz is also part of the preaching team at St. Marks.

Rev Williamson will lead his final Sunday Service on the 27th July 2025 at 10am followed by a celebration on Des and Liz’s last day where they will encourage a bring and share meal.

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