



Use your vote!



RBC ELECTION MAY 4th

Isabel Mullens, already a RBC Councillor, is standing for re-election this year & was overwhelmingly endorsed at our AGM on February 21st as the Runnymede Independent Residents Group (RIRG) candidate for RBC's Egham Town ward.



Isabel added : "I'm now gearing up for May's local Borough election - please look out for my election address falling into your letter-box in April.

With what I'm pleased to have done in the past 4 years & some of the difficulties encountered on the way:

- Sitting on the RBC Planning Committee and getting an understanding of planning matters - I've got RBC to look into introducing a planning control (called 'Article 4 Direction') on the conversion of family homes to 'Houses of Multiple Occupancy' (HMOs). The proliferation of HMOs in Egham and Englefield Green has decreased the quality of life for many residents.
- Also on the planning front, I've got the Council to require new developments to install EV charging points for disabled parking spaces as well as for standard spaces.
- Setting up Egham Flood Resilience Group, advising flood-prone areas on preparedness & resilience.
- Working with residents & with like-minded opposition Councillors, we've forced RBC's hand on the climate emergency & persuaded them to commit to net zero carbon emissions for RBC's own operations by 2030.
- Persuading RBC to improve its Council Tax Support Scheme, to provide a better level of support to those on low incomes.
- Pushed for the livestreaming of RBC meetings. I'd also like meetings to be recorded, in the interests of transparency and accountability. This measure was voted down by the Conservative majority.

Over the next 4 years, if elected, I'll be working to get Egham's needs formally expressed & accepted in RBC's imminent review of the Local Plan, which is a critical strategic requirement needed to support planning matters for many years - up to 2040. In the Local Plan I will push for inclusion of an 'Article 4 Direction' for Egham & Englefield Green, and for more family homes for Egham rather than small apartments. I'll challenge RBC to enhance their ambitions on the Climate Emergency, and embed them in our planning decisions. Beyond the Local Plan, I'll be supporting measures to improve enforcement on anti-social behaviour in the town. And I'll continue my campaign to get meetings recorded & livestreamed - shame on the Conservative majority for opposing our basic democratic right to see and hear Councillors' representations at open meetings!

The presence of Independents, not tied to national Party Politics, was bolstered last year with the election of an Independent in Englefield Green and another Independent candidate is standing for election up in The Green this year, so the cause of Independence is gathering pace. Do make sure that you vote this May 4th."

VOTE INDEPENDENT

Promoted by Willy Burgess, 42 Crown Street, Egham, Surrey on behalf of the above candidate.

A new requirement to show photographic ID at polling stations comes into force this year and will apply for the first time at the local elections in May. From October 2023, photo ID will be needed at UK parliamentary general elections.



Accepted forms of ID include a UK, European Economic Area (EEA) or Commonwealth passport; a UK, EEA or Commonwealth drivers' licence; and some concessionary travel passes, such as an older person's bus pass or an Oyster 60+ card. Voters will be able to use expired ID if they are still recognisable from the photo. You will only need to show one form of photo ID & it needs to be the original version and not a photocopy.

Anyone who does not have one of the accepted forms of ID will be able to apply for free ID, which is known as a Voter Authority Certificate. Applications can be submitted through the UK government's online portal (on : <https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-photo-id-voter-authority-certificate>) or by submitting a paper form to RBC. The deadline to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate for the elections on 4th May is 5pm on 25th April 2023.



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR (Willy Burgess)

I was excited and daunted in equal measure on being voted ERA's new Chair at the AGM. I've lived in Egham, and been an ERA member (mostly), for 37 years. I value the town's many virtues and I credit ERA with guarding them against the vicissitudes of private and public development over the years. These challenges pose a constant threat, but evolution is inevitable and adaption is essential if we're not to live in a museum. Vigilance and balance are key. Is ERA always successful? No. Could developments in and around the town be better designed, better delivered and better managed? Yes. But isn't Egham still an attractive, somewhat singular town with its own vibrancy? Isn't there still a need for keeping watch and speaking up for the town? If ERA didn't exist, wouldn't it still be a great idea? Yes, to all three.

Our constitution tasks us with 3 over-riding duties: the protection & enhancement of Egham, support for Independent candidates at local elections, and communication with resident members. The Councillors whose candidacy we have supported work tirelessly and act as the indirect means to our principal aim. 'Independent' is the critical word: a founding principle for ERA is that national Party Politics have no place in local government. Our candidate-Councillors are local, resident, and Independent. ERA does its own direct advocacy too - Chris Fisher currently takes the lead on ERA Planning, and I'm happy to say Chris has agreed to continue in this role. Adrian Skelt, our Secretary, keeps the show on the road and does a great job with Email Alerts to Members as well as editing the Newsletters. We have loyal Area Reps who get the paperwork delivered most efficiently. So we're in good shape, but we need to keep vigilant and relevant, and also to look out for the opportunities that changes bring.

I can't expect to fill the huge gap left by my predecessor as Chair, Chris Fisher. Chris has done an enormous amount for Egham in any number of positions going back to before ERA's creation. I have great admiration for all he's done. During my tenure I would first like to strengthen membership, in numbers and in member-engagement with the Committee. ERA's voice is only as loud as its membership is big. I know from experience the great band of volunteers that comes forward to help during election campaigns - more shortly for the 2023 RBC campaign! We've started reviewing all aspects of ERA activity, so do please contact me at chair@eghamresidentsassociation.co.uk with any ideas, requests, offers to help etc. Your Committee Needs You! I am greatly looking forward to my stint as Chair.

A Spring booster vaccine against Covid-19 is to be offered to people at most risk of serious illness from the disease to protect them this summer. UK vaccine experts say it should be available to everyone over 75, & anyone who lives in a care home for older adults and people aged five and over who are defined as immunosuppressed are also to be offered a booster jab.



Dr Mary Ramsay, head of immunisation at the UK Health Security Agency, said Covid-19 was still circulating widely and there had been recent increases in older people being admitted to hospital. "It is important those at highest risk of severe illness do not become complacent and I would encourage everyone who is eligible to come forward once the booster programme starts."

Vaccinations in England and Wales are to start in early April and the campaign will last until late June. People at higher risk of severe Covid-19 are also expected to be offered a booster vaccine dose in Autumn 2023 in preparation for the winter.



RunnymedeYZ is an association of young adults in their 20s and 30s who want to build new connections and friendships, help volunteer at local community events and act as a source of support and advice for each other.

They also make a contribution to the wider community through volunteering. YZ members supported a raffle for the Red Cross Ukraine appeal, held at The Red Lion Pub, which raised £1,065 on 24th February.

Visit their new website, runnymedeyz.com, to find out more about YZ and to join.

GRAVEL EXTRACTION - or not?

The never-ending start of a review by SCC of the Milton Park Farm (MPF) & Whitehall Farm (WF) gravel extraction planning applications has now been deferred until 28th June (for WF) & 27th September (for MPF) - which is beyond the date of the start of the review of the Surrey Minerals Plan (which is now out of date in their 2011 version).



The Issues and Options public consultation that closed in March 2022 included a call for sites exercise inviting landowners to nominate land in the county that may be suitable & SCC received 14 mineral site nominations. The nominated sites are being assessed by SCC as part of one or more site identification and evaluation processes. The results of these processes will inform the preparation of the Regulation 19 Draft Minerals and Waste Local Plan and the relevant reports will be published as part of the associated **public preferred options consultation that starts in June 2023.**

The previous Chairman opened by saying that he had to step down as Chairman after a mini-stroke but also because he had been on the front-line of Egham battles for almost 40yrs already.

The demographics of the town have rapidly changed over the past decade, partly due to the expansion of Royal Holloway College, which has resulted in the turning of many family homes into student Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs). The one- & two-bedroom residential accommodation emphasis has become a heavy feature of construction in Egham. Indeed, the Local Plan has RBC ensuring that 41% of additional homes would be built as 3 bedrooms & a further 25% as 4 bedrooms - but in Egham Town ward the actual percentages in recent years must be close to zero.

This was having an adverse effect on Egham &, in his opinion, on ERA too. ERA will be 41 this year but will it be 50? However, we have a new Chairman from today, who is confident that ERA can be reborn.

The previous Vice-Chairman then concentrated many threats in the Town, including continued construction developments, Heathrow, flooding, the ubiquitous gravel extraction projects & problems with the High Street. The weaknesses include attracting families, parking & enforcement, a medical centre under siege, a lack of a hospital bus service & the general litter & rubbish problem. He particularly thanked the members of the ERA Committee & a special thanks should go to Adrian Skelt, who has performed as an excellent Secretary & Newsletter Editor for over 20yrs to date.

Treasurer

The accounts as @ 31/12/22 were circulated at the meeting & the key points were that we have a fairly similar result to last year, with a surplus of only £37 over the year & a overall funds balance of c.£6,300. The move from HSBC to Metro Bank meant that we have no bank charges this year.

Chairman & Committee

The Secretary reported that, despite several attempts to obtain new Committee members from our membership, the current situation is that we have had 1 nomination for a new Chairman (Willy Burgess) & nearly all other members of the Committee are prepared to stand again, with the only Officer we will then be missing is a new Vice Chairman.

Willy Burgess then outlined his case for being the new Chairman, saying that he was more positive than the previous Chairman on the future of ERA & would set a target of 500 members by end-2023 (following a membership drive as part of the RBC election support). He would also seek to review all aspects of the ERA operations over the next 12 months.

With the other Officers mostly staying in place, the existing personnel thus sought election for 2023/24, which was endorsed by the floor.

RBC Councillors & Candidate Adoption

The Egham Town Independent Councillors on RBC gave their annual reports for 2022 : Isabel Mullens currently sits on the RBC Planning & Corporate Management Committees & has achievements in the last few years (including closure of the Spring Rise gate at night, the raising of the need for RBC Planning to consider the HMO situation, pressing the raising of the climate change agenda with the controlling Conservative group, creating the Egham Flood Resilience Group & improving Council Tax support from the Council). Sian Williams sits on the RBC Crime & Disorderly Behaviour and the Overview & Scrutiny Committees, which gives her some insight into ASB issues. Other issues she has worked on include parking (with SCC taking over responsibility from April), housing for disadvantaged residents, setting up the weekly Games Club at The Lit & becoming the Egham Town Team Chair last year. Sam Jenkins was surprised that it is only 12 months since he was endorsed by ERA for standing as a Councillor, which has been life changing for him. He has recently joined the Runnymede Access Liaison Group (RALG) & is pressing RBC on their climate change responsibilities. On younger members, he has formed the Runnymede YZ group & helped the introduction of a new 11-14yr youth club at the Egham Youth Centre.

Isabel Mullens is planning to stand again in this year's election & reminded the audience of the need for photo ID to vote & the change of polling station to the Egham Youth Centre. A motion for adoption of her as our Independent candidate for Egham Town was unanimously supported from the floor.

Guest Speaker

In a slide presentation, the National Trust advised of various events already organised at Runnymede or Ankerwycke, including archaeology at Ankerwycke (with talks to follow shortly) & Langham Ponds (with improved walkways). Upcoming events would include the Magna Carta Festival (12-18/6) & a new Meadows Day (date tbc). To get involved they suggested you contact runnymede@nationaltrust.org.uk.

Alerts on issues that arose between Newsletters this quarter covered :

- a) Surrey Fire Service Consultation (4/1)
- b) ERA Committee Members (16/1)
- c) Ben Spencer MP Meeting (19/1)
- d) RBC Infrastructure Delivery (20/1)
- e) RBC Councillor Surgeries (26/1)
- f) Covid Champions Briefing (27/1)
- g) Police "Meet the Beat" Meeting (31/1)
- h) Cllr Jenkins Notes (3/2)
- i) Egham Youth Club (6/2)
- j) Covid Champions Briefing (10/2)
- k) Runnymede Open Spaces (21/2)
- l) Manorcrofts Nursery (22/2)
- m) Care in Egham (23/2)
- n) Covid Champions Briefing (24/2)
- o) Surrey PCC ASB survey (11/3)
- p) SCC Parking Enforcement (15/3)
- q) King's Coronation Road Closures (20/3)



Contact Glenda Thisdell on 07905 917440 or glendathisdell@eghamresidentsassociation.co.uk to be sent email alerts



COUNCIL TAX

RBC's share of residents' Council Tax bills will increase by 2.99% a year from April. That will see their share of the bill rise from £179.55 last year to £184.92 this year, a £5.37 increase for people living in average band D homes. The payment which residents make for RBC services is just 8.5 per cent of their full Council Tax bill. Cllr Tom Gracey, Leader of the Council, said "I believe Runnymede provides the widest range of services of any local authority in the county, and we continue to do so whilst still charging the lowest level of Council Tax in Surrey".

Based on 2023/24 bills, 78% of your monthly bill goes to SCC, 14% goes to the Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner & about 8% is kept by RBC.

SCC has voted to increase its council tax by 2.99%, with 0.99% is an increase in general council tax, with the remaining 2% ringfenced for adult social care. The council said the increase would add £0.94p a week to a Band D property's bill. The council could have increased it by a further 2%, but SCC leader Tim Oliver said: "This is not the year to be adding to the pressure for residents so that is why we've worked really hard to keep it down to the lowest level we possibly can."

For the 2023/24 financial year the police precept has been set at £310.57 for a Band D property, equivalent to a 5.07% rise across all council tax bands. This amount equates to £15 a year extra, the maximum allowed without a referendum. Lisa Townsend, Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey, says "Asking the public for more money during a cost-of-living crisis has been an incredibly difficult decision, but the Surrey Police budget is under considerable strain with huge pressure on pay, energy and fuel costs. No increase would have inevitably led to cuts which would ultimately affect the service to our residents".

ERA COACH TRIP

After the advert in the Winter Newsletter, only 8 residents have contacted us about a possible Coach Trip this year. There has thus been insufficient interest to justify a booking & we will not unfortunately be arranging a trip in April.



ERA COMMITTEE

Chair

Willy Burgess 07864 397208

Vice-Chair

Vacant

Secretary (& Newsletter Editor)

Adrian Skelt 07956 875329

Treasurer (& Data Protection Officer)

Aneesh Gupta 07915 612291

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Glenda Thisdell 07905 917440

Planning Co-ordinator

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Webmaster

Vacant (temporarily filled by Aneesh Gupta)

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