Responding to the West Surrey Council stakeholder survey

Our Commentary

West Surrey Council is still developing its corporate strategy. It has set out four broad ambitions, and this consultation is intended to help bring detail to how they can be achieved. We welcome this initiative, but we would rather these ambitions had been set with communities from the start.

We would also like to see action on climate change as an important part of these ambitions or, as we would argue, as the foundation that underpins all of them. Climate change is one of the most serious risks the UK faces, and many of us felt its effects this summer. Done well, climate action also helps build healthy, resilient communities, improves wellbeing, eases the cost of living, drives innovation and creates new jobs and opportunities. These are all ambitions the council has already stated, yet nothing in them recognises that climate action is a route to achieving them, or that without a healthy climate none of them can be secured. We're also asking the council's leaders to ask it to declare a Climate and Nature Emergency, as a clear signal that climate and nature will underpin its strategy.

We welcome the council's invitation to community groups and residents to take part in decisions, and we hope this is a real commitment and not a gesture. We would like the council to bring community groups together to define its priorities and how it will work with them. This should be a real partnership, and all parties should have an equal opportunity to shape how the partnership will work. At the What's Stopping Us workshop in June 2024, participants identified governance barriers, including a lack of joined-up thinking and cooperation, as the most frequently raised obstacles to a sustainable Surrey that works for climate, nature and people. We therefore propose a wide partnership between the council, businesses, academia and community groups, with agreed ways of working and priorities, and a regular West Surrey gathering to review progress and set goals for the following year. Local government reorganisation is a once-in-a-generation chance to change how the council works and collaborates with residents and communities.

Guidelines for partner organisations on how to respond

The stakeholder engagement survey link: https://engage.zencity.io/surrey-county-council/en-GB/engagements/c92fcf89-b0cb-4069-82c1-303e9679a597

Please answer honestly

These are suggestions, not a script. Please tick only what reflects your organisation's view, and use your own words and local examples. Responses in different voices carry more weight than identical text.

Practical tips

- Use local examples from your own work, such as a flooded road, a bus route that does not run, or a retrofit scheme that worked.
- Say who you are and who you represent.
- The final question in the survey asks how the council can build an effective relationship with your organisation. A good answer asks for a standing partnership, early involvement in delivery planning, and a regular forum.
- Tick the contact option at the end if you are happy to be involved further.
- **The survey closes on 15 November 2026**. Responses can be made online, by email to devolutionandlgr@surreycc.gov.uk, or on paper at local libraries.

Five themes for the open text questions

1. **Make climate action a clear commitment.** Ask the council to name climate and the environment as a priority, covering emissions as well as flooding and heat. Please also support our call for the council to declare a Climate and Nature Emergency.
2. **Cut energy bills.** Ask for support for home insulation and retrofit, framed as help with the cost of living and health, and as a source of local jobs and training,
3. **Affordable, healthy travel.** Ask that "easier and safer travel" explicitly includes buses, walking and cycling, safer routes for children, and cleaner air.
4. **Nature and resilient communities,** Ask for action on access to green space, habitats, water quality and flood protection, and for support for local reuse and repair initiatives.
5. **Work with communities, not just listen to them.** Ask for lasting ways for residents to shape decisions, such as community panels or citizens assembliesm, and for a wide partnership of the council, businesses, academia and community groups, with a regular West Surrey gathering to review progress.

Question	Suggested approach, if it reflects your view
Organisation focus	Choose the option that best fits your organisation.
Strengths (up to 5)	Consider: Green spaces and countryside; Strong communities; Strong voluntary and community sector; Strong partnership working; Universities, colleges and education.
Challenges (up to 5)	Consider: Climate change and environmental pressures; Cost of living; Housing affordability and availability; Transport, congestion and connectivity.
Greatest opportunity for West Surrey over the next 5 to 10 years, and why	*Suggested starting points as follows, but please adapt, adding your own examples, and delete anything that does not reflect your organisation. Square brackets mark where to add your own detail.* The greatest opportunity is to use the creation of West Surrey Council to change how Surrey works, by making climate and nature action the foundation for every ambition the council has set. We ask the council to begin by declaring a Climate and Nature Emergency. Warm, energy-efficient homes cut bills and improve health. Safe, affordable walking, cycling and bus travel improve air quality, wellbeing and access to work. Green spaces and healthy rivers support health and bring people together. Retrofit, renewable energy and nature restoration create skilled local jobs and business opportunities. Planned together, these can deliver a supportive, thriving and prosperous West Surrey at the same time, and more effectively than tackling each ambition separately. This depends on working differently: the council, businesses, universities and community groups sharing priorities and reviewing progress together, instead of working in separate silos. Local government reorganisation is a once-in-a-generation chance to build that from the start. [Our organisation] would welcome the chance to help.

Question	Suggested approach, if it reflects your view
Priorities, challenges or opportunities unique to specific areas of West Surrey	*Suggested starting points as follows, but please adapt, adding your own examples, and delete anything that does not reflect your organisation. Square brackets mark where to add your own detail.* Each part of West Surrey faces different pressures, and local groups are best placed to describe them. [In [borough or area], the main issues for our members are [for example flooding, a transport gap, a green space or river that matters, or a local project that could grow with support].] Across West Surrey, we ask the council to recognise that priorities will differ between the six boroughs, and to create ways for local communities and organisations to shape priorities for their own area, instead of applying one approach everywhere. *Prompts to help fill in the brackets: Where do flooding or overheating affect people? Which journeys cannot be made without a car? Which green spaces and rivers matter most locally? Which community projects could grow with council support?*
Top three priorities over next five years	Consider: Protecting and enhancing the environment; Sustainable growth and infrastructure; Stronger, safer and more resilient communities.
Why are these your top three priorities?	*Suggested starting points as follows, but please adapt, adding your own examples, and delete anything that does not reflect your organisation. These are written for the three priorities suggested in the previous question, above. If you choose differently, please change the text to match.* We chose these priorities because they are connected and underpin the council's other ambitions. Protecting and enhancing the environment is the basis for health, the local economy and quality of life, and the effects of climate change, such as flooding and heat, are already felt by residents. Sustainable growth and infrastructure matters because decisions about homes, transport and energy made now will shape emissions, bills and resilience for decades, so they should be planned together. Stronger, safer and more resilient communities matter because connected, involved communities are better able to cope with shocks and to deliver local solutions. Acting early can also reduce future costs, and community groups, volunteers and local businesses can contribute skills and capacity. We encourage the council to set its priorities with communities, and to build a wide partnership with businesses, universities and community groups, with a regular West Surrey gathering to review progress.
Values (two)	Consider: Collaboration and Localism. If you prefer, you could tick "Other" and write "Environmental stewardship - so that protecting climate and nature underpins everything the Council does."
Importance of priorities	Consider rating "A thriving and sustainable West Surrey" as Essential. It is the only theme that covers the environment.
Council's role	Consider: Transport: Bring partners together Environment and climate: Bring partners together.. Empowering communities: Enable and empower others. .

Question	Suggested approach, if it reflects your view
Barriers (three)	Consider: Lack of joined-up working; Difficulty engaging communities; Lack of funding.
Working together	Consider: Help shape future policy and strategy; Develop joint projects; Support community initiatives; Participate in partnership boards or forums.

Contact Details and Submission

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