

Mobile users endure weeks with no signal

No date set for restoration of service

By Brian Haran

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HUNDREDS of residents are still without mobile phone signals, weeks after the problem was first reported.

A senior councillor has now waded into the row, as exasperated customers report they are receiving mixed messages as to when the month-long problem will be resolved.

The signal blackout – caused by two masts being removed but not yet permanently replaced – has hit customers across Caterham and Chaldon.

Caterham district councillor Chris Botten, the Liberal Democrat group leader on Tandridge

District Council, said the lack of signal was having a “very serious impact on businesses and residents”.

Writing to the council’s chief executive Stephen Weigel, Mr Botten said: “Residents would welcome any pressure you could bring to bear on Vodafone to sort out a decent service for local businesses.”

Mr Weigel replied: “I appreciate how frustrating it is that Vodafone have been unable to get their new masts operational and chose to remove their temporary mast. “I will be writing to Vodafone to see if there is anything we can do to assist them in getting their masts operational.”

Chaldon resident Bev Beechey said: “We are situated well within the M25 – hardly the Highlands of Scotland – yet we still cannot get a decent mobile signal in the 21st century.”

Frustrating

Dr Ria Kubaisi, an East Surrey Hospital anaesthetist who lives in Caterham, said: “I have struggled to keep in contact with my elderly father and can’t get calls from the hospital. It’s very frustrating.”

Tim Morgan, an IT manager of Addison Road, Caterham, said: “The service in Caterham this year has been very poor, but it has bordered on non-existent recently.”

“I have had to drive to Coulsdon just to get a signal.”

Guy Riches, an HR manager of Hambledon Road, said: “Some folks are being told next February or March for reintroduction of the service.”

“Self-employed people and other businesses must be at their wits’ end.”

Also hard-hit is East Surrey Dial-a-Ride, which provides minibus trips for pensioners, but often can’t contact its drivers.

Vodafone spokeswoman Jane Frapwell told the Mirror a fortnight ago that the mast in Westway should be functioning by late



SERIOUS IMPACT: Chris Botten

November.

But, when asked last week to clarify when the service will be restored, she said: “I can’t give you a firm date as we are waiting to hear back from the council about closing the road.”

“But February is not accurate – it will be considerably earlier than this.”

Vodafone’s original mast was on the Oaklands site, off Coulsdon Road, Caterham, which is now being developed for housing.

No objection was raised by the council in October last year to plans to install two new masts in Westway instead.

Temporary

In the meantime, a temporary mast went up at Chaldon’s Surrey National Golf Course.

But when the temporary permission expired last month it was removed after the council said it “would not view favourably” any further extension of this permission.

A council spokesman said: “If the masts in Westway are still not providing service, over a year since they had consent, this is a matter for customers to take up with their operator.”



STILL OUT OF ACTION: One of the Westway phone masts

Residents’ flooding risk plea

RESIDENTS could only watch helplessly as water rose around their properties this week.

Homes in Chapel Road, Smallfield, have been swamped in the past, and the recent heavy rain has led to further fears of flooding.

The affected householders say the drains are unable to cope with sudden downpours, and have pleaded with Surrey County Council to clear them.

They were out until midnight two months ago brushing the muddy water away from their properties.

Paul Simmons has lived in Chapel Road since 2000. His garden flooded last year.

“We regularly request the council clear the debris from the



WATER THREAT: Chapel Road, Smallfield, has drainage problems

culvert, but when they do, they sometimes pile it up on the bank and it soon washes back into the stream again and blocks the grates,” he said.

“As for Chapel Road, until something is done to enable the water from the road to flow away unrestricted, we will continue to suffer floods to our properties.”

Another resident with similar

issues is retired saleswoman Marion Dollemore.

“As soon as I hear the rain coming down, I panic. I find myself feeling on edge every time,” she said.

“We have had this problem for years. The water comes at the house from both directions and it stands around my property.”

“We have had to lift the manhole covers and brush the water away from our properties until about midnight just to try and get the water away from us.”

Surrey County Council has tried to clear the road gulleys, but residents say the problem is drainage pipes, which are unable to cope with heavy rainfall.

Surrey County Council was not available for comment.



SWIMMING FOR CHARITY: Abi Monk, Maggie Giddings, Saba Salman and Ruth Evans from Oxted

Month-long swim raises money for kids’ charity

FOUR women from Oxted have raised hundreds of pounds for online charity Netbuddy.

Swimming a total of 8.3 miles, friends Saba Salman, 40, Abi Monk, 39, Maggie Giddings, 38, and Ruth Evans, also 38, swam for 30 minutes each, one day a week, for a month.

The sponsored swim at Tandridge Leisure Centre managed to raise £977 for Netbuddy, an online charity supporting parents and carers of children with learning disabilities.

Saba, whose younger sister Raana has a learning disability, said: “I wanted to raise funds for Netbuddy because it’s a fantastic charity for families affected by a learning disability.”

“Something like Netbuddy would have been a huge support for us when we were growing up.”

“There are literally hundreds of practical ideas and tips on their website from other parents and carers. That kind of peer support is invaluable.”

■ To find out more visit www.netbuddy.org.uk

IN BRIEF

Charges follow driving arrest

CATERHAM: A 30-year-old man has been charged over several offences that are alleged to have occurred in Caterham and Coulsdon last month.

Richard Stinton, of Manor Road, South Norwood, has been charged with failing to provide a specimen, dangerous driving, assault with intent to resist arrest, failing to stop for police, failing to stop after an accident and criminal damage.

He has been released on bail to appear before Redhill magistrates next Friday (December 7).

■ Anyone who saw a white Vauxhall Combo van travelling between Ninehams Road in Caterham and Taunton Lane, Coulsdon, at around 12.25am on Wednesday, November 21, is asked to call police on 101.

Christmas fair

CATERHAM: A host of attractions are in store at a traditional Christmas fair on Saturday in one of the town’s most historic buildings.

On offer at the Soper Hall will be dozens of stalls selling gifts, a choir singing carols, a hog roast, mulled wine – and guaranteed snow outside.

Admission is free, and the fair runs from 9.30am to 5.30pm.

The running of the 101-year-old building in Harestone Valley Road was transferred in May from Tandridge District Council to a residents-led group.

Since then the building has been given an initial make-over, and has quickly attracted bookings for more social events.

Museum events

CATERHAM: East Surrey Museum is holding Christmas activities for children and accompanying adults.

Participants can make traditional Christmas paper chains and cards.

Sessions run from 10.30am to noon and from 2pm to 3.30pm, on both Wednesday and Thursday, December 19 and 20.

Booking is recommended by calling 01883 340275.

Park revamp

REIGATE: Priory Park’s play area will be closed until Friday December 14.

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council said the closure, which began on Monday, is for “essential maintenance to items of equipment and surfacing”.

The council is also making changes to the toddler area.

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