



Top-Down Power, Bottom-Up Pain: How Central Control is Killing Local Communities

When I was a child growing up in rural Surrey, I could never imagine why anyone wouldn't want to preserve the wondrous landscapes of Britain, only to replace them with concrete and tarmac for roads, houses, and airports. As I've gotten older, this disbelief has only grown stronger.

Take Ashted, for example — a small town not far from where I live. The local council wants to build 270 new homes on green belt land, despite furious local opposition. Even the council themselves are divided on the issue, pushing it through due to fear of top-down reprisal. In nearby Langley Vale Village, there's talk of potentially 110 homes being developed on equally green agricultural land that has been part of the local farming area for generations.

These are just two examples of dozens from my area alone. These plans are unpopular and have sparked fierce backlash and debate in the community. People wonder: Why do we have so little say in decisions that transform our neighbourhoods? Why do we often feel powerless against developers and top-down mandates?

Now, as I did then, I believe that Britain is still (at least for now) a beautiful country. However, my view of our island has matured to balance what I feel we have lost alongside what we've gained.

At 29 years old, many assume my generation is full of pro-modernist, latte-sipping, avocado toast-eating, Netflix-bingeing apathetics who don't value the past and would bulldoze anything if it meant lowering house prices. This stereotype is not just wrong — it's dangerous. Many of us care about more than just house prices; we care about landscape, beauty, nature and history. We want to preserve what was, and we think seriously about what is to come.

Many young people hear the mood of the nation and agree that things are broken. But I don't believe that a centralised, managerial approach with top-down policies is the way to fix this or make the country happier.

A big reason why Brits feel broken is that they have no control over their futures. Stagnant wages, rising living costs, and soaring house prices force many to delay milestones like having children, marriage, or retirement. But I believe the problem runs deeper. This apathy — and misery — comes from a lack of local agency, community, and belonging. Money is necessary, but the soul of a community comes from local decision-making, not cash.

Nowhere is this absence of local control clearer than in the planning system. Central London Starmerites (and many others before them) claim that communities, especially in the Home Counties, are just NIMBYs blocking progress to boost the economy. But it's far more complicated than this.

Today's planning process is little more than a tick-box exercise. Communities are asked for input, then routinely ignored. When a local council rejects a development, it's often overturned on appeal by higher authorities. Councillors face political backlash but have little real power to protect their communities. What looks like democracy is, in practice, centralisation.

This suppression of local democracy breeds apathy and resentment. People feel decisions are imposed on them, not made for them.

So here's an alternative — one I doubt either major national party would support, but let's dream.

In Switzerland, local communities decide their fate through direct democracy, sometimes gathering in town squares to vote on local issues. Local infrastructure, zoning, education, and some taxation are set at the local level. The central government only plays a guiding role in essential services and national taxes.

You might ask: won't richer areas just set tax rates low to outcompete poorer ones, increasing inequality? Two mechanisms prevent this. First, Swiss local tax rates operate within regulated bands, maintaining rough parity. Second, a redistributive model transfers wealth from richer to poorer areas, ensuring local empowerment without worsening inequality.

I would love to see this model brought to Britain. It would shake up the old, sclerotic national parties and restore real power to local people. Local councillors represent diverse parties and interests but are currently toothless. A Swiss-style local democracy would change that.

"But what if they don't build enough houses? What if businesses move to areas with better tax rates?" Then communities will respond accordingly. Challenges would remain, but at least people would be deciding their own trade-offs and paths forward.

Unfortunately, the UK is moving away from local democracy. Surrey provides a stark example. Our 11 boroughs are slated to merge into 2 or 3 "super authorities," with a directly elected mayor gaining sweeping powers over the county. How is this real



devolution? It centralises power into a system locals had no say in creating — allowing the government to push through top-down housing targets, often against local wishes.

In a Swiss or similar system, we'd live in a country truly made for the people, by the people — with agency, dignity, and hope for the future. I believe that Brits are capable of running their own communities, and it is patronising to suggest otherwise.

I wait with bated breath to see the fallout that is yet to come from this government's drive towards centralisation, continuing a tradition in this country that has hollowed out local communities for decades.

I can only hope we the people see the light before it's too late.

Matthew P. Dunn

Who will pay for Epsom's leisure centre “better deal”?

Dear Editor,

Your excellent article on the Council's decision to appoint a new operator for the Rainbow Leisure Centre raises important questions about what residents can expect. One crucial point not yet disclosed by the Council is that prices for residents are likely to rise — because the new provider, Places Leisure, has agreed to pay the Council more for the right to operate the Centre, and this additional cost will almost certainly be passed on to users.

The decision-making process, described by the ruling Residents' Association as “transparent”, was anything but. It began with a now-familiar request for councillors to enter confidential session, shutting the public out of a decision that affects thousands of local families.

At consecutive meetings of the Community and Wellbeing Committee — on which I sit — and then the Strategy and Resources Committee, councillors were asked to approve the administration's preferred supplier, Places Leisure, over the incumbent GLL/Better and another bidder. We were told that failure to agree would result in the Centre's closure from 1 October. This ultimatum was presented as a matter of legal necessity under procurement law, but no explanation was provided as to why earlier action had not been taken to avoid such a stark choice.

The selection process itself raises concerns. A confidential paper outlined how bids were scored. Quality and commercial factors were supposedly given equal weight. On quality, GLL/Better scored higher than Places Leisure, with clear criteria applied. Yet for the “commercial” element, GLL was given a score close to zero — with no explanation offered for how this figure was reached. The absence of transparency on such a critical aspect of the scoring process undermines confidence in the outcome.

It was made clear that Places Leisure would pay the Council more for the right to run the Centre and would commit to making some “investment”. However, this came with a catch — a “change to the fees which the operator would look to charge”. In plain terms, residents will be paying more so the Council can generate more income from the Centre.

This is not how important decisions affecting public services should be made. Epsom and Ewell residents deserve better than secretive processes and rubber-stamped choices. I urge the new Leader of the Council to reflect on this episode, and to commit to greater transparency, genuine scrutiny, and open debate on future decisions — especially those involving public assets like the Rainbow Leisure Centre.

Cllr Rob Geleit

Labour, Court Ward

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council

Editor's Note: *This letter reflects the views of the author, an elected councillor. While it refers to matters that may or may not have been discussed in a closed session of the Council, we have published it in the public interest, given the implications for public services and local accountability. We invite the Council to respond if it wishes to clarify any aspect of the decision-making process.*

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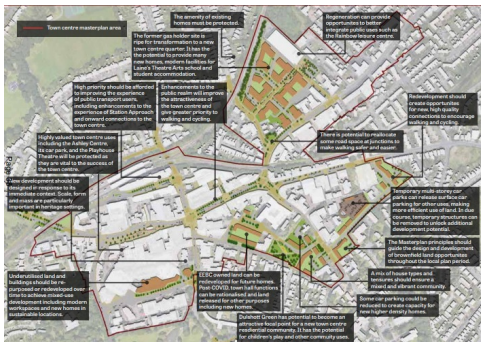


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Council Planning

Award-Winning Epsom Town Masterplan Shines Spotlight on Council's Planning Priorities



12 July 2025

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Epsom Town Centre Masterplan has been named "Best Plan" at the Royal Town Planning Institute's (RTPI) South East Awards for Planning Excellence 2024. The win ... [Read More](#)

Arts Education

Creative Futures: Year 10 Taster Days at Epsom's UCA



12 July 2025

The University for the Creative Arts (UCA), in collaboration with the Higher Education Outreach Network (HEON), is offering six exciting and inspiring Taster Days for current Year 10 students. These ... [Read More](#)



Community Council Sports

Epsom and Ewell will judge change at their leisure

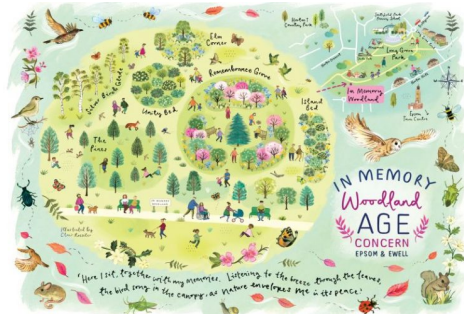


9 July 2025

When Epsom & Ewell Borough Council announced that Better will hand over management of the Rainbow Leisure Centre to Places Leisure in October 2025, many locals who have experienced booking glitches, understaffed gyms, and ... [Read More](#)

Community Environment Health

A New Place for Reflection and Remembrance Opens in Epsom's Long Grove Park

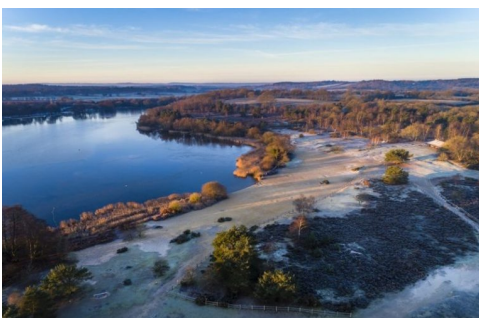


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A new natural sanctuary has been unveiled in Long Grove Park, offering a space for remembrance and quiet reflection. The 'In Memory Woodland', created by Age Concern Epsom & Ewell, ... [Read More](#)

Council Environment Planning

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Arts Culture Education

Ewell’s Nescot student’s work selected for Origins Creatives 2025



9 July 2025

Art & Design student from Nescot College, Imaani Zafar, has been selected to exhibit her work at Origins Creatives, taking place at the Mall Galleries in July. Imaani’s submission, titled, ... [Read More](#)

Horse racing Sports

Epsom’s six races; five handicaps and a fillies’ maiden



9 July 2025

Epsom Racecourse presents its latest meeting on Thursday evening, which consists of six races; five handicaps and a fillies’



maiden. Read on for a full preview of the Epsom card, ... [Read More](#)

Creative Futures: Year 10 Taster Days at Epsom's UCA

The University for the Creative Arts (UCA), in collaboration with the Higher Education Outreach Network (HEON), is offering six exciting and inspiring Taster Days for current Year 10 students. These free events will focus on a range of creative disciplines including **Fine Art, Graphic Design, Animation, Acting, Textiles, and Creative Business**.

Taking place across UCA's campuses, each Taster Day is designed to give students a hands-on introduction to life at a specialist creative university. Participants will have the opportunity to work closely with practising artists, experienced academics, and current UCA students. Through engaging workshops and interactive sessions, students will gain valuable insight into what it's like to study and work in the creative industries.

These experiences allow students to explore the university's professional facilities, including industry-standard studios, workshops, and software. Whether it's using digital design tools, experimenting with materials, performing in rehearsal spaces, or developing their own summer music festival, these Taster Days are designed to develop creative confidence and key skills that can support students as they enter Year 11 and begin to think seriously about their future pathways.

UCA partners with HEON, a network of universities and colleges working together as part of the Office for Students' Uni Connect programme. HEON's mission is to raise awareness of higher education and help young people from North Hampshire and Surrey to make informed, confident choices about their next steps. By offering engaging and supportive activities, HEON aims to open doors to higher education for students who may not have previously considered it.

The Taster Days form part of this wider commitment to student outreach and aspiration-raising. They provide a first-hand experience of what it means to study creative subjects at a higher level, while also showcasing the range of career paths available in the creative industries, from visual arts and media to performance and entrepreneurship.

These Taster Days are not just about creativity – for many, it's the first time they've stepped onto a university campus or imagined themselves pursuing a career in the arts. We encourage all eligible Year 10 students to consider attending one of these fantastic opportunities.

24th July, 10:00-14:30 – UCA Farnham – Fine Art, Graphic Design, Animation, Acting

25th July, 10:00-14:30 – UCA Epsom – Textiles and Creative Business

Successful applicants will also be entered into a prize draw to win an artist's pack!

If you are a student, parent, or teacher interested in learning more, please don't hesitate to get in touch at outreach@uca.ac.uk.

Epsom's six races; five handicaps and a fillies' maiden

Epsom Racecourse presents its latest meeting on Thursday evening, which consists of six races; five handicaps and a fillies' maiden.

*Read on for a full preview of the Epsom card, courtesy of Racing TV, who have the very latest horse racing **free bets** offers.*

The first race at the track – which is the UK's cheapest Grade One racecourse, according to the **Racing Post** Price Index – is a mile and a half three-year-olds' handicap (5.50). A competitive affair, this is a tough race to call. Stormy Monday is well proven over the trip, while Only One Blue and Nobleman look likely to enjoy the extra couple of furlongs, stepping up in trip for the first time. Newmarket trainer Harry Eustace is having a very good season and, therefore, his runner Vulcan Way is of some interest, but Sir Mark Prescott's Bosphorus Rose should be able to finish strongly here and win for a bang in-form yard.

A two-year-old fillies' maiden is next, run over seven furlongs (6.25). From a field of nine, four are newcomers, all with useful pedigrees. Ollie Sangster's Court Of Stars and Eve Johnson Houghton's Mystic Moment set the standard on form, both having picked up places, but the former looks to have the most potential on paper and ought to be today's winner.

Next is a seven furlong handicap (7.00). Both Daisy Roots and Finbar's Lad seek to make it back-to-back wins, although the latter



does carry a five-pound penalty having won at Chelmsford only nine days ago. Course and distance winner G'Daay comes here in a good strain of form, having placed on both of his last starts, and is given a chance by the handicapper in remaining on the same mark. With a seven-pound claimer in the saddle, this could be his day.

Race four is a six-furlong handicap (7.35). Harry Eustace's Kisskodi seeks a hat-trick, having won his last two starts at Leicester and Brighton. With rider Jack Nicholls' seven-pounds in hand, they could go well again, but this might be a tall order for a three-year-old up against older, hardened handicappers. 11-year-old Muscika has a good record at this track and is back down to a workable mark, so should be right there at the finish.

The penultimate race is a handicap run over the extended mile (8.10). Orbaan carries a penalty having won last Friday at Beverley, so this may prove to be too much of an ask. Golden Circet looks promising equipped with a visor for the first time, back down in trip from 10 furlongs last time, while Virtue Patience looks well primed for a win here. Rab Havlin won on the gelding in March and rides again for Amanda Perrett, whose stable is doing very well at present.

Finally, a mile and a quarter three-year-olds' handicap rounds off the evening's racing (8.45). James Fanshawe's Inquisition comes here hoping to complete a hat-trick and might be able to do so, with rider Fred Daly's seven-pound claim counteracting the six-pound penalty the filly carries here. Pergola, Without Burlington and Marmalade Kid make their handicap debuts here, but this does look like quite an ask.

Epsom selections - Thursday:

5.50 - Bosphorus Rose

6.25 - Court Of Stars

7.00 - G'Daay

7.35 - Muscika

8.10 - Virtue Patience

8.45 - Inquisitio

Image: Horses racing Image: Credit Paul. CC BY 2.0

10th July 2025

Community Council News

Public Meeting to Debate Epsom and Ewell's government future



8 July 2025

A public debate later this month will ask whether Epsom and Ewell Borough Council could soon be abolished — and whether such a decision might happen without any vote or ... [Read More](#)

Arts Culture



Epsom choir range in all musical directions

8 July 2025

On Saturday 28th June, the Epsom Chamber Choir presented an eclectic programme of music inspired by Shakespeare's songs and sonnets. Ranging from small-scale madrigals to the beautiful melodies of Bernstein's ... [Read More](#)

Environment News

Fly-tipping in Epsom and Ewell part of national problem



8 July 2025

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Community Council Education

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Local History



Epsom's infamous murders



8 July 2025

Epsom has witnessed several notable murder cases throughout the 20th century. These incidents, though tragic, have become part of the town's history. Epsom is best known for its racing heritage, Georgian ... [Read More](#)

Business News

King's Award for Epsom based business



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Community Environment Volunteers

Volunteers Tackle Plastic Waste in Epsom Town Centre



7 July 2025

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Community Education

Epsom and Ewell Town-Twinning Association presents Cyril Frazer Awards for 2025



3 July 2025

The Epsom and Ewell Town-Twinning Association recently presented its annual Cyril Frazer Awards to this year's winners: Sarah Carpenter of Southfield Primary School, and the joint runners-up, Siobhan Cornell and ... [Read More](#)

Council Council constitution Letters

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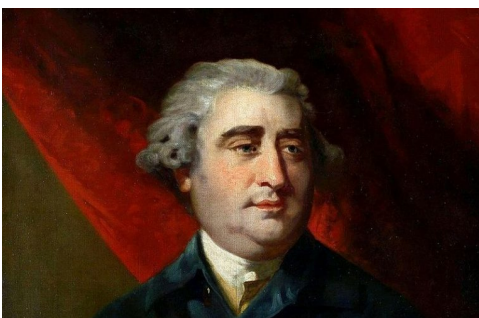


2 July 2025

I enjoyed your write-up of the latest meeting of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, where you asked "Will the doomed Epsom and Ewell Borough Council rise from the ashes in ... [Read More](#)

Arts Council Local History

Anti-slavery Parliamentarian portrait purchase



2 July 2025



Runnymede Borough Council has agreed to release thousands of pounds to help buy a “significantly important” oil painting for its museum. The painting is an oil on canva

Public Meeting to Debate Epsom and Ewell’s government future

A public debate later this month will ask whether Epsom and Ewell Borough Council could soon be abolished — and whether such a decision might happen without any vote or public consultation.

The event, titled *“Here Today, Gone Tomorrow? Devolution Explained”*, will take place at 7.00pm on Wednesday 23rd July 2025 at St Joseph’s Catholic Church St Margaret Dr, Epsom KT18 7JQ. It is free to attend and open to all residents and businesses.

The meeting is organised by **Rotary Connections**, a local initiative of the Rotary Club aiming to bring together businesses, civic groups, and the wider community.

The panel will include local councillors:

Eber Kingston – Residents Association and Surrey County Council and former long-serving Councillor on EEBC.

Bernie Muir, deputy chair of Surrey County Council, Conservative, who also serves on Epsom and Ewell Borough.

Steven McCormick – Residents Association serving both EEBC and Surrey County Council.

The discussion will be chaired by **Lionel Blackman**, local solicitor and a director of the Epsom and Ewell Times.

The debate comes amid growing speculation over local government reorganisation in Surrey. Proposals in recent years have raised the prospect of scrapping all district and borough councils in favour of one or more large unitary authorities. Such a move would end the independence of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, which has served the community since 1937.

Supporters of unitary reform claim it could bring savings and efficiency. Opponents argue it risks reducing local accountability and weakening the borough’s unique identity.

After initial addresses from each speaker organisers say the meeting will follow a “Question Time” format, allowing the public to pose questions directly to councillors on what these changes might mean for services, representation, and the future shape of local democracy.

Entry is free.

Related reports:

Will the doomed Epsom and Ewell Borough Council rise from the ashes in other forms?

Two unitaries will save money says Surrey leader

Epsom and Ewell Considers New Community Councils as Local Government Shake-Up Looms

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council out – Community Council’s in?

and many more – search “local government reorganisation”.

Epsom choir range in all musical directions

On Saturday 28th June, the Epsom Chamber Choir presented an eclectic programme of music inspired by Shakespeare’s songs and sonnets. Ranging from small-scale madrigals to the beautiful melodies of Bernstein’s *West Side Story*, relaxed jazz from George Shearing, and an uplifting setting of Whitacre’s *Leonardo Dreams of His Flying Machine*, with everything in between, there truly was music for everyone.

Encouraged by the generous acoustics of St Martin’s Church, Epsom, the choir was in good voice despite the heat of the evening.



The programme structure combined more contemporary music interspersed with madrigals (sung mainly two to a part), giving most of the choir an opportunity to shine. While some of the small groups were more successful in mastering the “art” of the madrigal—especially in the performance of *Fair Phyllis*—this music nevertheless offered both vocal and musical contrast.

The *West Side Story* medley (along with the arrangement of *Summertime*) provided a joyous start to the concert, with excellent choir diction and lovely solo singing. The four Shakespeare songs by the Finnish composer Jaakko Mäntyjärvi (born 1963) were more challenging for both the audience and the choir. Requiring an exceptionally high standard of performance, the choir, as always, was assured, although tuning and balance suffered a little at times.

In contrast, the performance of Whitacre’s *Leonardo Dreams of His Flying Machine* was masterful—sung with conviction, passion, and finesse. Bravo, Epsom Chamber Choir!

The second half had a lighter feel, with some meaningful arrangements, including Billy Joel’s *And So It Goes* (arranged by Bob Chilcott), all of which were sung beautifully. The concert concluded with the five *Songs and Sonnets from Shakespeare* by George Shearing, which gave the choir a chance to “let their hair down.” Clearly, they enjoyed these pieces, as did the audience, supported by excellent piano accompaniment from Stephen Ridge.

For this concert, Tristan Weymes replaced ECC’s principal conductor, Jack Apperley, and his calm and sensitive approach was appreciated by all.

Congratulations to the Epsom Chamber Choir for a joyous summer evening of Shakespeare-inspired music.

So, “if music be the food of love, sing on!”

—Michael Stevenson MA FTCL GTCL ARCO

Photo credit Paul McCan

Leslie Pinckney Simpson

Leslie Pinckney Simpson died peacefully on 26th June 2025, aged 92, after a short illness.

He will be greatly missed by his wife Audrey and his nephews and nieces. Funeral to be held on Monday 28th July at 11.45, at Randalls Park Crematorium, Leatherhead.

No flowers, donations to the Princess Alice Hospice

King’s Award for Epsom based business

Penta Consulting, an Epsom-based provider of global technology talent and managed solutions, has been awarded the King’s Award for Enterprise in International Trade 2025, one of the most distinguished honours for UK businesses.

The award recognises Penta’s exceptional growth in international markets and its proven ability to deliver secure, compliant, and scalable solutions across the globe. This prestigious recognition places Penta among a select group of British companies demonstrating innovation, resilience, and commercial success on the international stage. Winners of the award were invited to a royal reception at Windsor Castle and gain the right to use the official award emblem for five years.

“This award is a testament to our people, our partnerships, and our passion for delivering results for our clients,” said Paul Clark, Executive Chairman and Founder of Penta Consulting. “It reflects our team’s dedication to delivering with expertise, integrity, and a global outlook.”

Penta Consulting CEO Aminash Patel added:

“This has been our best year on record and we’re in a great position to keep this momentum. We’re proud of being recognised for our international business, but we also do everything we can to make an impact locally. We support Epsom Pantry, a local food bank, the Jigsaw Trust, and many other local causes. We’re on an exciting trajectory, so we’d encourage anyone interested in technology job opportunities to continue to check our website.”



The King's Award win comes as the latest recognition in an incredibly successful year for the Surrey business. Penta Consulting has also been recognised with several other accolades in the first half of 2025:

- **Sunday Times Top 100** – recognising Britain's fastest-growing companies
- **Sunday Times Best Places to Work** – medium-sized business category
- **London Chamber of Commerce and Industry SME Business Awards** – Best International Business and Overall Winner

About the King's Awards

The King's Awards for Enterprise were previously known as The Queen's Awards for Enterprise, and were renamed two years ago to reflect His Majesty The King's desire to continue the legacy of HM Queen Elizabeth II by recognising outstanding UK businesses.

About Penta Consulting

Penta Consulting delivers bespoke technology resource solutions to the global ICT industry. With 12 international offices, the company supports over 1,000 technical resources across more than 80 countries. Specialising in digital transformation, cloud, and AI, Penta's core services include Professional Services, Managed Solutions, and Managed Resource for leading global technology brands.

Image: Paul Clark, Founder and Executive Chairman of Penta Consulting meeting His Majesty the King at Windsor Castle