



Epsom Playhouse £1.50 per ticket fee from 1st April

The Epsom Playhouse will now charge an additional £1.50 facility fee per ticket as of the 1st April 2025.

During its meeting on the 16th January 2025, the Community and Well-being Committee, chaired by Councillor **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village), discussed proposals for the Epsom Playhouse for 2025/26, aspart of their fees and charges agenda.

The proposal outlined the growing struggles the aging Playhouse currently faces, with the infrastructure remaining the same for 40 years.

A major concern highlighted by the report was the technical show lighting, with end-of-life issues potentially hindering future productions. For the Playhouse to provide 'high-quality, diverse, and well-balanced entertainment to support the local community and enhance our reputation as a cultural destination', it was deemed essential for the Playhouse to undergo maintenance work.

The main focus of the Epsom Playhouse proposal was to source a way to finance this necessary maintenance. The report states that 'to support the ongoing operational costs of running the venue, which have significantly increased, we propose the introduction of a facility fee of £1.50 to each ticket sold from 1 April 2025, the income raised annually will be ring fenced for the Playhouse upkeep.'

The Council's senior accountant explained that this new facility fee could see around £80,000 in additional revenue, directly going towards the upkeep of the Playhouse annually. He assured Councillor **Alison Kelly** (LibDem Stamford) that the additional fee would be clearly indicated for those purchasing a ticket.

Councillor **Rachel King** (RA Town) highlighted that an additional £1.50 could tip the balance of tickets being affordable for some households wishing to attend the theatre. Other local theatres have adopted this scheme that in some instances is between the £2-£5 range.

Councillor Clive Woodbridge added that there will be regular monitoring of ticket sales to determine whether the new fee damages the Playhouse's box office sales.

The committee was in agreement to go ahead with the recommended proposal of a new facility fee, which will be implemented as of the 1st April 2025. Any bookings made before this date will not incur the additional £1.50 fee.

UK library cuts a concern for Epsom & Ewell?

With 132 libraries closing permanently between 2016-2023 in England, there are growing concerns of further actions from local councils to make savings at the expense of public libraries. Should Epsom & Ewell be concerned?

Since 2016, the UK has witnessed a net loss of 185 public libraries from Council's statutory services. In total 132 libraries were permanently closed in England, with a further 29 expected to follow suit in 2024.

Former Children's Laureate, **Michael Rosen** has expressed great concern, stating "Every time I hear of a library being closed I find it absolutely horrifying... this seems to be like a decimation of our cultural entitlement."

Permanent closures are not the only growing worry surrounding UK libraries. Libraries Connected Chief Executive **Isobel Hunter** MBE acknowledged that "it is also a gradual reduction in opening hours, staff numbers and operating budgets that can leave libraries unable to meet the needs of their communities".

A government spokesperson responded "We recognise the pressures [libraries] face, and are committed to giving stability back to local councils so services such as these can best meet the needs of their communities."

How have libraries in Surrey and Epsom & Ewell fared since 2016?

Surrey:

Unlike several local councils, the Surrey County Council has not permanently closed any libraries since 2016. All 52 libraries are still running, 42 of which are council-run with the other 10 being community partnerships.

The Surrey County Council's 2024/25 budget indicates that they intend to enable libraries to meet the changing needs of communities while also ensuring library assets are fit and sustainable for the future.



One change Surrey has seen however is that 29 libraries are now operating with reduced hours.

Epsom & Ewell:

Of the 4 libraries in Epsom & Ewell, two are council-run (Epsom library and Ewell library). Between 2016-2023, both have been subject to the reduction of operating hours, with the council-run libraries reducing their open hours by 4.5 hours per week.

Despite the concerns of closures elsewhere, Surrey County Council is investing in several of its libraries, with Epsom library included.

A £23.2million investment for the transformation of Surrey libraries was approved by the Surrey County Council earlier this year, aiming to modernise services and create flexible spaces. Epsom, alongside Woking and Redhill, will see the creation of flagship facilities, including;

Flexible meeting rooms

Moveable partitions/walls to create workspaces

Meeting pods

New furniture

A fully flexible layout

Epsom will additionally have 'super access technology' to allow access to library services outside its opening hours (during "super access hours"). This intends to resolve the reduction of opening hours by allowing people to use the library facilities even if no staff are present. The system has a library card and pin code access point to enter the building, and self scan kiosks to check books in/out.

With works already starting, as of the 5th of August 2024, Surrey County Council expects the final completion day to be in February 2025.

Despite this investment, Surrey County Council have outlined that libraries income pressures will continue in 2024/25, as outlined in their 2024/25 Budget & Medium-Term Financial Strategy to 2028/29.

Reliance on volunteer work:

1 of the 10 community-run libraries in Surrey is the Stoneleigh Community library, which has previously suffered from cuts. In 2011 the Surrey County Council voted to let go of most of the full time staff there, forcing the library to appeal for volunteers. After the judicial technical challenge and revised proposal, the volunteer group Friends of Stoneleigh library was formed in 2013 to reopen and run the library, and as of 2016 had around 70 volunteers.

Today the library still holds regular activities and special events, acting as a social hub for the Stoneleigh community. The Friends of Stoneleigh Library offers a variety of volunteer roles from administrative work to helping the running of events.

The other community partnership library in Epsom & Ewell is Ewell Court Library, listed alongside the Stoneleigh Community Library in initial plans to reduce spending in 2011/12. Open 4 days a week, the community library offers a wide array of services, with the help of its volunteers.

Epsom and Ewell's new MP and new Party

The 2024 general election count for Epsom & Ewell was held last night at the Epsom Downs racecourse from 10pm to the early hours today.

This year's election introduced new boundaries for the constituency of Epsom and Ewell, with the addition of wards from Ashted and Leatherhead.

With the vote closing at 10pm, the official ballot count revealed a voter turnout of 70%. (2019: 81,138. 73.3%)

Mrs **Jackie King**, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's CEO and Returning Officer, revealed the official result at about 06:15 with the results as follows:

LIBERAL DEMOCRAT: Helen Maguire:

- Votes 20,674



- Share 37.9%
- Share change +13.7
- 2019: 13,946 (23.5%)

CONSERVATIVE: Mhairi Fraser:

- Votes 16,988
- Share 31.2%
- Share change -22.4
- 2019: 31,819 (53.5%)

LABOUR: Mark Todd:

- Votes 8,325
- Share 15.3%
- Share change -1.5
- 2019: 10,226 (17.2%)

REFORM UK: Mayuran Senthilnathan:

- Votes 5,795
- Share 10.6%
- Share change +10.6

GREEN: Stephen McKenna:

- Votes 1,745
- Share 3.2%
- Share change -0.1
- 2019: 2,047 (3.5%)

TRUE and FAIR: Gina Miller:

- Votes 845
- Share 1.6%
- Share change +1.6

Social Democratic Party: Damon Young:

- Votes 153
- Share 0.3%
- Share change +0.3

Each candidate was accompanied by a fairly large cohort, all working endlessly to keep up with a general sense of how well their party was doing nationally. While the rest of the UK's election results unfolded on TV screens, mixed reactions were circulating. However, it was the Labour corner with the most cheers throughout, with a landslide exit poll for the Labour party unfolding into a reality. The announcement of a Labour government was issued around 4:55 am.



Helen Maguire (Liberal Democrat) said a priority for Epsom and Ewell was getting the new hospital built that had been promised for 10 years. On the election campaign she said "There are so many pollsters saying different things it has been difficult for voters to know what has been going on. It brings up the question whether we should have polls during election campaigns. If we had proportional representation we wouldn't need polls anyway."

Responding to the result **Stephen McKenna** of the Green Party said "With a super-majority is it less likely that the new Government will work with other parties to get proportional representation and introduce the Green policies the country needs. We hope the new MP preserves the Green Belt and makes sure we have a housing policy that works for everyone and sorts out the NHS locally."

Mayuran Senthilnathan of Reform UK said "The first past the post system does not serve the interests of this country so I hope the constituents of Epsom and Ewell get behind a campaign for proportional representation."

Gina Miller of True and Fair said of the future of Epsom and Ewell "I hope the Green Belt is preserved and Epsom and Ewell becomes a place where health and well-being come first". On the national picture she said "I think the share of the vote for Reform UK is quite terrifying. The centre parties need to start listening to people and delivering for them." On her local campaign experience Gina Miller said she was shocked by the negative campaigning that had gone on. She called for regulation of campaign literature and tactical voting websites. "The bullying is something I never thought I would experience".

Editorial:

Democracy at work? Or strange mathematics?