EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

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Progress at Banstead’s High Down prison – but drugs and poor conditions remain

7 September 2026



A prison near Epsom and Ewell has made encouraging progress in safety and the time prisoners spend out of their cells – but illicit drugs, poor living conditions and delays in rehabilitation remain serious concerns.

HM Chief Inspector of Prisons visited HMP High Down, at Banstead, during an unannounced inspection from 1st to 11th June. The Category C training and resettlement prison held 1,085 men, close to its operational capacity of 1,113.

The inspection report, published on 7th September, described the findings as “generally positive” and praised an experienced governor and strong leadership team.

Safety was upgraded from “not sufficiently good” at the previous full inspection in 2023 to “reasonably good”. Purposeful activity improved from “poor” to “not sufficiently good”.

Respect remained “reasonably good”, while preparation for release was again judged “not sufficiently good”.

Drugs remain biggest threat

The prison had developed a more robust response to illicit drugs, including improved gate security, more extensive testing and a comprehensive programme for prisoners seeking to overcome addiction.

Positive results from random drug tests fell from 31 per cent before the previous inspection to 19 per cent. Although an improvement – and better than at many other prisons – inspectors said the figure remained too high.

Criminal gangs were regularly using drones to deliver drugs and other prohibited items. Window cages had reduced the risk, but some were damaged and weaknesses in windows, grilles and netting continued to provide access.

Inspectors concluded that the illicit economy remained the greatest threat to High Down’s stability, contributing to debt, bullying, fear and violence.

Reported violence had nevertheless fallen by 14 per cent and was broadly in line with other Category C prisons. Self-harm was 22 per cent lower than at the last inspection and there had been no self-inflicted death at the prison since then.

Despite these improvements, 56 per cent of prisoners questioned said they had felt unsafe at High Down, while 31 per cent said they felt unsafe at the time of the survey – both higher proportions than at comparable prisons.

Stark difference in time outside cells

Prisoners in full-time work or on the enhanced regime could spend as much as 10.5 hours a day outside their cells.

For unemployed prisoners, who represented about 10 per cent of the population, the average was only around three-and-a-half hours.

Roll checks found almost a quarter of prisoners locked in their cells during the working day. Inconsistent operation of the regime meant that some were locked up as early as 4.30pm and, in a small number of cases, were not released until 11am the following morning.

There were some popular employment-focused programmes, including railway courses and XO Bikes, which trains prisoners to refurbish bicycles. Construction courses taught bricklaying, plastering, painting and decorating, while other prisoners could qualify as baristas and learn to repair coffee machines.

Most prisoners completing courses achieved their qualifications and inspectors found that teaching standards had improved.

However, attendance at education, training and work remained too low. Some prisoners were not unlocked for scheduled classes, while staff did not always challenge those who refused to attend. Ofsted judged every aspect of the prison’s education and skills provision as “requires improvement”.

Dirty cells and damaged showers

Conditions varied considerably across the prison.

Communal areas were generally clean and some specialist units were well cared for, with gardens, plants and other improvements. Inspectors also welcomed a reduction in the number of prisoners sharing cells.

Elsewhere, cells were dirty and toilets and sinks were described as particularly unhygienic. Few cells had curtains,

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forcing prisoners to use sheets or towels to block the light, and some reported shortages of basic supplies such as toilet paper.

Many showers were grimy, damaged or lacked screens providing sufficient privacy. At the time of the inspection, 183 cells intended for one person were being shared by two.

The prison library was also too small for the population, with inadequate materials, limited seating and some broken furniture.

Rehabilitation delays

High Down became a Category C training and resettlement prison in 2022, with an emphasis on preparing men for release. Inspectors found that it was still not achieving its full potential in that role.

The offender management unit was understaffed and officers carried high caseloads. Contact was often concentrated on prisoners approaching an important sentence milestone, leaving many others without meaningful help.

This delayed risk assessments, transfers to open prisons and access to offending behaviour courses. There was a particular bottleneck for the Building Choices programme, with insufficient places and what inspectors described as at times chaotic allocation arrangements.

Of the approximately 800 prisoners released during the preceding year whose outcomes were known, around 30 per cent went into sustainable accommodation. About eight per cent were released homeless – still too many, inspectors said, although a lower proportion than at most London prisons.

Only 41 former prisoners were known to be in employment six weeks after release, rising to 58 after six months.

There were positives in resettlement support, including well-coordinated housing advice, help with benefits and debt, and efficient arrangements on the day of release. Family support delivered by the charity Pact and parenting programmes run with Sutton Council were singled out as examples of good practice.

Health-record concerns

Inspectors also identified shortcomings in health services. Records did not always contain complete details of appointment requests, triage decisions or “do not attempt resuscitation” instructions.

For at least three years, nurses had routinely poured and labelled individual doses of methadone before transporting them to prison wings, a practice which inspectors said was not consistent with professional nursing standards.

The Care Quality Commission requested action plans from the prison’s health providers over record-keeping, complaints handling, clinical governance and the monitoring of risks.

Concluding the report, Chief Inspector Charlie Taylor said further improvement depended partly on the Prison Service providing resources for building refurbishment and security upgrades.

He added that High Down also required renewed attention to offender management staffing and prisoners’ attendance at education.

Seven of the report’s 15 principal concerns were classified as priorities requiring immediate attention.

Lionel Blackman

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Related reports:

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Surrey jail addresses prison population crisis – 15th June 2025

Surrey prison failed IPP prisoner – 23rd December 2024

Damning report on local prison – 16th November 2023

You could re-train to reform offenders – 13th April 2023

Image: HMP High Down from Google maps

New vicar returns to his Epsom roots

7 September 2026

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The Revd Tom Hill has returned to the church where he came to faith more than 25 years ago, following his institution as Vicar of Christ Church Epsom Common.

The service took place on Thursday 27th August and was led by the acting Bishop of Guildford, the Rt Revd Paul Davies, who instituted Mr Hill. He was subsequently inducted and installed by the Archdeacon of Dorking, the Ven Martin Breadmore.

Ordinarily, the appointment of a new vicar would involve a service of collation conducted by the diocesan bishop. However, the Diocese of Guildford currently has what is formally known as a “vacancy in see”, meaning that there is no serving diocesan bishop. As acting bishop, Bishop Paul institutes rather than collates a new incumbent.

The congregation included the Very Revd Bob Cooper, Dean of Guildford Cathedral, local clergy and representatives of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, schools, uniformed organisations and Churches Together in Epsom.

Official welcomes were offered by Dean Bob Cooper on behalf of Guildford Cathedral and the Revd John Marrow, Area Dean.

Others welcoming the new vicar included Louise Druce, headteacher of Stamford Green Primary School; Karl Nicholas, District Lead Volunteer for Epsom and Ewell Scout District, representing local uniformed organisations; churchwardens David Blacoe and Gill Glasspool; and Christ Church’s children and youth worker, Sofia Welsby. Young members of the Christ Church congregation also took part.

The service had particular personal significance for Mr Hill, who grew up in Epsom and first came to faith at Christ Church more than 25 years ago.

Before entering the ministry, he served for 13 years as an officer with the Metropolitan Police. He began training for ordination in 2016 and subsequently served as a curate at Holy Trinity Claygate and as Associate Minister at Leatherhead Parish Church.

Members of Christ Church were joined at the service by many of Mr Hill’s family and friends, as well as visitors from his former parish in Leatherhead. Mr Hill is married to Megan and the couple have four children.

The occasion also provided an opportunity for Christ Church to welcome two new curates, the Revd Patrick Corley and the Revd Rebecca Catterall.

A reception followed in the parish hall, where former churchwarden Fay Wedlake presented the new vicar with a cross carrying a long association with Christ Church. The cross has traditionally occupied a place in the vicarage study and has been passed down from one vicar to the next over many years.

Mr Hill said he was looking forward to a new season of growth at Christ Church, sharing the Christian message and getting to know more people throughout the local community.

His first Sunday service as Vicar of Christ Church Epsom Common will take place at 10am on Sunday 6th September. All are welcome.

Christ Church Epsom Common is in Christ Church Road, Epsom, KT19 8NE.

Lionel Blackman

Photo: From left to right:

Berwick Curtis Licensed Lay Minister at Christ Church

Revd Nico Ohlsson St Paul’s Howell Hill

Revd Harry Lamaison St Barnabus

Revd Sue Ayling, St Mary’s Ewell

Archdeacon The Ven. Martin Breadmore

Revd James Wakefield, St Mark’s Tattenham Corner

Revd Rebecca Catterall curate Christ Church

Revd John Marrow All Saints West Ewell

Revd David Senior St Pauls Howell Hill

Revd Tom Hill vicar Christ Church

Revd Patrick Corley curate Christ Church

Acting Bishop of Guildford The Rt Revd Paul Davies.

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Back Epsom’s Horton Cemetery history heroes in national vote

7 September 2026



Epsom and Ewell (and beyond) residents are being urged to get behind the local Friends of Horton Cemetery after the charity was shortlisted for a national award celebrating the volunteers who rescue the stories of ordinary people from obscurity.

The Friends are among 24 organisations selected from across England for Findmypast and Heritage Open Days’ first “Everyday History Heroes” awards, with its place in the regional South-East final short-list of three.

Historian and broadcaster David Olusoga is supporting the campaign, which recognises historic and cultural organisations that preserve the stories of people frequently overlooked by conventional history.

A national winner and seven regional winners will be chosen by public vote. Regional winners will receive £1,000 to support their work.

Olusoga is quoted in a BBC news article as saying: “Horton Cemetery was a remarkable example of everyday history.” Adding “More than 9,000 people who died as patients in Epsom’s psychiatric hospitals were buried there, many in unmarked graves, and for decades their stories were largely forgotten.”

He said: “The Friends of Horton Cemetery have been restoring dignity and remembrance to thousands of people who were too often overlooked in their own lifetimes”.

The Epsom & Ewell Times makes no pretence of neutrality in this contest: our vote belongs to the Friends of Horton Cemetery—**and we hope our readers will add theirs.**

Between 1899 and 1955, about 9,000 people were buried at Horton Cemetery. Each had been a patient at one of the five mental health hospitals forming the Epsom Cluster.

Their graves are now unmarked. The privately owned cemetery has been neglected for decades and remains inaccessible to the public.

Against that unpromising background, the Friends’ volunteer researchers have painstakingly rebuilt the lives of those buried there from hospital, census, military, family and other historical records. More than 500 individual life stories have already been researched, written and published.

The result is much more than a list of names and dates. The research restores identities to people whose lives were often obscured by the stigma once attached to mental illness and institutional care.

Those remembered include war veterans, mothers, labourers, domestic servants and children. Many experienced poverty, bereavement, illness or family separation before entering one of Epsom’s hospitals. Their stories collectively illuminate a neglected chapter of the borough’s history—and of Britain’s changing treatment of mental ill-health.

Explaining its nomination, charity trustee Theresa Keneflick said: “We’re proud that this nomination recognises the work of our researchers and volunteers for all that they do to ensure the lives of the 9,000 are remembered.”

The award was created by family-history website Findmypast in partnership with Heritage Open Days. Its purpose is to honour grassroots organisations telling the histories of the ordinary people and communities who worked, struggled, campaigned and helped to build modern Britain.

David Olusoga said history was not confined to the famous figures taught about in schools, but included the millions of ordinary people whose actions shaped today’s world. He encouraged the public to explore the shortlisted organisations and vote for a local “hidden gem”.

Few candidates can fit that description more literally than Horton Cemetery: an important part of Epsom’s heritage hidden behind locked boundaries, its thousands of occupants deprived of individual grave markers but no longer without voices.

Voting remains open until 31 August, with the winners due to be announced on 10 September.

Vote for the Friends of Horton Cemetery on the Findmypast South East voting page.

The Friends’ research and the stories already recovered can be explored at the Horton Cemetery website.

The Friends of Horton Cemetery host an Heritage Open Day alongside the Cemetery on Saturday 12th September.

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Lionel Blackman

Hon. Sec. of The Friends of Horton Cemetery and a director Epsom and Ewell Times

Image – photo of the Cemetery from 1971

Note: The FindMyPast voting page suggests the charity has “transformed the cemetery”. This is an error we are seeking to correct. The Cemetery remains neglected in private hands with Epsom and Ewell Borough Council declining to purchase it for its restoration as a community asset.

Related reports:

500 patients buried in Epsom’s asylum cemetery no longer forgotten

Friends of Horton Cemetery influence law reform

Epsom and Ewell’s MP champions Friends of Horton Cemetery mission on “Time to Talk Day”

Epsom’s Horton Cemetery gets attention of two kinds

Epsom Council dead set against the dead?

Petition to reclaim Horton Cemetery from property speculator

Local community gathered at Horton Cemetery

Epsom’s Love Me Love My Mind celebrates 20 years of community care

7 September 2026



An Epsom charity which has supported thousands of people affected by mental health difficulties has celebrated its 20th anniversary.

Members, volunteers, friends and supporters of Love Me Love My Mind gathered at St Barnabas Church in Temple Road on Saturday 25th July for a buffet meal, raffle, dancing and anniversary celebration. Among those attending was Epsom and Ewell MP Helen Maguire.

The evening marked two decades since the charity’s Monday Drop-In began at St Barnabas in 2006. What started as a welcoming place where people could meet, talk and share refreshments has developed into an entirely volunteer-run charity promoting better understanding of mental health throughout Epsom and Ewell.

Today, Love Me Love My Mind seeks to break down stigma, offer friendship and encouragement to people experiencing mental health difficulties and their families, and direct people towards sources of further help. Its regular Monday Drop-In attracts around 30 to 40 people each week for refreshments, activities and a home-cooked meal. The charity also runs a Men’s Pit Stop group, peer support and community activities, as well as organising the annual Epsom Mental Health Week.

The anniversary exhibition placed the charity’s work within a much longer and sometimes painful chapter of Epsom’s history. From 1896 onwards, five large psychiatric hospitals—Long Grove, Horton, West Park, St Ebba’s and The Manor—were built around the town. By 1925 the “Epsom Cluster” formed what was described as the largest psychiatric facility in the world.

The hospitals provided employment, recreation, companionship and care, but their position on the edge of the town also reflected the isolation and stigma experienced by people with mental illness. St Barnabas developed particularly close links with Long Grove Hospital, while members of its congregation were involved with the Friends of Long Grove.

When the large hospitals were gradually closed under the policy of care in the community, many former patients were discharged into group homes around Epsom, including within St Barnabas parish. Some had lost the friendships and support networks they had known inside the hospitals.

A number began attending weekday services at St Barnabas. The then vicar, the Revd Michael Preston, offered coffee afterwards and listened to the life stories of those who came. The exhibition records that from this modest act of welcome grew “a very significant mental health community support project”.

The charity’s late founder, the Revd Susan Bull, subsequently researched the relationship between churches and people experiencing mental distress. Her study, *Voices of the Voiceless: An evaluation of local church care for those in mental*

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distress, examined what enabled St Barnabas to provide acceptance and hospitality at a time when fear and stigma remained widespread.

The anniversary also remembered the long-standing social divide between St Barnabas parish and more affluent parts of Epsom. Separated from the town centre by the railway embankment and reached through low bridges, the neighbourhood was historically home to many lower-paid hospital workers and successive communities arriving from other parts of Britain and overseas.

Against that background, Love Me Love My Mind has spent 20 years building a place in which people can find companionship, belonging and acceptance. The charity says its work over that period has supported thousands of people, promoted positive mental health and helped create a stronger and more connected community.

Saturday's summer party was one of several events being held during the anniversary year. The charity thanked Direct Residential, Love Your Accountants, Park View Café, St Barnabas Church and the Rotary Club of Ewell for supporting the celebration.

Further information about Love Me Love My Mind, its activities, volunteering and donations is available at www.lovemelovemymind.org.uk.

Lionel Blackman

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Photo: Helen Maguire MP addresses the 20th anniversary party of LMLMM

Related reports:

Warm places to go to in Epsom and Ewell – 8 January 2026

Epsom's Love Me Love My Mind week of healing – 30 September 2024

Local community gathered at Horton Cemetery – 11 October 2023

Sue Bull – a special lady. An obituary – 1 March 2023

Mental Health Services in Epsom and Ewell – 30 June 2022

A Matter of Faith: St Barnabas Church – 24 March 2022

Wild Arts brings Mozart and opera favourites to Surrey

7 September 2026



Opera will be coming to Surrey this summer as the touring company Wild Arts presents Mozart's The Marriage of Figaro in Guildford and at Titsey Place.

The production visits the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre in Guildford on Friday 7 August before returning to the county for a performance at Titsey Place, near Oxted, on Sunday 6 September.

Titsey Place will also host An Evening of Opera on Saturday 5 September, combining well-known operatic arias with songs from classic musicals.

Founded in 2022, Wild Arts takes opera and classical music to theatres, country houses, gardens and other distinctive venues around the UK. Its productions favour intimate staging, imaginative costumes and close engagement between

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performers and audiences rather than large sets and heavy touring equipment.

The company also supports singers, musicians and theatre practitioners at the beginning of their professional careers through its Emerging Artist Programme.

Its new production of The Marriage of Figaro marks the directorial debut of international opera singer Danielle de Niese. Orlando Jopling conducts the ten-player Wild Arts Ensemble, with the opera performed in English in a new translation by de Niese and Jopling.

Mozart's comedy follows Figaro and Susanna on the morning of their wedding, when they discover that their employer, Count Almaviva, has designs on the bride-to-be.

A day of disguises, misunderstandings and plotting follows as servants attempt to outwit their master and ensure that the wedding goes ahead. Among the opera's best-known musical moments are its fizzing overture, the Countess's aria "Dove sono" and the jubilant finale.

The cast includes Jack Sandison as Figaro for the Guildford performance, Ellie Neate as Susanna, Timothy Nelson as Count Almaviva and Elinor Rolfe Johnson as Countess Almaviva. Matt Siveter takes over the role of Figaro for the September performances.

They are joined by Abbie Ward as Cherubino, Olivia Ray as Marcellina, Timothy Dawkins as Bartolo and Antonio, William Searle as Don Basilio and Don Curzio, and Eleanor O'Driscoll as Barbarina.

Wild Arts describes the production as an evening of "sparkling tunes, tangled romances and razor-sharp wit", staged with bold costumes, inventive props and an emphasis on pace and storytelling.

The company's second Surrey offering, An Evening of Opera, is intended to provide an accessible introduction to the art form as well as an entertaining programme for established opera enthusiasts.

Devised and directed by Guido Martin-Brandis, the semi-staged production follows four singers through a 75-minute story of intrigue, jealousy, comedy and love, accompanied by a string quintet.

The programme brings together music by Handel, Mozart, Puccini, Rossini and other leading opera composers alongside songs by Irving Berlin, Leonard Bernstein, Rodgers and Hammerstein and Noël Coward.

Selections include the Flower Duet from Delibes' Lakmé, the overture to Rossini's William Tell, "Anything You Can Do" from Annie Get Your Gun, "On the Street Where You Live" from My Fair Lady and "Make Our Garden Grow" from Candide.

The Surrey performances are:

The Marriage of Figaro
Friday 7 August – Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Millbrook, Guildford GU1 3UX

An Evening of Opera
Saturday 5 September – Titsey Place, Oxted, Surrey

The Marriage of Figaro
Sunday 6 September – Titsey Place, Oxted, Surrey

Further information and booking links are available from the Wild Arts website and its dedicated Marriage of Figaro page. Tickets for the Guildford performance are available through the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre.

Lionel Blackman Photo: Marriage of Figaro scene courtesy Wild Arts

When the Rolling Stones rolled into Epsom — twice

7 September 2026



Before the stadium tours, private jets and worldwide fame, five young rhythm-and-blues musicians performed on a temporary floor laid over the swimming pool at Epsom Baths Hall. More than six decades later, as the Rolling Stones celebrate another chart-topping album, local history reveals that the band visited Epsom not once, but twice.

The Rolling Stones have returned to the top of the British album chart with *Foreign Tongues*, released on 10 July. It is the band's 25th studio album and their 15th to reach number one in the UK—putting them level with the Beatles and one behind record-holder Robbie Williams.

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That remarkable longevity offers an opportunity to look back to two winter Saturday nights in Epsom, when Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Brian Jones, Bill Wyman and Charlie Watts were still climbing towards stardom.

A swimming pool became a concert hall

Epsom Municipal Baths opened in East Street on 15 March 1939. The £65,000 complex had been designed from the outset to serve two very different purposes: swimming during the warmer months and public entertainment during the winter.

Its main pool was 100 feet long and 35 feet wide, with galleries seating 412 people. For dances, concerts, boxing and theatrical performances, a moveable maple floor supported by tubular scaffolding was erected over the water. A stage, lighting system, microphone and record turntable completed the transformation. The converted hall was licensed to accommodate as many as 1,396 people for music, dancing and public meetings.

It must have produced an unusual atmosphere: a rock-and-roll audience gathered on boards above the drained or concealed pool, surrounded by tiled walls, diving boards and the acoustics of a municipal swimming bath.

After the Second World War, the Baths Hall became one of Epsom's principal social venues, hosting dances, boxing, orchestral performances and visiting entertainers. The Epsom and Ewell History Explorer describes the Rolling Stones' 1963 engagement as a sold-out highlight for which the band received a fee of £60.

Saturday 14 December 1963

The best-documented Stones appearance took place on **Saturday 14 December 1963**.

"Star Rhythm Blues Time with the Rolling Stones"

The publicity picked out the band's two records, *Come On* and *I Wanna Be Your Man*, and advertised an appearance by supporting group **The Presidents**, described as "that ever popular attraction". Dancing and music were scheduled from 8pm until 11.30pm. Tickets cost five shillings and sixpence in advance or six shillings and sixpence at the door, with reduced rates offered for parties.

The instruction to "get your tickets early and avoid disappointment" proved well judged if the History Explorer's record of a sell-out is correct.

A surviving business trail also corroborates the engagement. Christie's has catalogued an Eric Easton Ltd performance contract for the Rolling Stones at Epsom Baths Hall among a collection of early Stones agreements covering venues in and around London during late 1963. Eric Easton was then managing the group with Andrew Loog Oldham.

The Epsom booking came at a fascinating point in the band's ascent. They were no longer an unknown club act, but neither had they become the international institution familiar today.

On the chart dated 11 December 1963, three days before the concert, *I Wanna Be Your Man* stood at number 16. It moved to number 15 the following week and eventually reached number 12. Their self-titled debut album had not yet appeared; it would enter the albums chart in April 1964 and spend 12 weeks at number one.

Thus, Epsom caught the Stones in the narrow interval between their first taste of chart success and their transformation into one of Britain's biggest bands.

Back again four weeks later

Concert chronologies reveal something overlooked in the familiar local account: the Rolling Stones returned to Epsom Baths only four weeks later, on **Saturday 11 January 1964**.

The second appearance is listed in detailed Stones performance records as an "extracurricular gig"—a separate engagement fitted around the band's first major tour of 1964. Their schedule at the time was punishing. They performed two shows at Walthamstow's Granada Theatre on 10 January, played Epsom the following evening, and then gave two more shows at the Granada in Tooting on 12 January.

They were recording at the same relentless pace. On 10 January—the day before returning to Epsom—the band worked at Regent Sound Studios on *Honest I Do*, *I'm a King Bee* and an early version of *Not Fade Away*, before travelling to Walthamstow for the evening performances.

Their chart fortunes were still improving. *I Wanna Be Your Man* was at number 15 during the week of the second Epsom appearance and rose to its number 12 peak on the chart dated 15 January.

Contemporary touring accounts estimate that the Stones travelled more than 5,000 miles during this period, playing clubs, colleges, ballrooms, cinemas and halls across Britain. The Epsom concert was one of several additional ballroom engagements squeezed between the formal package-tour performances.

No dependable set list has yet emerged for either Epsom show. The December poster establishes that *Come On* and *I Wanna Be Your Man* were central to the promotion, while the band's contemporary touring repertoire included blues, rhythm-and-blues and Chuck Berry numbers. It would, however, be unsafe to present any reconstructed list as the exact programme heard at Epsom.

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Before the world knew their names

The contrast with the present could hardly be greater.

In December 1963, the Stones were travelling from town to town, earning comparatively modest appearance fees and promoting two singles. Their audience in Epsom paid a few shillings to see them in a converted public swimming bath.

Within months, their first album would displace the Beatles' *With the Beatles* at the top of the UK chart. Their first British number-one single, *It's All Over Now*, followed in the summer of 1964. The tours, television appearances and scenes of mass excitement then spread far beyond Britain.

Yet the five musicians who appeared in Epsom were already the classic early Stones: Jagger at the microphone, Richards and Jones on guitars, Wyman on bass and Watts behind the drums. Brian Jones and Charlie Watts are no longer alive, while Mick Jagger and Keith Richards—then barely out of their teens—remain at the centre of a band topping the album chart in 2026.

The hall has gone, but the night remains

Epsom Baths Hall continued to host entertainment after the Stones, including a performance by Genesis in 1972. Its popularity eventually declined as alternative venues opened and leisure habits changed. The hall closed in 1989; the original baths complex was demolished in 2001 and replaced by the present Rainbow Leisure Centre.

Nothing visible at the modern centre readily tells visitors that one of the most famous bands in the world once performed there—twice—on a wooden floor constructed above the municipal pool.

What is still missing are the human memories: who queued at the Baths Hall box office, who danced at the front, what the band sounded like through the hall's public-address system, and whether anyone kept a ticket, photograph or autograph.

Epsom and Ewell Times would be delighted to hear from readers who attended either concert—or whose parents, relatives or friends remembered the Rolling Stones' two visits to Epsom Baths.

Epsom and Ewell History Explorer is *the* definitive guide to all things historical and more. Run by dedicated volunteers.

Epsom Playhouse remains one of the regions premier venues for tribute bands including rock-and-roll.

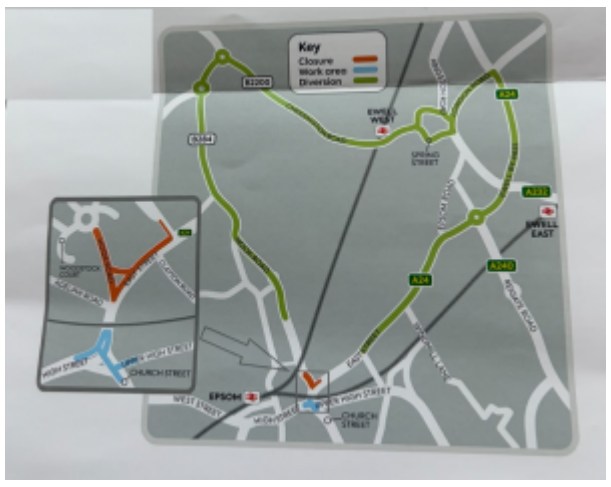
Epsom Jazz Club

brings live top-flight jazz bands to the centre of Epsom. Next season starting 24th September.

Lionel Blackman

Six months of disruption ahead as major gas and traffic works set to hit central Epsom

7 September 2026



Businesses and residents voice concerns over diversion routes as SGN and Surrey County Council prepare for large-scale works at the East Street/Hook Road/Upper High Street junction

Central Epsom is facing up to six months of roadworks and traffic disruption following the announcement of a major joint gas infrastructure and traffic signal project by Southern Gas Networks (SGN) and Surrey County Council (SCC) Highways.

What's happening, and when

According to letters sent to residents and businesses this month, the works are being carried out to support new housing development in the area and to maintain the safety and reliability of the local gas network. SGN's contractor, JDT Utilities, will lay new gas mains in East Street and Hook Road, while SCC replaces the traffic signal system on High Street, Upper High Street and Church Street.

A clarifying email from SGN, seen by this publication, sets out the works in more detail than the resident letters managed to convey. The project will run in two phases:

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- **Phase One** (planned duration: four weeks) will see SCC install a new urban traffic light system, with new light heads on Church Street, High Street and Upper High Street. Within this footprint, SGN will impose a lane closure — not a full closure — on East Street, to allow open-cut installation of two new mains running from outside The Big Yellow Storage on East Street through to Hook Road.
- **Phase Two** will follow, with Hook Road closed between Woodstock Court and East Street while SGN continues its open-cut works down towards the multi-storey car park entrance and Woodstock Court.

The resident letters state that engineering work is scheduled to begin on 18 July, with SCC's signal works starting on 23 July within the same traffic management setup. Go Epsom, the town's Business Improvement District, gives a fuller picture of the timeline, stating that works will run from 23 July through to 24 December — a span of roughly five months, and notably longer than the "completed by the end of the year" assurance given in SGN's own letter.

During the works, the multi-storey car park will remain open and accessible via Hook Road under traffic management, and a signed diversion route will be in place. SGN says access will be maintained for residents and businesses throughout.

Residents question the diversion plan

The announcement has prompted concern from residents about the adequacy of the traffic management plan. One resident, responding to the letter, said the accompanying diversion map was difficult to interpret and that the colour-coding "does not make a lot of sense," while the flyer gave no indication of where traffic would be diverted to rejoin the A24 on the far side of Epsom, nor any information on bus route changes.

The resident warned that Epsom's narrow residential streets are already prone to rat-running, and questioned whether roads such as Downs Hill Road and Worple Road — both narrow, and in the case of Worple Road affected by potholes — could safely absorb diverted traffic, including HGVs, without vehicles being forced onto pavements. They suggested a 20mph limit should be considered on any residential road used as part of the diversion, particularly given the number of children walking to and from school in the area.

The resident also raised concern about the six-month duration of the works and its potential impact on trade in Epsom High Street, and said they would be unable to attend either of SGN's public drop-in sessions this week.

Businesses seek pause over Christmas trading period

Go Epsom has echoed concerns about the scale and length of the disruption. In a message to local businesses, it confirmed the works are expected to run from 23 July to 24 December, warning of "knock on effects with diversions, parking bay suspensions and road closures." The BID says it is asking SGN and SCC to pause works over the November/December trading period, recognising the importance of the pre-Christmas period to town centre traders.

Businesses affected by the works may be eligible for support through SGN's small business compensation scheme, details of which are available at sgn.co.uk.

Have your say

SGN is holding two public drop-in sessions this week for residents and businesses to raise questions directly with the engineering team, at the rear offices of 29 East Street:

- Wednesday 1 July, 4pm–7pm
- Thursday 2 July, 2pm–4pm

Project updates are expected to be published at sgn.co.uk/our-gas-works/major-planned-projects, and anyone with concerns about disabled access or specific needs during the closures is asked to contact SGN's customer service team on 0800 912 1700.

Lionel Blackman

Epsom Foodbank warns of summer holiday pressure as donations fall

7 September 2026



Families facing the school summer break are increasingly worried about affording extra meals and snacks for children,

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according to Good Company Surrey, which says donations to its foodbank operation are down by 20 per cent compared with the same period last year.

In its latest newsletter, the charity said that while many people look forward to the holidays, the approaching break can bring anxiety for families already struggling financially.

Dafne, Good Company's Operations Manager, said the concern was not simply about the cost of food during the weeks away from school, but also the additional expense of preparing for a new school year.

She wrote: "For many of the families and individuals we support, however, the approaching summer holidays are not associated with a well-earned break or time away. Instead, they bring anxiety about providing extra meals and snacks during the long school holiday, guilt over what they cannot afford to give their children, and worry about the additional costs that come with preparing for a new school year."

The charity, which incorporates Epsom and Ewell Foodbank, said foodbanks and partner organisations can only meet demand where essential supplies are available. It appealed for donations, saying that even small contributions could help ensure local people did not go without during the summer.

The newsletter also highlighted wider support offered through Good Company's network. Epsom Pantry held its first peer-support meeting for parents of neurodiverse children on 10 June. Three members attended the initial session, which was intended to reduce isolation and allow parents to share information about services and activities. Another meeting is planned.

Good Company's three Advice Cafés — at St Barnabas in Epsom, Merland Rise in Tadworth and Leatherhead Community Hub — recently met to develop their work. The service says it has supported nearly 2,200 clients in the past two years, with benefits and grants, debt, and the cost of living among the main reasons people seek help.

The newsletter also carried a personal account from Sharon, a member of the Banstead Pantry Steering Committee, who described the pantry as a place where people could obtain affordable food but also find advice, companionship and a non-judgemental environment.

She said: "Banstead Pantry is a community that works within the local community, it is a real life line, it is a place where you can be yourself regardless of background and situation."

Good Company is also encouraging residents to support its work through fundraising challenges. Jonathan Lees, the charity's founder and Managing Director, is due to cycle 100km in Ride Reigate on 12 July, while Run Reigate follows on 20 September, offering 5km, 10km and half-marathon routes.

The charity's newsletter says donations, volunteering and community fundraising all remain important as it prepares for increased pressure over the school holidays.

Lionel Blackman

Former Epsom job centre worker hopes to question next PM in Parliament

7 September 2026



A local marketing entrepreneur seeking Conservative parliamentary selection once went on television's *Blind Date* with the woman who later became Andy Burnham's wife — and was working at Epsom Jobcentre by the time the programme was screened.

The story was reported by *The Sunday Times* on 28 June 2026 in an article by chief news correspondent Rosamund Urwin.

Will Harris was chosen by Marie-France "Frankie" van Heel on Cilla Black's ITV dating show in 1992. Van Heel was then studying at Cambridge University and was already in the early stages of a relationship with Burnham, the Mayor of Greater Manchester and former Labour Cabinet minister.

According to *The Sunday Times*, Burnham gave his blessing for van Heel to appear on the programme. She selected "Will from Surrey" from three unseen contestants.

Harris, then 21, was studying English at Nottingham University. He told the newspaper that he had spotted posters seeking *Blind Date* contestants and decided to audition on impulse.

"I had never watched *Blind Date* — I'm not a big TV guy — but I just thought it would be fun to go on a date and a holiday," he recalled.

By the time his appearance was broadcast, however, Harris had apparently taken a job at a Jobcentre in Epsom. The

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article reports that he referred to himself as “signing John Major’s unemployment dole”.

The pair were sent to Gibraltar for their television date and spent about three days there, including visiting the Barbary macaques, dining together and filming sequences for a later programme.

Harris said there was no romantic spark. He described van Heel as “clever and cool” and said they got on well, but compared the atmosphere to being with a sister rather than on a conventional date.

The programme-makers later asked them to return for a follow-up, apparently believing the original encounter had not produced enough drama. Harris said that he found the idea uncomfortable, particularly when production staff urged him to say that van Heel was cold and lacking fashion sense.

He declined a further appearance. Harris said Cilla Black later told him: “Sorry, Will, it’s just good TV.”

Van Heel married Burnham in 2000 and the couple have three children.

Harris’s later career, as described in *The Sunday Times*, was separate from van Heel’s. He became marketing director of the Conservative Party in 2003 and later met van Heel and Burnham again in a House of Commons bar after both had been sent on the same training course.

The report says Harris now runs Bridge F61, an AI-powered business intended to help private-equity firms assess the marketing strategies of companies they may wish to acquire. He is also seeking selection as a Conservative parliamentary candidate.

Sam Jones – Reporter

Epsom’s LibDem MP gags her Party’s new councillors in their moment of triumph

7 September 2026



Bourne Hall, Ewell, Friday 8th May – the Count of the five local divisions in the East Surrey Unitary Council elections.

As reported elsewhere, local Liberal Democrats took eight out of ten seats in the Epsom and Ewell Area on Thursday’s local elections.

Our reporter, in the room reserved for media interviews at the Count, was talking to soon to be elected Liberal Democrat candidate Roy Deadman. Entered the room Helen Maguire’s communication *(sic)* officer who stated her party’s candidates were not to talk to the press! The press were only to talk to her boss.

What hare-brained politics studies undergraduate idea this was of a communications strategy is any body’s idea. Neither “liberal” nor “democratic”. Ms Maguire, you can do better than this.

Somewhat handicapped by this injunction your reporter had more time to gauge feelings and responses from the other parties.

Clearly a very poor showing from Labour who had a proud record of consistent representation in Court Ward and a succession of highly respected Labour Mayors.

Reform posted substantial votes in most of the five divisions but failed to get even a second place.

The Conservatives appear to be saying goodbye to Epsom and Ewell as a safe Conservative parliamentary seat, that it had been for ever, up to Helen Maguire’s Liberal Democrat victory in July 2024.

The Greens polled admirably but failed to make the breakthrough that they were hoping for.

The Residents Associations’ faces were saved by the personal appeal and integrity of Eber Kington and Peter O’Donovan who won their seats by substantial margins. Elsewhere, the RA leaders Hannah Dalton and Neil Dallen fell woefully behind both Liberal Democrats and Reform by hundreds of votes.

It would seem that the direction, motivation and relevance of the long-ruling Residents Association has been lost and a new era has dawned.

The full EAST SURREY election results will be published HERE in due course.

On a lighter note. Council issued coloured rubber thimbles sparked controversy. Handed out to the dedicated and hard-working counters, they were brightly coloured green, red and yellow. Were they for counting particular party votes? No, just a co-incidence but that did not stop one Reform candidate asking why there were no purple ones.

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Lionel Blackman

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Surrey Open Studios Returns – Discover Artists Near Epsom

7 September 2026



Art lovers in Epsom and Ewell are being invited to step inside artists' working spaces this summer as the annual Surrey Artists Open Studios returns from 6th to 21st June 2026. The county-wide event sees hundreds of artists open their doors to the public, offering a chance to meet creators, view works in progress and buy original art directly.

Studios are organised into geographic areas across Surrey, with those closest to Epsom and Ewell forming part of the East Surrey grouping, alongside nearby towns such as Reigate and Redhill. Visitors are encouraged to plan their visits in advance, with many artists opening on selected days throughout the two-week period.

Among the participating studios within easy reach of Epsom is AJ Studio Gallery, where visitors can view a large collection of oil paintings. Also in Epsom, Terry O'Brien and Jacky Cowdrey Studio will be welcoming guests to explore their work in an informal studio setting.

A little further afield in Redhill, Heart and Home Studios brings together a range of disciplines including sculpture, handmade books and jewellery, while other studios across East Surrey showcase everything from ceramics and textiles to contemporary painting and mixed media.

The appeal of the Open Studios format lies in its accessibility. Visitors can explore a wide variety of creative spaces—from garden workshops to established studios—and speak directly with artists about their techniques and inspiration. Many venues also offer smaller works, prints and cards, making the event an opportunity to purchase unique pieces at a range of prices.

Full details of all participating artists, including opening days, times and exact locations, are set out in the official Surrey Artists Open Studios programme, available here:

https://surreyopenstudios.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/SAOS-2025-Programme-PAG.pdf

With dozens of studios within a short drive of Epsom and Ewell, the event offers a simple way to explore Surrey's vibrant arts scene and support local artists this June.

Lionel Blackman

Epsom Family Highlights "Hidden" Loneliness Among Young Adults with Mild Autism

7 September 2026



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Friendship is one of life's quiet essentials. It brings variety, confidence, and a sense of belonging. Yet for a growing number of people, that connection is missing. National estimates suggest around 7% of UK adults experience chronic loneliness — a figure that runs into the millions.

For people on the autistic spectrum, the risk can be even greater.

An Epsom couple have contacted the *Epsom and Ewell Times* to share their son Jon's experience, in the hope it may resonate with others and spark a local solution. Jon, now a young adult, once enjoyed the structure and social circle of a youth group. But as his peers moved on to university, careers, and later relationships and family life, those connections gradually fell away.

What followed has been a pattern familiar to many families in similar situations. While services exist, they often do not meet the needs of those with higher functioning autism. Groups run by organisations such as the National Autistic Society tend to focus on those with more complex needs, while mainstream clubs and societies can feel overwhelming and inaccessible.

The result is a gap — one where individuals like Jon, who wish to participate in everyday social life, find themselves increasingly isolated.

There are long periods where Jon may not meet peers socially at all, spending most of his time at home with family. Yet the contrast when he does connect is striking. A simple outing — a trip to the pantomime, or even the anticipation of a game of adventure golf — can transform his mood for weeks or months, replacing low mood with excitement and purpose.

"It doesn't take much," his family explain. "Just a small amount of time from someone willing to meet up makes an enormous difference — not only to Jon, but to all of us."

From this experience has come a simple idea: a local "befriender scheme" in the Epsom area.

The concept is straightforward. Volunteers — individuals or couples — perhaps of a similar age bracket – would offer a couple of hours occasionally to meet a young adult like Jon in a safe, public setting. That might mean a coffee, a meal, a cinema trip, or a game of bowling. Expenses would be covered, but the real value lies in building confidence, companionship, and mutual enjoyment.

The family stress that such a scheme would need to be properly organised, with appropriate safeguards in place. But they believe the community already has what matters most — people willing to show a little kindness.

They are now asking a simple question: is there enough interest locally to make it happen?

Anyone who feels they could offer time as a befriender, or who knows someone who might benefit, is invited to get in touch. If there is sufficient response, the idea could develop into a structured community initiative.

Contact: epsombefrienders@gmail.com and they will get back to you.

Lionel Blackman

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