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

26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

Million-pound FIFA-standard football pitch opens at Glyn School in Ewell

11 December 2025



A new state-of-the-art FIFA-standard 3G football pitch and pavilion has been officially opened at Glyn School in Ewell after more than £1 million of investment from national and local partners.

The Premier League, The FA and the Government's Football Foundation contributed just over half of the total cost, with further funding from Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, Your Fund Surrey (Surrey County Council) and the Epsom & Ewell Colts. The new pitch will be used by Glyn School, other GLF Schools, Epsom & Ewell Colts FC and the wider community.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Playing Pitch Strategy and Corporate Plan identified the need for high-quality sports provision to promote healthy lifestyles, widen participation and meet the needs of a growing population. With more than 1,800 students at Glyn and around 5,000 across other GLF Schools, the facilities are expected to make a significant daily impact on school and community sport.

A partnership with Epsom & Ewell Colts FC means the pitch will become a major hub for grassroots football, supporting over 1,200 players across 82 teams, including 30 girls' and women's teams. The GLF Schools Foundation will help expand access for disadvantaged groups, disabled players and young people historically underrepresented in sport, aligning with both borough and national priorities for community wellbeing.

The official opening took place on Wednesday (Dec 10), with GLF Schools Interim CEO James Nicholson addressing guests and the Mayor of Epsom & Ewell, **Cllr Robert Leach**, cutting the ribbon. Also present were Liz Pill from the Football Foundation and Rosanne Fine from Surrey Football Association. Visitors toured the pitch and pavilion after watching players take to the new surface.

Jo Garrod, Headteacher at Glyn School, said: "This new pitch and pavilion are a fantastic addition to the sports facilities at our school and will be a huge benefit to all our students. We're extremely grateful to the Football Foundation for the funding and investment and delighted that they have made such a significant contribution to improve the quality of sports facilities for everyone in the community."

James Nicholson, Interim CEO of GLF Schools, said: "The range of sports and activities we offer at GLF Schools is central to the educational experience for all students. Having the latest modern facilities is key to giving every student the best opportunities to reach their full potential and enjoy their time with us. I'd like to thank The Football Foundation, whose major grant made this development possible, Epsom & Ewell Council, Your Fund Surrey (Surrey County Council), and the Epsom & Ewell Colts, who also supported this project with substantial financial contributions. As well as Surrey FA for their strategic guidance and endorsement, and all the consultants in design, fundraising, planning, and project management who worked so hard to build such an impressive pitch and pavilion."

Robert Sullivan, Chief Executive of the Football Foundation, said: "The Football Foundation is working closely with our partners, the Premier League, The FA and Government, to transform the quality of grassroots facilities in England by delivering projects like this across the country. Good quality playing facilities have a transformative impact on physical and mental health and play an important role in bringing people together and strengthening local communities. We're delighted that the local community in Epsom and Ewell will now be able to enjoy all these benefits thanks to the new facilities at Glyn School."

Epsom & Ewell MP Helen Maguire said: "The opening of this new pitch and pavilion at Glyn School is a real milestone for Ewell and the wider borough. It gives young people and local clubs a first-class space to train, play, and grow – and it strengthens the role that sport can play in building confidence and aspiration, as well as the improvements it can bring to both physical and mental health. I'm delighted to see this project completed and look forward to visiting soon."

Many local clubs, organisations and community groups provided letters of support, including NESCOT, Chelsea FC Foundation, Fetcham United FC, Active Surrey, Surrey Schools FA, Surrey Cricket Foundation and Tidy Keepers.

A 3G (Third Generation) astro pitch is an advanced artificial turf surface combining synthetic grass, sand and rubber infill to mimic natural turf, offering all-weather durability and consistent performance.

About the Football Foundation

The Football Foundation is the Premier League, The FA and the Government's charity dedicated to delivering outstanding grassroots facilities. Since 2000 it has raised £1.3 billion to improve facilities nationwide, including 1,300 3G pitches, 15,000 grass pitches and 1,700 changing rooms, attracting an additional £1.5 billion in partnership funding. It works with local authorities, County FAs and community partners to create Local Football Facility Plans for every area of England. More information at footballfoundation.org.uk.

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About GLF Schools

GLF Schools is a multi-academy trust of 43 schools serving more than 17,000 pupils aged 2 to 19 across Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Surrey, West Sussex and parts of London. The Trust includes eight secondary schools and 35 primary settings, each serving its own community while sharing a commitment to excellent educational outcomes.

Sam Jones – Reporter



New Pitch at Glyn School x 2. Credit: GLF Schools

Public of Epsom and Ewell to be asked if they want two new Councils

11 December 2025



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has voted to continue exploring the creation of two new community councils—one for Epsom and one for Ewell—following an often heated debate at the Full Council meeting on Tuesday 9 December. The decision means the proposals will now go to a second phase of public consultation before a final vote in March 2026.

The meeting also saw **Cllr Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) elected—by 17 votes to 11—over **Cllr Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) as the Borough's representative on a Local Government Association forum related to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

The main item of the night, however, was whether to progress the Community Governance Review (CGR) and consult residents further on the proposed new parish-style councils.

What was decided

Two recommendations were voted on separately, both by recorded vote:

• Recommendation 1: Proceed to a second-stage consultation
• Recommendation 2: Confirm the amended Terms of Reference and delegated arrangements for running that consultation

Both recommendations were carried by 17 votes to 6 (or 7) with 6 (or 5) abstentions, depending on the motion.

Supporters: "Residents must have a voice before the borough is abolished"

Cllr John Beckett (RA Auriol), who proposed the motion, framed the issue as a democratic response to the looming abolition of the borough council under Surrey's move to two unitary authorities. He warned of a 75% reduction in elected representation once Epsom and Ewell's 35 borough councillors and 5 county councillors are replaced with just 10 unitary councillors.

Beckett said: "*These changes are about the centralisation of power and money all at the expense of local democracy.*" He added that the first consultation—352 responses, with 67% supporting further investigation—was "*the second highest response to a borough-wide consultation outside the Local Plan*".

He argued that parish-style councils could preserve local identity and provide continuity: "*For our residents… this gives our residents a choice, and it gives our residents a voice.*"

Cllr Hannah Dalton told councillors that other areas undergoing unitary transitions, including Northamptonshire, Wiltshire and Somerset, saw unparished areas "*left behind*". She said that if Epsom and Ewell did not act now, it risked becoming "*the only unparished area in East Surrey*".

She added: "*Tonight we are only asking you to support further consultation… with a precept that has no transfer of*

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assets, whatever our colleagues are saying."

Cllr Neil Dallen (RA Town) said the proposal was modest: "*We go out to the residents and we ask them… whether they want us to continue.*"

Cllr Rachel King (RA Town) emphasised that the public had only given feedback on principles so far: "*We now need to give them a proper opportunity to respond to a fleshed out proposal… We owe it to our residents to give them a voice.*"

Opponents: "A flawed consultation, a financial burden, and a political stitch-up"

Opposition councillors delivered some of the sharpest criticism heard in the chamber for years.

Claims of a flawed consultation

Cllr Julian Freeman (Lib Dem College) said the consultation process was "*flawed*" because respondents were forced to select an option rather than reject the idea outright. He argued: "*This is the wrong issue at the wrong time… The only reason this is being raised now is to create a role for the people in this room.*"

Cllr Rob Geleit (Labour Court), speaking also on behalf of absent **Cllr Kate Chinn**, said the proposals lacked community backing: "*A flawed and skewed consultation, a lack of engagement… giving no mandate… and poor financial analysis.*" He added: "*I see no point in removing a layer of democracy only to add it back again on a lesser level.*"

Cllr Alison Kelly (Lib Dem Stamford) said residents were mostly concerned about planning, but that the parish proposals did not address this: "*Most people… give the issue of allotments very little thought. We are showing a cost of a parish council around £45 for an allotment you don't need in a flat.*" She noted that only around 230 respondents had expressed a desire for a parish council.

Financial warnings: 98.7% admin, 1.3% allotments

Cllr James Lawrence (Lib Dem College) highlighted the ratio in the report: approximately £1.5m in administrative overheads versus £20,000 for allotment running costs. "*You will be telling [residents] you're creating a parish council that is just for allotments… the allotments cost is 1.3% of the tax you're going to charge.*" He added that consultation documents risked misleading residents by listing admin and allotments side-by-side "*as if they were roughly equal*".

"An uncapped tax burden on struggling households"

Cllr Alex Coley warned that the real precept could be much higher—up to £180 for Band D properties—if the community councils later took on community buildings with significant maintenance liabilities such as Bourne Hall: "*It would be disingenuous to go to residents with £40-something pounds when it could be £180… We should not seek a view from residents with a lower figure and then quadruple it.*" He said many residents were "*struggling financially*" and called the proposals "*an astonishing waste of time, energy and money.*"

Cllr Bernie Muir (Conservative Horton) urged councillors to wait until the new unitary structure and Surrey's pilot Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) bedded in: "*I think this is a premature discussion… we should see how the unitaries and NACs pan out and then move forward if we need to.*"

Cllr Chris Ames (Labour Court) was highly critical of the RA leadership: "*This wasn't a review. This was one option chosen by the Residents' Association to meet its own purposes… It's all about providing a jumping-off point for the clique that runs this council.*"

Admin cost vs allotment cost: the core numerical controversy

Using the figures in the Report to Council:

• Admin and support costs for new community councils: approx. £1.5 million
• Cost of allotment management: approx. £20,000

That means roughly:

• 98.7% of the expenditure is administration
• 1.3% is allotment provision

This ratio became a central argument for opponents, particularly **Cllr Lawrence**, who said allotments would be a "*rounding error*" in the parish budget.

Supporters responded that these were not final budgets, merely illustrative maxima, and that Phase 2 consultation would use the *true* starting point—around £43–£46 Band D—with no asset transfers.

Conclusion

The council has opted to continue exploring parish councils despite sharp divisions. The second public consultation will now seek residents' views on more detailed proposals before a final decision in March 2026—months before the borough is abolished and replaced by the new East Surrey unitary authority.

Sam Jones – Reporter

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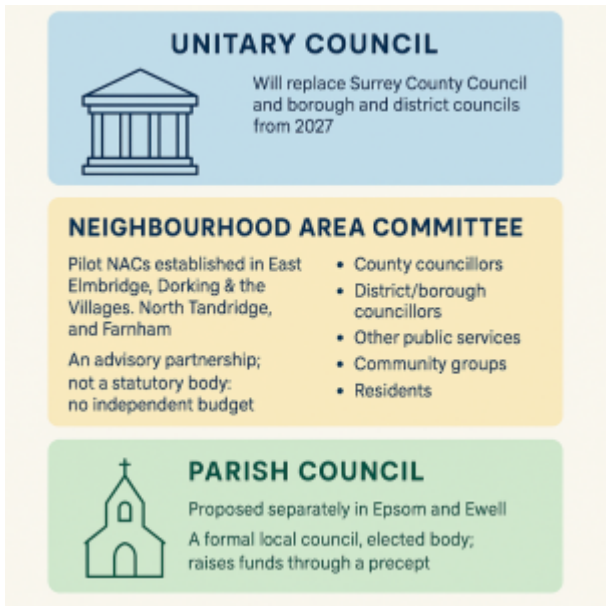
Neighbour Area Committees in Surrey

11 December 2025



As Surrey prepares for major local government reorganisation, the County Council has been trialling a new model of community involvement known as Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs). These committees, currently operating in four pilot areas, are designed to give residents and partners a stronger voice in shaping local priorities without creating new councils or adding an extra layer of taxation. With Epsom and Ewell facing the abolition of its borough council in 2027 and debating whether two parish councils should be established, attention is turning to whether NACs offer an alternative blueprint for local influence in the new unitary era.

The first three pilot NACs were launched in summer 2025 in East Elmbridge, Dorking and the Villages, and North Tandridge. A fourth area, Farnham, joined the initiative in September. These areas were selected to test the model across different geographies and community types, including both parished and unparished areas. Epsom and Ewell is not currently included in the pilot scheme, but the County Council has indicated that NACs could eventually be rolled out county-wide if the pilots prove successful.

Unlike parish or town councils, NACs are not statutory bodies. They do not have legal powers, budgets or the ability to raise a precept through council tax. Surrey County Council describes them as advisory partnerships that bring together elected representatives, public services, voluntary and community organisations and local residents to identify shared priorities and shape decision-making at a neighbourhood level. Typical membership includes county councillors, district or borough councillors (where applicable), representatives from health, police, education and the voluntary sector, alongside community groups and residents. Subject specialists from County Hall provide officer support.

The aim is to encourage more collaborative working between public services and communities, promote preventative approaches, and ensure that future unitary authorities have access to local intelligence when planning services. NACs sit outside the formal structures of governance and do not replace any existing body. Where parish councils exist, they may participate in a NAC, but the NAC itself has no authority over them.

NAC boundaries are formed using existing county electoral divisions as building blocks, refined to ensure the populations are of manageable size, roughly around 50,000 residents. The pilots are running until the end of 2025, after which Surrey County Council will assess their effectiveness and consider whether to expand them across the county. The evaluation will look at levels of participation, the quality of partnership working, community impact and how well NACs might support the new East and West Surrey unitary councils from 2027.

The emergence of NACs adds an additional dimension to the ongoing debate within Epsom and Ewell about whether to create parish councils. Parish councils are formal, elected bodies with defined legal powers and the ability to raise funds through a precept. NACs, by contrast, are informal community partnerships with no statutory authority. Supporters of the parish council model argue that a legally constituted local body is necessary to preserve democratic representation once the borough disappears. Others believe NACs might offer a lighter-touch mechanism to maintain local influence without

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ISSN 2753-2771

recreating a second tier of government or introducing new local taxes.

Whether NACs become a central feature of local engagement under East Surrey Council will depend on the outcome of the pilot phase and the design decisions made by the incoming Shadow Authority after May 2026. For now, Surrey's NAC pilots provide an insight into one possible direction for neighbourhood-level involvement in the years after reorganisation.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Surrey author's unexpected journey to global football goodwill

11 December 2025



If you had asked Surrey-based accidental author Stephen Johnson twenty years ago whether he would one day write a ten-book children's series, sponsor a grassroots football kit in East London, and end up backing a trophy for "the worst team in the world" in Micronesia, he says he would have laughed. Yet life, he reflects, has a habit of surprising you.

Johnson, who has lived in the Epsom & Ewell area for many years, says the whole adventure began almost by accident, from the writing to the football involvement. His children's picture-book series *Berry Town* did not begin with a long-held dream but with a workplace bet. "I'd been telling a colleague that anyone can achieve anything with enough persistence," he recalls. "He challenged me to write a book. I told him books take years, so he said, 'Fine, write a children's book.' Challenge accepted."

The idea took shape around characters inspired by fruit. Years earlier, Johnson had pitched a fruit-based TV concept that was dismissed on the grounds that "kids aren't interested in fruit", but the idea stuck with him. When the challenge arrived, he created the Berry Town community, beginning with Mrs Straw, a character he describes as having "very Hyacinth Bucket vibes". Illustrator David Leonard joined after Johnson scoured the internet for artists willing to take on the unusual brief with a modest budget. "David just got it," he says. "My sketches needed rescuing, and his flat, colourful artwork brought the whole world alive."

There were some early hiccups, including a character name that had to be changed after a reviewer pointed out an unfortunate slang meaning. "That one needed fixing straight away," Johnson admits. "You never forget moments like that."

Before *Berry Town* ever reached Micronesia, it first made its mark in East London. In 2009, Johnson sponsored a full kit for Senrab FC, a grassroots club renowned for producing future Premier League players. The shirts featured bespoke artwork of two *Berry Town* characters, the Boysen Twins. "I was doing well at the time and wanted to give back," he says. "Helping kids felt right." Many of the young players still remember "the Berry Town kit", and several were given copies of the books — one child telling him it was the first book they had ever owned. "If you can support kids in football and in reading, you do it," Johnson says.

But the most surprising chapter unfolded 7,000 miles away in Pohnpei, Micronesia. Johnson came across an article about two British men, Paul Watson and Matt Conrad, who travelled there to coach what was widely considered the worst football team in the world. "I loved their ambition," he says. "I contacted them and asked if I could help."

He ended up sponsoring the Berry Town Cup — awarded to the runners-up of the Pohnpei Premier League. The main trophy had already been sponsored, so he took the next one available. Only later did he realise the league was often improvised, with teams struggling to assemble due to travel costs. "But none of that mattered. I just wanted to help," he

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ISSN 2753-2771

says. He also sent copies of the books to local schools, where they became unexpected resources for children learning English.

More than a decade later, Johnson rediscovered the original artwork, drafts, and even the formal sponsorship certificate tucked away on an old computer. “It was labelled ‘Old Projects, Berry Town’,” he says. “I opened it all up and smiled. I’d forgotten how much heart went into it.” Sharing the story with his football-mad 13-year-old son brought new joy. “He loved it,” Johnson says. “He started researching Pohnpei, asking questions. It became this lovely bonding moment.”

Although Johnson believes *Berry Town* “has had its time”, he is considering releasing the books digitally, probably for free. “Why not let the world enjoy them?” he says.

What began as a playful dare became a decade-spanning adventure involving creativity, kindness, international football, and a legacy that travelled far further than its author could ever have imagined.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Photo: International FC, being awarded the Berry-Town.com Pohnpei Premier League Runners-Up Cup

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“Us and Them” visualises connections with former Epsom patients

11 December 2025



A ground-breaking heritage project exploring the lives of disabled people detained in Surrey’s former mental hospitals is turning fresh attention on Horton Cemetery in Epsom – the burial ground of some 9,000 men, women and children whose resting place remains locked, overgrown and inaccessible under the control of a property speculator who has neglected the site since the 1980s.

Freewheelers Theatre and Media, a creative company of disabled artists based in Leatherhead, is leading *Us and Them*, a National Lottery Heritage Fund-supported initiative using original medical portrait photographs and case records from Surrey’s long-closed asylums. Working with photographer Emma Brown, community history group On the Record and researchers at King’s College London, they are uncovering the stories of patients whose voices were seldom heard in their lifetimes. The project includes new wet-collodion portraits of Freewheelers members made using the same Victorian techniques once used in institutions such as The Manor Hospital and West Park. These contemporary portraits will be shown alongside the originals in a touring exhibition, with the first major display due to take place at The Horton, Epsom, in 2026.

For Epsom, the work resonates particularly with Horton Cemetery – the former burial ground for patients from the Epsom Cluster hospitals, including The Manor, Horton, Long Grove, West Park and St Ebba’s. Despite its national historic significance as the largest asylum cemetery in the UK, the cemetery has been left to decay for decades and remains closed to relatives, historians and the wider community. The Friends of Horton Cemetery continue to campaign for its return to public or charitable ownership so that the site can be restored, documented and respected as the resting place it once was.

The Freewheelers project highlights the human stories behind those buried there. One participant, Alice Scott, chose to pair herself with Rose Harris, a woman confined to The Manor Hospital in 1910 and buried in a pauper plot at Horton Cemetery in 1917. Another member, Pete Messer, recreated the photograph of workhouse survivor Frederick Tarrant, who spent 15 years in various institutions, part of the same system that funnelled thousands of patients to unmarked graves in Epsom.

Historians involved in *Us and Them* emphasise how the original photographs were created without consent for purposes of classification and diagnosis, often contributing to stigma. Today, the Freewheelers portraits aim to prompt public reflection on how disability is perceived and represented, and how society remembers – or forgets – those who lived and died within institutional care. The project’s December creative sessions coincide with a Christie’s auction of similar historical images, underlining renewed public interest in the stories of institutionalised people.

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26th November 2026
ISSN 2753-2771

The Friends of Horton Cemetery say the renewed national attention generated by projects like *Us and Them* strengthens the argument that the burial ground must be brought back into community hands. Volunteers have long argued that the cemetery is a unique and irreplaceable heritage site, containing the life histories of people from across Britain and the world, many of whom have living descendants still searching for answers.

Recent BBC reporting has highlighted the scale of the neglect, the site's condition and the growing calls for public ownership. For many families, the cemetery is the last physical link to relatives whose lives were shaped by the former Epsom institutions. Campaigners say that without intervention, the stories now being rediscovered risk remaining disconnected from the very place where so many of those patients were laid to rest.

More information about the Friends' campaign and the history of the site and some 500 personal stories of the patients buried in the Epsom Hospital Cluster cemetery in Hook Road/Horton Lane, Epsom can be found at **www.hortoncemetery.org**

Sam Jones – Reporter



See BBC coverage here:

Disability group recreates Victorian hospital images

'Grandad is one of 9,000 buried in derelict site'

Call for public ownership of asylum cemetery

Related reports in Epsom and Ewell Times:

Portraits of pauper patients in Epsom's Horton Cemetery, inspires artist

Petition to reclaim Horton Cemetery from property speculator

Local community gathered at Horton Cemetery

Another Horton Cemetery Life Story

Image: Background Horton Cemetery: *photographed on 28 February 1971 by L R James. Epsom & Ewell Local & Family History Centre.* Foreground: Courtesy Friends of Horton Cemetery

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MP warns as 3,600 Epsom homes face fuel poverty

11 December 2025



More than 3,600 households in Epsom and Ewell are estimated to be living in fuel poverty this winter, according to new figures that have reignited debate over the Government's decision to scale back national home-insulation funding.

The estimates come in the same week the Chancellor announced cuts to the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) scheme, a long-running programme that funds energy-saving improvements such as insulation in low-income households. Government data indicates ECO has delivered 1,866 installations locally, helping families reduce heat loss from older homes that are often poorly insulated. Local MP Helen Maguire said withdrawing support now would leave "thousands of families in draughty homes and facing high bills" at a time when many residents already feel financially stretched.

Fuel poverty is measured by comparing a home's required energy costs with household income. National charities warn the UK remains one of the worst-insulated housing stocks in Western Europe, meaning households are more vulnerable to spikes in market energy prices. Despite a fall in wholesale gas costs over the past year, Ofgem confirmed that bills remain significantly above pre-crisis levels, and several support schemes introduced during the 2022–23 energy shock are winding down.

Analysts at the Resolution Foundation have noted that around half of the temporary support announced in the Budget is due to expire within three years. Separate modelling by climate think-tank E3G suggests reducing the scope of ECO could prevent up to a million homes nationwide from receiving insulation improvements over the next four years and may lead to job losses in the retrofit and construction sector.

The Government has argued that its energy efficiency targets remain in place and that the Budget decisions reflect wider

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fiscal pressures. Ministers say additional measures to stabilise wholesale prices and support low-income households will continue. But campaigners and industry groups have expressed concern that cutting insulation programmes risks higher long-term costs for both consumers and the state, as poorly insulated homes require more energy to heat.

Helen Maguire said residents are already reporting that “they feel poorer by the day” and called on ministers to back a more ambitious national upgrade scheme. The Liberal Democrats are advocating an emergency programme offering free insulation and heat pumps for people on low incomes, alongside removing the Renewables Obligation levy from electricity bills. The party claims that breaking the link between gas and electricity prices and scaling up home retrofit work could halve household energy bills by 2035.

As temperatures fall, local authorities, charities and advice services expect increased demand from households struggling to balance heating costs with other essential spending. Nationally, fuel poverty campaigners continue to urge the Government to treat insulation as an infrastructure priority, warning that winter pressures will persist until the UK’s older housing stock is modernised at scale.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Young Surrey volunteers help shape new neuroinclusive travel app

11 December 2025



Young people in Surrey have helped test a new travel-planning app designed to make public transport less stressful for neurodivergent passengers. Members of ATLAS, Surrey Youth Voice’s participation group for young people with additional needs and disabilities, spent three days trialling *Aubin*, a free app that takes a different approach to journey planning.

Unlike standard apps that prioritise the quickest route, Aubin focuses on reducing anxiety and supporting users who may find travel overwhelming. The app allows travellers to tailor their journey according to personal needs, rather than simply finding the fastest option. ATLAS members used it to plan and carry out trips across North, East and West Surrey, assessing how effectively it helped with independence and confidence.

Aubin functions as both a route planner and a “travel companion”. Alongside directions, it offers practical tools to support users in moments of uncertainty. These include grounding exercises to help regulate emotions during difficult points in a journey; a type-to-speech feature for anyone who may struggle to speak when stressed; and an editable Autism Card that allows travellers to explain needs quickly and discreetly to staff or fellow passengers. Users can also set preferences that shape the route suggested, such as avoiding busy interchanges or long waits.

ATLAS has long advocated for more accessible, neuroinclusive transport options, arguing that navigating public transport is essential for young people to reach education, work and social opportunities. Members described the trial as a chance to influence a product that could help reduce isolation and build independence for others with similar needs.

At the end of the pilot, ATLAS met with Aubin’s co-founder and product manager, Corinna Smiles, to give detailed feedback. Suggestions included adding journey-sharing options so a trusted contact can follow someone’s progress, communication prompts for stressful situations, and a checklist to help users prepare before leaving home. Aubin welcomed the recommendations and said they would incorporate them into future updates.

Ms Smiles said the pilot was a valuable example of user-led design and thanked the group for helping shape the app. ATLAS members have since given Aubin their “seal of approval”, encouraging other neurodivergent young people to try it.

ATLAS member Emily said taking part “felt empowering” and that knowing the group’s input would help autistic travellers made the experience worthwhile: “I feel honoured to have been part of shaping this app, which I’m sure will give many people the tools to travel with confidence.”

Councillor Helyn Clack, Deputy Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning, said the collaboration showed the importance of designing tools with “the voices of the community they serve”, and that the app has real potential to improve accessibility.

Aubin is free to download from app stores.

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Sam Jones – Reporter



Image – Surrey County Council news

Here’s some Spring cheer as Winter approaches Epsom and Ewell

11 December 2025



Nonsuch Park has been awarded two top honours at the 2025 South & South East in Bloom Awards, taking **Gold** for both *Heritage Park of the Year* and *Large Conservation Area*. The Gold Award is the scheme’s highest accolade, reserved for entries judged to have achieved exceptional standards across all assessment categories.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council said the result reflects a sustained programme of heritage restoration and environmental management, including the refurbishment of garden features such as the greenhouse, continued care of its champion trees, and conservation work across the wider landscape. Judges described Nonsuch Park as “an exceptional example of conservation in action”, commending its carefully managed habitats, historic setting and community engagement projects.

Councillor **Anthony Froud** (RA Stoneleigh), Chairman of the Nonsuch Park Joint Management Committee, said: “This is an incredible achievement and a reflection of the dedication of our volunteers and staff. Local volunteers, the Nonsuch Voles, and the Council’s Countryside, Property and Estates, and Operational teams work year-round to protect and enhance this unique heritage landscape for the benefit of wildlife, visitors and future generations. These Gold Awards celebrate their hard work and the deep pride our community takes in Nonsuch Park.”

Governance of Nonsuch Park

Unlike most parks in the borough, Nonsuch Park is not managed solely by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council. It is overseen by the Nonsuch Park Joint Management Committee (JMC), a long-standing partnership between Epsom & Ewell Borough Council and the London Borough of Sutton. The arrangement dates back to the 1930s, when the two authorities jointly acquired the estate to prevent the land from being sold for development.

Under the current structure, the JMC is responsible for strategic decisions concerning the park’s maintenance, heritage assets, conservation plans and public access. Day-to-day operations are delivered by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council on behalf of the partnership, with Sutton contributing towards the running costs through an annual financial agreement. Representatives from both councils sit on the committee, ensuring shared oversight of policy, budget and long-term planning.

The Joint Management Committee model is one of the reasons Nonsuch Park has been able to maintain its character and heritage significance. It enables coordinated management across borough boundaries while preserving the historic landscape as a single entity. Local volunteer groups, notably the Nonsuch Voles, play an important supporting role, undertaking conservation tasks, habitat improvement, garden restoration and public engagement throughout the year.

With thousands of visitors each week, Nonsuch Park remains one of the region’s most valued open spaces. This year’s double Gold Award adds to its growing list of recognitions and underlines its importance as both a heritage landscape and a biodiversity-rich green space for the wider community.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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

26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

Surrey University balloon study of solar flares informs current air safety concerns

11 December 2025



New balloon-mounted radiation probes developed by the Surrey Space Centre at the University of Surrey have captured their first readings of a major solar storm, confirming that levels of cosmic radiation at typical cruising altitude briefly surged to their highest point in almost two decades. The findings come as aviation authorities worldwide are responding to unrelated but highly publicised technical concerns affecting a small number of long-haul aircraft, prompting the UK Transport Secretary to offer public reassurance.

The powerful X5-class solar flare recorded on 11 November 2025 triggered a rare Ground Level Enhancement (GLE), in which solar energetic particles penetrated unusually deep into the atmosphere. Within an hour, the UK Met Office and the Dutch meteorological agency KNMI launched rapid-response weather balloons equipped with Surrey's newly developed sensors, sending them through commercial-aircraft altitudes and far higher.

Early analysis shows that radiation at 40,000 feet briefly reached almost ten times normal background levels. Scientists stress that the spike posed no immediate health risk to passengers or crew, but they note the potential for temporary pressure on aircraft electronics. Surrey researchers estimate that during the storm's peak, "single-event upsets" — tiny, unpredictable bit-flips in onboard computer memory caused by energetic particles — may have reached around 60 errors per hour per gigabyte.

Clive Dyer of the Surrey Space Centre said the November surge was the strongest event of its kind since December 2006, with new UK neutron monitors at Guildford, Lerwick and Camborne helping to map the storm's radiation footprint across global airspace. Researchers emphasise that while far larger historical events are known — including the record 1956 radiation storm and the ancient "Miyake Events" revealed through tree rings — such extremes have never struck during the modern aviation era.

The renewed scientific focus on space weather arrives during a period of public sensitivity around flight safety. In recent days, several international carriers have reported technical issues affecting specific aircraft types, prompting precautionary inspections and, in some jurisdictions, temporary operational restrictions. Although no link has been made between these aircraft issues and solar activity, the incidents have heightened passenger concern.

Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander, responding to the situation, said: "I am aware of the technical issue impacting certain aircraft and concerns over how this will affect passengers and flights this evening. Passengers who are due to fly this weekend should check with their carriers for the latest information. The good news is it seems the impact on UK airlines seems limited with a smaller number of aircraft requiring more complex software and hardware changes. I would really like to thank the experts, staff and airlines who are working at pace to address this and reassure passengers that work is ongoing. It is heartening this issue has been identified and will be addressed so swiftly, demonstrating the high aviation safety standards globally."

The Surrey sensors, engineered to withstand near-vacuum conditions and temperatures down to –70°C, stream real-time radiation data up to 100,000 feet. Their results will be used to refine models at the Met Office Space Weather Operations Centre, improving forecasting for sectors reliant on high-altitude electronics, including aviation.

Keith Ryden, Director of Surrey Space Centre, said the 11 November flare provided the team's first opportunity to use the rapid-launch sensors in a live event, producing a "3D picture" of radiation patterns across UK airspace. Met Office Space Weather Manager Krista Hammond added that this is the first time radiation has been measured across such a broad range of altitudes during a solar storm, describing the new data as "a big leap forward" for forecasting capability.

Further launches are planned from Met Office sites in Lerwick and Camborne, and from KNMI in the Netherlands, as the current solar cycle moves into a more active phase. Aviation regulators say the Surrey results will help inform future operational guidance during solar storms, while the Transport Secretary emphasised that UK passenger safety remains "of the highest priority".

Sam Jones – Reporter



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ISSN 2753-2771

Surrey consults on next year’s budget

11 December 2025



Surrey County Council has opened a public consultation on its draft budget for 2026/27, asking residents across the county to comment on proposals ahead of final decisions next year. Each year the council sets out how it will fund essential local services including adult social care, children’s services, special educational needs provision, highways, libraries, public health programmes, fire and rescue, and environmental maintenance. The authority says the coming year presents one of its most difficult financial challenges for over a decade due to the government’s Fair Funding Review, which will reduce Surrey’s central government grant and increase reliance on council tax and other locally-raised income. At present, the council reports a provisional £21.3 million funding gap for 2026/27.

The Fair Funding Review is a long-anticipated national reform intended to change how Whitehall allocates money to local authorities. Early modelling indicates that areas with strong tax bases such as Surrey will see reduced relative need-based funding, while more deprived areas gain. Surrey has already seen its core government grant fall dramatically over the past decade. According to publicly available Local Government Finance Settlement figures, Surrey’s Revenue Support Grant dropped from over £130 million in 2010 to effectively £0 in recent years, leaving the council heavily dependent on council tax, which already accounts for around 74% of its income. Rising inflation, growth in demand for adult social care and special educational needs services, and ongoing cost pressures linked to contract inflation and staffing shortages have compounded these challenges.

Councillor Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council, said Surrey was “facing one of the most challenging financial periods in its history”. He added that the government’s new funding approach “has a direct impact on the services we provide”, stressing that protecting the most critical functions remains the priority, including support for vulnerable adults, children, and families and the infrastructure that keeps the county moving. He noted that this is the final budget to be set before Surrey’s existing county structure is dissolved and replaced with two new unitary authorities, East Surrey Council and West Surrey Council, from April 2027 following the government’s recent decision on local government reorganisation.

Surrey County Council has pointed to its past record of setting balanced budgets in contrast to several authorities nationally that have issued Section 114 “bankruptcy” notices in recent years, including Northamptonshire, Croydon, Slough, Woking and Birmingham. However, the council’s financial resilience has been tested. The county faces one of the largest high-needs deficits for special educational needs in the South East.

Councillor David Lewis, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, said that reduced government support combined with rising costs means the authority must “plan even more carefully to ensure support reaches those who need it most”. Adult social care, children’s services, and SEND support together account for close to two-thirds of the council’s entire net budget. He acknowledged that residents also value “visible services” such as road maintenance, libraries, and community spaces, emphasising the importance of public feedback in prioritising investment.

The draft budget consultation will shape the final budget papers to be published in January 2026 and submitted to Full Council in February. Residents can view the proposals online and submit comments until 11.59pm on Sunday 4 January 2026.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Image: Surrey Budget graphic from Surrey County Council Youtube video

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ISSN 2753-2771

Epsom and Ewell homeless costs set to overshoot by £900k

11 December 2025



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is forecasting a substantial overspend on its homelessness budget this year, **as reported to the BBC**, with demand for help remaining “consistently high”.

According to figures provided by the council via the BBC, the number of people seeking assistance in the first quarter of the 2025/26 financial year rose by 19% compared with the same period last year. The authority has already overspent by £587,412 in the first six months and now expects the gap to widen to £895,000 by March 2026.

Local and national pressures

Councillor **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village), who chairs the Community and Wellbeing Committee, told the BBC the pressures facing the borough echoed those “found nationwide”, driven largely by the lack of affordable, permanent housing and the continuing cost-of-living crisis.

He added that Epsom and Ewell faces its own structural challenges, including a limited supply of affordable private rented homes, no council-owned housing stock, and a long-standing shortage of social housing.

The council’s budget for 2025/26 was set on the assumption that 70 families would be in nightly paid temporary accommodation. However, as of 24 October, the figure had climbed to 114.

Prevention schemes and charity support

Councillor Woodbridge said the council was concentrating on homelessness prevention, expanding private sector leasing arrangements and making greater use of rent deposit schemes. Local charities are also involved in reducing demand for emergency housing, notably YMCA East Surrey, which provides guidance and support for people at risk of losing their homes.

One woman from Redhill, who spoke to the BBC, said YMCA assistance stopped her falling into homelessness after a period of severe illness. She described how disability and post-traumatic stress disorder left her unable to work during and after the pandemic. With rent arrears mounting and her informal support network exhausted, she feared emergency accommodation was the next step. YMCA staff helped her with the paperwork and guided her into permanent housing.

A wider Surrey picture

Epsom and Ewell is not alone in facing escalating temporary accommodation bills. As reported by the BBC, Woking Borough Council expects to overspend by £350,000 this year, while Waverley Borough Council has forecast a £165,000 shortfall.

The national situation is equally stark. Government statistics published earlier this year showed the number of households in temporary accommodation in England at its highest level since records began in 1998, driven by rising private rents, the freeze on housing benefit Local Housing Allowance rates, and continued shortages of social housing. Councils across the South East report similar difficulties securing affordable lets for families, often at prices far above their budgets.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is expected to revisit its temporary accommodation strategy early in 2026 as financial pressures continue to mount.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Related reports:

Epsom’s homelessness crisis

What are the solutions to Epsom’s homeless crisis?

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Pods off in bricks grant for Epsom homeless

Did a fair view prevail on Epsom’s modular homes for the homeless?

British Railways’ 200 year celebration train coming to Epsom

11 December 2025



Free exhibition train to steam into Tattenham Corner

A free exhibition train celebrating 200 years of the modern railway will arrive at Tattenham Corner station next March as part of a 60-stop national tour.

More than 40,000 people have already visited the touring train, named *Inspiration*, which forms a centrepiece of **Railway 200**, the nationwide programme marking two centuries since the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway in 1825. Nine in ten visitors say they would recommend it to a friend.

What visitors can expect

Co-curated with the National Railway Museum, *Inspiration* explores how rail reshaped Britain and the wider world. Displays chart key “railway firsts”, interactive engineering challenges and a rapid tour of lesser-known railway careers. The exhibition has been praised as “brilliant”, “fascinating” and suitable for all ages.

One visitor reported: “I loved that it was interactive. I visited with people from age 18 to 85 and there was something for everyone.” Another said even their five-year-old “absolutely loved it”.

The train will be hosted by Southern at **Tattenham Corner station from 9 to 11 March 2026**. Tickets are free but limited.

Tattenham Corner’s royal railway history

Tattenham Corner station itself has a long connection with major public events. Opened in 1901, the station was built to provide easier rail access to the Epsom Downs racecourse, particularly for the Derby. According to local historical accounts, the new station offered an alternative to the original Epsom Downs station, which at the time had nine platforms and could be overwhelmed by Derby-day crowds.

It is widely understood that the creation of Tattenham Corner station was encouraged so that **Queen Victoria**, in the final months of her reign, could travel to the racecourse with greater ease and avoid the congestion associated with the older, much busier station. The new alignment brought passengers directly to the famous turn on the Downs from which the station takes its name.

In the decades that followed, Tattenham Corner became a focal arrival point for racegoers, and extra services still run on major racing days.

A milestone for Britain’s railways

Railway 200 marks two centuries since Stephenson’s *Locomotion No. 1* steamed along the Stockton and Darlington line, an innovation that changed global travel, encouraged mass tourism, shaped timekeeping and sped up industrial development.

The anniversary year has already included a re-run of the original 1825 journey watched by around 100,000 people, commemorative stamps and coins, a global “whistle-up” of more than 200 locomotives, and what organisers describe as the world’s largest rail festival.

Angie Doll, Chief Executive of Govia Thameslink Railway, said: “Two hundred years ago the modern railway came into existence and utterly transformed our society. Working together, we hope to educate and inspire young people in rail’s past and future. The railway is great for the climate, and helps our local communities thrive.”

Emma Roberts, Programme Manager for Railway 200, added: “Inspiration is a fun, free and fascinating way to learn about the past, present and future of rail. There’s something for everyone.”

Rail Minister Lord Peter Hendy called Britain “the birthplace of the modern railway” and said the touring train aims to

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ISSN 2753-2771

inspire a new generation of engineers, drivers, conductors and technicians.

The exhibition has been supported by a £250,000 National Lottery Heritage Fund grant, with Porterbrook providing the livery for the train.

Tickets

Tickets for the Tattenham Corner visit are free but must be booked in advance.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Nescot students' artwork brightens Ewell East Station

11 December 2025



Artwork by Nescot's Level 3 Art and Digital Design students is now on display at Ewell East Station as part of Art@theStation, a national initiative bringing young artists' work into public transport spaces.

Commissioned by The Arts Society Epsom and funded by Govia Thameslink Railway, this is the second collaboration with the college. Their first commission, exhibited in 2024, is still on show at Epsom Station.

"Sense of Place – Ewell"

Students were asked to create portrait-format designs themed around *Sense of Place – Ewell*, using bold silhouettes and bright colours to reflect local landmarks. Four students – Jess, Emma, Cate and Sarah – were selected for display and each received a certificate and a £25 prize.

Sarah's design features Bourne Hall Museum. She said working collaboratively "just like in the art industry" had been one of the highlights, adding that the digital skills gained at college had been "invaluable". Cate's design, inspired by Bourne Hall Park and the Dog Gate entrance, left her "thrilled" when selected. She said researching the history behind her piece had been fascinating and that seeing her work displayed publicly was "a proud moment".

Jess and Emma, whose pieces depict well-known Ewell Village landmarks, said the project strengthened their digital design skills and that they enjoyed working as a team.

Building skills and confidence

Tutor Demonstrator Miles Merritt said the project offered "a brilliant opportunity" for students to build confidence and professional experience. He praised the chance for learners to work to a live brief and deadline and to enhance their portfolios ahead of further study.

He added thanks to The Arts Society Epsom for providing a platform to showcase student creativity, saying the college looked forward to future collaborations.

Praise from The Arts Society Epsom

Angie Child, Project Lead for Art@theStation, said she was "delighted" with the students' graphic designs, noting their use of vibrant colour to bring clarity and impact to familiar Ewell landmarks. She said each student showed a "mature approach to commercial design" and a clear passion for pursuing creative careers. She also commended Miles Merritt for supporting the students throughout the project.

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26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

Supporting young artists

Art@theStation is part of a wider national initiative developed by The Arts Society, giving young artists the rare chance to exhibit work in waiting rooms, ticket halls and on platforms across Britain. The scheme aims both to improve the station environment and to give travellers an unexpected cultural experience.

Photo: (left to right): Tudor Evans, Ewell East Station Manager; Alistair McGeachey, Chair of The Arts Society Epsom; Nescot Level 3 students Jess, Emma, Sarah and Cate; and project lead Angie Child.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

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

Ewell East underpass transformed by new community mural

Young Artists Brighten Up Tattenham Corner Station

QEF to Close After 90 Years as Epsom MP Seeks Answers

11 December 2025



The Queen Elizabeth’s Foundation for Disabled People (QEF), the long-established disability charity based in Leatherhead, has announced it will enter administration after a 28-day wind-down period, bringing an end to more than nine decades of specialist support for people with disabilities in Surrey and across the country.

QEF said the decision follows “severe financial challenges” and comes after a year of exploring options to stabilise its position. The charity supports nearly 10,000 people annually through neuro-rehabilitation, mobility services and specialist residential care.

Founded in 1934 with the support of the then-Duchess of York (who became Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother), QEF has been a significant presence in the local community for generations. Its closure raises immediate questions about the future care of residents and clients who rely on its services, and about the national pressures facing the disability-care sector.

Local Epsom and Ewell MP Helen Maguire said she was “deeply saddened” by the announcement, calling QEF “a cornerstone of our community in Leatherhead” and praising the “wonderful person-centred care” provided by its staff. She said she had seen the charity’s impact first-hand during a visit earlier this year.

According to QEF’s own statements, the organisation has faced rising staffing costs, recruitment pressures, and funding constraints from statutory bodies. The charity reported that despite efforts to improve its financial position, “there wasn’t a viable solution” to meet the scale of the challenge.

Mrs Maguire said she has been in “regular conversation” with QEF leadership in recent days to see whether a last-minute solution was possible. “It was conveyed to me that, sadly, the shutdown process is already fully in motion,” she said. She confirmed she has written to the Health Secretary, Wes Streeting, seeking an urgent meeting to discuss the circumstances of the closure and the wider lessons for the sector.

Her immediate focus, she said, is “ensuring continuity of care for both patients and staff”. QEF has said the 28-day wind-down period is intended to give time for residential clients to be found suitable alternative placements.

The charity’s closure will leave a notable gap in specialist provision in the region. QEF employed around 250 people and operated from modern facilities in Leatherhead after a major redevelopment earlier in the decade. Its departure will add pressure to already stretched NHS and social care services that rely on external specialist providers.

Sam Jones – Reporter

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Image: QEF street sign. Google street view

Epsom and Ewell Climate Action Network launches with community events and initiatives

11 December 2025



A new community movement is taking shape in the borough with the launch of the Epsom and Ewell Climate Action Network (eeCAN) – a local volunteer group working to empower residents through inclusive projects that build resilience to climate change.

EECAN's mission is simple but ambitious: to help communities adapt and thrive in a changing world. Its projects focus on practical solutions, awareness-raising, and supporting climate-friendly policies. Everything the network offers at the moment is totally free and open to all, ensuring that everyone can take part in building a more sustainable, climate-resilient Epsom and Ewell. Users of the services will be given the opportunity to make any donations they feel they can afford if they want to help the charity do even more for their community.

"Epsom and Ewell Climate Action Network has grown so much in the last 12 months as a result of the energy and commitment of volunteers wanting to help their local communities reduce Climate risks while saving money" says William Ward the Chair and co-founder of the group.

Epsom and Ewell Library of Things

Launching to the public in spring next year, this innovative "Library of Things" will allow residents to borrow items instead of buying them, reducing waste and promoting sharing. From carpet cleaners and wallpaper steamers to pressure washers and gazebos, residents will be able to borrow tools and equipment for free, thanks to donated items. Donations of nearly new equipment are now being sought. Those able to help are asked to contact eeClimateActionNetwork@gmail.com or visit https://eecanlibraryofthings.myturn.com/library.

eeCAN is developing this initiative in partnership with Surrey County Council Library Services (for front of counter service) and with Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, in association with The Epsom Repair Café, who ensure that all electrical items are safe to use.

Bike Amnesty – Saturday 22 November 2025

Got a bike you no longer use? Donate it! Between 9am and 5pm at Epsom Methodist Church, Scout Hall, Ashley Road KT18 5AQ, residents can drop off unwanted bicycles to be refurbished and passed on to people who need them.

The scheme helps promote active, low-carbon travel while supporting those who might not otherwise afford a bike. Just turn up with your spare bikes. This free service is provided in partnership with Surrey County Council's "Active Surrey" team.

Contact: eeClimateActionNetwork@gmail.com

Climate Conversations – every 2nd and 4th Monday of the month

eeCAN also runs regular Climate Conversations at Birchgrove Lower Mill, Kingston Road, Ewell KT17 2DQ, from 10:30am to 12:30pm. These informal gatherings give residents a friendly space to learn, share experiences, and explore all aspects of climate change together.

One participant said, "I often feel so motivated after one of our meetings!"

The upcoming session on Monday 24 November will feature Dr Kristine Damberg, online presenting *"What can we eat for human and planetary health"*, a talk exploring how our food choices affect both personal wellbeing and the planet.

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Anyone can join in using this link: https://meet2.organise.earth/rooms/95o-iug-ems-2p6/join

Living Rivers Exhibition – April to May 2026

Looking ahead, eeCAN will host a *Living Rivers Art Exhibition* at the Ebbisham Centre, Epsom KT19, in association with The Royal Marsden. Running from 22 April (Earth Day) to 22 May 2026, the free exhibition will celebrate the beauty and importance of rivers and waterways.

Inspired by writer Robert Macfarlane's question *"Is a river alive?"*, the exhibition will showcase artwork from local schools, community groups, and individuals.

Submissions (A4 max-sized drawings or paintings) are invited by 27 March 2026, with eeCAN volunteers offering to collect (and return) artworks directly from schools and art groups. Groups will be invited to see their work on display and participate in nature-themed activities.

Email eeClimateActionNetwork@gmail.com for participation details.

A community coming together

From swapping tools and donating bikes to sharing climate ideas and artistic expression, eeCAN's initiatives reflect a spirit of cooperation, creativity, and care for the environment.

Its organisers believe that by taking small, collective steps, Epsom and Ewell can make a big difference — helping local people live more sustainably while building resilience for the future.

For more information, contact eeClimateActionNetwork@gmail.com or follow eeCAN's activities through their upcoming community channels.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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