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Coroner visits Surrey cricket hero’s mental decline

24 July 2025



Coroner’s Inquest visits the loss of former England and Surrey batting great **Graham Thorpe MBE**, who died in August 2024 aged 55. Following an inquest held this week at Surrey Coroner’s Court, his life and tragic death have returned to the headlines, casting fresh light on his legacy and personal struggles.

Born in Farnham, Surrey on 1 August 1969, Graham Thorpe rose through the county’s cricketing ranks with prodigious talent and steely determination. He made his first-class debut for Surrey County Cricket Club in 1988 and quickly established himself as one of the most technically gifted left-handers of his generation.

Thorpe’s early promise blossomed into a formidable career with Surrey, for whom he scored over 21,000 runs across formats. His stylish strokeplay, calm temperament, and ability to perform under pressure made him a linchpin for the county during the 1990s and early 2000s.

Surrey’s return to success in the late 1990s—including their Sunday League title in 1996 and County Championship victories—bore Thorpe’s fingerprints, and his bond with the club remained strong well beyond retirement. He later served as Surrey’s batting coach, mentoring a new generation of cricketers at the Oval.

Thorpe made an instant impact on the international stage, scoring a century on his Test debut against Australia in 1993. Over a 12-year England career, he compiled 6,744 Test runs at an average of 44.66, with 16 centuries—cementing his place among the country’s most reliable middle-order batsmen.

He was central to key series wins in the subcontinent, notably England’s victories in Pakistan and Sri Lanka in 2000, and was named a Wisden Cricketer of the Year in 1998. His unbeaten 200 against New Zealand in 2002 was widely hailed as one of the finest innings of its era.

A naturally modest figure, Thorpe’s contribution to English cricket went beyond runs. He embodied a quiet resilience and professionalism that won the admiration of teammates and opponents alike.

After retiring from playing in 2005, Thorpe remained in the game as a respected batting coach, including roles with Surrey and later as a key figure in the England coaching setup. He was part of the ECB’s elite coaching team and served as a mentor to many of England’s current generation of batters.

However, his career in coaching came to a sudden end in 2022 following the fallout from a video showing players drinking after a heavy Ashes defeat in Australia. Though not the subject of disciplinary action, Thorpe lost his role as England’s batting coach soon after—an event that proved devastating.

This week’s inquest at Surrey Coroner’s Court revealed the full extent of Thorpe’s mental health battle, casting a sombre shadow over his final years.

Thorpe had reportedly suffered from anxiety and depression since at least 2018. After the loss of his ECB coaching job in 2022, his condition deteriorated significantly. He became socially withdrawn, suffered from insomnia, and described feelings of shame and worthlessness.

His wife, Amanda, told the inquest that he had even asked her to assist him in dying, expressing an intention to seek assisted suicide in Switzerland. In April 2022, he attempted suicide and spent weeks in intensive care. Though he made a partial physical recovery, the psychological toll persisted.

On 4 August 2024, Thorpe tragically died after being struck by a train at Esher railway station. The coroner concluded that he had taken his own life. His family chose to speak publicly in the hope of raising awareness and encouraging open conversation around mental health in sport.

Surrey County Cricket Club paid tribute to Thorpe, calling him “one of the finest cricketers the club has ever produced.” The club has honoured his legacy with a commemorative gallery at the Oval and moments of silence at matches.

Teammates and former England captains described Thorpe as a “warrior at the crease” and a “gentleman off it,” highlighting both his cricketing prowess and quiet dignity.

Thorpe’s story has also reignited national debate about the mental health pressures faced by elite athletes and the need for more robust support structures—both during and after their careers.

Graham Thorpe’s life was rich in achievement, marked by loyalty to Surrey, excellence for England, and a deep love for the game. But his death also reminds us of the vulnerabilities behind even the most accomplished public figures.

As his family bravely noted, “Graham’s legacy must be more than his cricket. Let it also be a call to look out for each

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other."

Thorpe is survived by his wife Amanda and their children. He remains, to many in Surrey and beyond, a hero of the game—and a symbol of the need to treat mental health with the seriousness it deserves.

If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health, contact Samaritans at 116 123 or visit www.samaritans.org.

Image: Graham Thorpe selfie in 2005. Attribution: Jguk at English Wikipedia Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported

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Absence of CEO on audit Red Flag causes an outrage

24 July 2025



The Audit and Scrutiny Committee of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council met on 17th July. Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) expressed his outrage that the Chief Executive of the Council was not in attendance.

The Committee had previously agreed to request a report from the Senior Leadership Team of the Council explaining management responses to External Auditors, as reported to the Committee in February 2025. The attendance of the Chief Executive to discuss management responses and actions was called for.

Grant Thornton, the external auditors, had made the following "red flag" recommendation to the Council: "The Council should develop a clear approach towards transparency. The Council should be mindful of requirements to be open and accountable".

The Chair (Cllr **Steven McCormick** – RA Woodcote and Langley) explained that the Chief Executive's availability would be checked but he could not foresee an issue in her attending the July Committee meeting.

However, due to another commitment of the Chief Executive on the 17th July, the Chair had invited her to attend the September meeting of the Committee. Further, he assured Cllr Ames, the Committee could defer any particular matters requiring the CEO's attention to the next meeting.

Cllr Ames was not satisfied with the failure of the CEO to attend and repeatedly expressed his outrage at the stalling of accountability. Accountability being a key element for the Council to improve, as stated in the auditors red flag recommendation.

His frustration was duly "noted".

Related reports:

Annual audit of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

"Audit and Scrutiny" under scrutiny

Local Audit meet: unexpectedly interesting…

RA councillor replaces Independent member as scrutiny row erupts at Epsom Town Hall

Image EEBC YouTube. Cllr Ames.

Be positive about B negative blood donations

24 July 2025

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Residents across Surrey and the wider South East are being asked to step forward and donate B negative blood, as the NHS warns that stocks of this rare blood group have dropped to critically low levels.

Stocks of B Negative Blood Hit Concerning Lows

Recent figures from NHS Blood and Transplant indicate that only 2,482 B negative donors in the region are currently eligible to donate, with overall donor numbers in dangerous decline. There are now fewer than 20,000 active B negative donors across the country, following a drop of 1,000 since last year.

B negative is exceptionally rare, present in just two percent of the population. This scarcity has raised serious concerns, as the NHS reports that patients with this group can only safely receive B negative or O negative blood. When B negative stocks run low, pressure increases on emergency supplies of O negative, the universal blood type.

Local Appeal and Priority Access for Donors

Existing B negative donors are being contacted directly and urged to book donation appointments as soon as possible. Anyone who already knows they have B negative blood, or suspects they might, is strongly encouraged to register and donate. Family members of B negative donors, meanwhile, are 30 percent more likely to have the same rare type—and are being called upon to consider giving blood.

Priority appointment slots will be made available to B negative donors struggling to find suitable times, and the NHS has appealed for the local community to act now, especially with increased summertime demand looming.

Why Your Donation Matters

Hospitals in England require more than 5,000 blood donations every day to support patients undergoing surgery, cancer treatments, managing sickle cell disease, or recovering from serious injuries. Each donation, which takes just an hour, has the potential to save up to three lives.

Besides B negative, donors with O negative and the extremely rare Ro blood are also desperately needed, especially to help treat sickle cell and other critical conditions.

How to Register

Men can give blood every three months and women every four months. Booking an appointment is fast and straightforward. Donors can:

- Visit the NHS Blood and Transplant website
- Use the GiveBlood app
- Call 0300 123 23 23

Donation sessions are held at permanent centres in nearby London locations, and through regular community sessions in town halls and other local venues across Surrey.

Local Voices

Gerry Gogarty, Director of Blood Supply at NHS Blood and Transplant, said:
“B negative donors are immensely important to our lifesaving work, but as one of the rarest blood types, it can be a challenge to always collect enough. Just a slight rise in hospital demand, or even one patient needing several units, can put supplies under severe strain. We urgently need B negative donors—regular and new—to come forward.”

The Bigger Picture

With the NHS needing up to 200,000 new blood donors nationally each year, the call is not just for today, but for a sustained community response to keep saving lives.

For more information, visit the NHS Blood and Transplant website or call 0300 123 23 23 to book your appointment. Every donation can make all the difference for someone, somewhere in need.

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

24 July 2025



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Epsom Town Centre Masterplan has been named "Best Plan" at the Royal Town Planning Institute's (RTPI) South East Awards for Planning Excellence 2024. The win brings regional recognition to the Council's efforts in shaping the future of the town centre — but it also casts a renewed spotlight on the long-standing delays in finalising a borough-wide Local Plan.

The RTPI judges praised the Masterplan's participative and innovative approach, its use of digital consultation tools, and its firm emphasis on sustainability. The plan was commended as a model of non-statutory planning excellence, particularly impressive given it was not prompted by legislative requirement but by what the judges described as "a strong desire to make a better place."

The planning team achieved an unprecedented level of local engagement, with 1,979 consultation responses — almost 3% of the borough's population — including many residents participating in a council consultation for the first time. This level of public involvement far exceeds the national average of 1%, according to RTPI data.

Councillor **Peter O'Donovan**, (RA Ewell Court) Chair of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee, described the award as "reflective of the hard work and expertise" of the planning policy team, highlighting the central goal of "making Epsom an even better place."

The Masterplan, developed with consultancy firm David Lock Associates, provides clear development parameters for key town centre sites including the Ashley Centre, Hook Road, Depot Road car park, and Hope Lodge. It also outlines placemaking objectives, environmental improvements, and key design principles aimed at preserving and enhancing Epsom's historic core.

A Tale of Two Plans

While the award marks a triumph for the Town Centre strategy, it also contrasts sharply with the ongoing delays and controversy surrounding the borough's statutory Local Plan. The Local Plan, which is essential for long-term housing and infrastructure development across the wider borough, has faced repeated postponements, public protests, and uncertainty over Green Belt protections.

Epsom and Ewell Times has reported extensively on the Local Plan's troubled progress — from stalled timelines and passionate public campaigns resisting proposed housing developments on cherished green spaces. The Local Plan was officially submitted to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government for independent examination. This significant step, taken on 10 March 2025

Observers may see the Masterplan's success as both a sign of the Council's planning capability and a reminder of its failure to deliver its statutory planning framework in a timely manner. The Masterplan may now proceed to the national RTPI Awards for Planning Excellence later this year, but it remains a non-binding vision — its implementation depends, in part, on a coherent Local Plan to support infrastructure and development across the borough.

Until then, residents can celebrate Epsom's win on the regional stage, while continuing to ask: when will the borough-wide plan finally materialise?

Epsom Town Centre Masterplan now advances as a finalist for the RTPI National Awards for Planning Excellence, to be announced in October. The awards ceremony is scheduled for 26 November 2025.

Related reports:

Epsom & Ewell's Local Plan under the Green microscope

Epsom and Ewell Local Plan Submitted for Examination

The Local Plan plot thickens after revised NPPF

Council minority vote Local Plan to next stage with Green Belt in

Epsom Town Centre Masterplan Unveiled

Mind the Epsom Town Centre Masterplan!

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and many more….

Epsom and Ewell will judge change at their leisure

24 July 2025



When Epsom & Ewell Borough Council announced that **Better** will hand over management of the Rainbow Leisure Centre to **Places Leisure** in October 2025, many locals who have experienced booking glitches, understaffed gyms, and declining poolside conditions breathed a silent sigh of relief. The question now: how quickly will the promised improvements materialize?

Why the Council Doesn't Run Itself

The council does not manage leisure centres directly—instead, it contracts out operations. That's why swathes of public facilities across the borough, including the Rainbow Centre, are run by third-party providers. The rationale? Private operators like Better specialise in facility management, class programming, and membership administration. But that also means the council steps back, paying providers rent and oversight rights in exchange for promised upkeep and performance.

Transparency and Value for Money—Still in Question

Although the council has described Places Leisure as a "social enterprise," it has offered no specifics about terms: contract length, rent paid, baseline investment, or expected improvements remain undisclosed. Without that data, taxpayers and users have no firm guarantee of value—simply a brand change.

Councillors have stressed that this switch aims to bring greater "community focus" and better reinvestment of any surplus—hallmarks of the social enterprise model. Yet sceptics point out that social enterprises aren't automatically transparent: some still report hefty executive pay packets. In particular, the CEO of **Places for People** the ultimate owners of Places Leisure reportedly earned £565,426 in 2023-2024 , raising eyebrows among voters who wonder.

A Closer Look at Places Leisure's Reputation

The local press release paints Places Leisure as a community-minded organisation, but reviews from employees and users tell a different story. Feedback on sites like Indeed and Breakroom varies significantly. Some praise friendly culture and flexible working, while others warn of poor management:

"Management loved to bully young lifeguards… poor pay"

"Awful communication, awful leadership… spend too much time fixing their mistakes"

On Trustpilot, users have lodged complaints about broken equipment, overcrowded classes, and appalling changing-room hygiene—low-grade experiences raising legitimate concerns over upkeep standards as they transfer from Better to Places Leisure .

The Case of the 'Midnight Lane-Booking' Mystery

Among the most frequent user frustrations at Rainbow Centre is the so-called **midnight lane-booking blackout**—where lane reservations vanish at midnight, impairing swimmers' schedules. While formal documentation is scarce, social media posts and member forums share similar experiences, consistent with online complaints directed at Better about buggy booking systems. Whether this was down to software limitations or internal policy remains unclear—but users will expect Places Leisure to fix this fundamental flaw.

A Moment for Accountability

This handover is more than a change of logo: it's a test of the council's commitment to local services. Users are invited to watch the roll-out carefully, demanding updates, realistic targets, and transparent accounting. Social enterprise status sounds progressive—but without openness, it can be nothing more than a sticker on the door.

The Bottom Line

Epsom & Ewell's move away from Better reflects mounting pressure from dissatisfied users. But who wins—the community or the balance sheet—depends on what happens once the ink is dry. Will we get a truly improved Rainbow Centre, or just a rebranded disappointment?

Time—and transparency—will tell.

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

24 July 2025



A new natural sanctuary has been unveiled in Long Grove Park, offering a space for remembrance and quiet reflection. The 'In Memory Woodland', created by Age Concern Epsom & Ewell, was formally opened on Sunday 22nd June 2025 at a community event attended by local residents, families, and supporters.

Bathed in sunshine, the event marked the culmination of months of planning and planting, with contributions from the Epsom & Ewell Tree Advisory Board, who designed the woodland and oversaw the planting of elm and silver birch trees, alongside daffodils, bluebells, and other native flora. The tranquil glade is also home to a variety of wildlife, creating a peaceful retreat in the heart of the borough.

A ceremonial cherry tree planting and music from the Surrey Brass Quintet added to the occasion, while guests were offered complimentary tea and cake and invited to take part in remembrance activities. The speeches were led by Dorah May, Chief Officer of Age Concern Epsom & Ewell, and Howard Gregory from the Tree Advisory Board.

The woodland was made possible thanks to funding support from Surrey County Council's *Your Fund Surrey*, with land provided by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council. The site has been carefully developed to offer a permanent place for people to honour the memories of loved ones or to simply pause and enjoy the restorative qualities of nature.

Age Concern Epsom & Ewell, a long-standing local charity supporting older people, sees the 'In Memory Woodland' as a lasting and meaningful addition to the community. The charity hopes residents will return time and again to sit, reflect, and enjoy the peaceful setting.

For more information, visit: https://ageconcernepsom.org.uk/in-memory-woodland

Fly-tipping in Epsom and Ewell part of national problem

24 July 2025



Organised criminal gangs are increasingly using fake waste removal companies to dump lorry-loads of rubbish across the UK — and Surrey is not immune.

According to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), over 47,000 large-scale fly-tipping incidents (involving tipper lorries or more than a van load of waste) were recorded by councils in England in 2022/23, costing local authorities more than £13 million to clear. Behind many of these cases are sophisticated criminal operations posing as legitimate businesses, advertising cheap waste clearance on platforms such as Facebook Marketplace and Gumtree.

"These aren't just one-off chancers," said John Roberts, Chief Security Officer at Kingdom Local Authority Support. "We're talking about well-organised groups using the same tactics repeatedly — setting up fake firms, offering cheap deals online, and then vanishing before anyone can hold them accountable."

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How the Scams Work

According to Roberts, gangs offer low-cost rubbish removal services, load the waste into tipper trucks, and illegally dump it on green spaces, bridleways, industrial estates or roadside laybys — often under cover of darkness.

“They can disappear in a matter of hours. There’s virtually no trace, no formal business records, and no accountability,” he warned.

What many people don’t realise is that residents who unknowingly use these services can still be fined — up to £1,000 in fixed penalties, or face unlimited fines if prosecuted — if they fail to obtain a Waste Transfer Note, which proves the waste was handed to a licensed carrier.

Fly-Tipping in Epsom & Ewell: A Local Problem

While the national picture is alarming, Epsom & Ewell Borough has seen its own troubling rise in fly-tipping.

In February 2024, a man was prosecuted for multiple fly-tipping offences across the borough, including in the World’s End area. The Borough Council reported he was fined more than £2,300 after their investigations, using CCTV and physical evidence, successfully traced the waste back to him.

In 2023, the Council launched a targeted campaign to tackle what it described as “persistent” fly-tipping hotspots, including:

- Old London Road
- Hook Road
- Christ Church Road

Measures included surveillance cameras, warning signage, and public appeals.

A prior incident in 2021, covered by the Surrey Comet, showed men caught on camera dumping waste from a van near Horton Country Park — prompting public outrage and renewed calls for enforcement.

How to Avoid Illegal Waste Carriers

To avoid being scammed — and fined — residents are urged to take the following precautions:

- Check if the waste carrier is licensed with the Environment Agency: www.gov.uk/check-waste-carrier-registration
- Ask for a Waste Transfer Note. This document proves you handed over the waste legally.
- Avoid cash-in-hand deals and suspiciously low prices. Legitimate services charge based on volume and type of waste and hold valid permits.

How to Report Fly-Tipping in Epsom

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council encourages residents to report fly-tipping using the following methods:

Online: www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/fly-tipping
Phone: 01372 732000

Include details such as the time and date, exact location, vehicle registration (if known), and photos if safe to capture.

A Shared Responsibility

“People often don’t realise that even if they’ve paid someone to take the waste, they’re still legally responsible for what happens to it,” John Roberts said. “You’ve got to get that paperwork.”

The message is clear: fly-tipping isn’t just a public nuisance — it’s a criminal offence, and everyone has a role in tackling it.

If you’re clearing garden waste, disposing of old furniture, or hiring a skip, make sure you’ve checked who’s collecting it.

Image from Pixabay licence free

SENDing Pupils to Epsom’s Mainstream Schools?

24 July 2025



The national conversation around how best to educate children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) has intensified, following proposals by Labour’s Stephen Kinnock to increase the number of SEND pupils placed in

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mainstream schools. The aim, he says, is to promote inclusion and reduce the pressure on stretched specialist placements. But as the Government looks to reshape the SEND landscape — and amid growing concerns about funding — the question for residents of Epsom and Ewell is this: should more children with SEND be placed in local mainstream schools?

The borough is home to a number of schools that already provide dedicated support for pupils with SEND. Epsom and Ewell High School hosts a Hearing Resource Base and also runs an alternative curriculum aimed at meeting the diverse needs of learners. Epsom Primary and Nursery School is one of the local institutions to benefit from Surrey County Council's 2023 expansion of SEND provision. That county-wide investment pledged 6,000 additional specialist school places and introduced 85 new SEND resource base places within mainstream schools, part of a broader £240m commitment to address rising demand across Surrey.

The local impact of that investment is still unfolding. While there has been clear progress in infrastructure and placement availability, there is no publicly available data to confirm whether Epsom's schools currently have the capacity to take in significantly more SEND pupils — or how those decisions might affect classroom dynamics and resource allocation.

However, concern is growing that national policy may now be moving in the opposite direction. In June 2025, reports emerged suggesting that the Treasury is pressuring the Department for Education to identify "efficiency savings" in SEND budgets, amid wider efforts to reduce public spending. According to coverage in *Schools Week* and *The Guardian*, Government ministers have privately discussed potential curbs on local authority SEND funding, with one official describing existing growth in education, health and care plan (EHCP) numbers as "unsustainable." While no official announcement has been made, campaigners fear that this signals a shift towards cost-saving measures that could restrict access to specialist support or delay assessments.

This emerging tension between inclusion and austerity has alarmed SEND advocacy groups. They warn that increasing mainstream placements without matching increases in funding and staff training could place significant strain on already overstretched schools — and risk setting up both SEND and non-SEND pupils for failure.

Supporters of the mainstreaming model argue that it fosters an inclusive environment where all children can thrive together. They point to the benefits of breaking down stigma and allowing pupils with SEND to learn alongside peers, provided the right support mechanisms — such as teaching assistants, differentiated learning, and physical accommodations — are in place.

However, the debate is far from one-sided. Some argue that placing more SEND pupils into mainstream classrooms, especially where complex needs or behavioural challenges are involved, can stretch teaching resources and affect the learning environment for all students. There is no conclusive local data for Epsom, but nationally, parents and advocacy groups have voiced concerns that pupils without SEND may receive less teacher attention or experience disruption in classes that try to cater to a wide range of needs without sufficient staffing or training.

The reality is that the success of inclusion depends heavily on how it is implemented. A mainstream classroom with adequate resources, specialist support, and small group instruction may serve some SEND pupils well. But without those conditions — and without proper funding and planning — the risk is that no one in the classroom gets the education they need.

So far, neither Epsom & Ewell Borough Council nor Surrey County Council has issued a public position on whether more SEND pupils should be placed in mainstream settings, and there has been no formal consultation locally on the implications of national policy changes.

As families, teachers and policymakers await further clarity, it is vital to hear directly from the community. The *Epsom & Ewell Times* invites parents, educators, and students to share their thoughts. Do you believe more children with SEND should be placed in mainstream schools? What has your experience been with local provision — as a parent navigating the system, or a student learning alongside SEND peers?

This is a complex and nuanced issue, and any long-term solution must balance fairness, resources, and outcomes — not just for children with SEND, but for everyone in the classroom. Whatever direction policy takes next, one thing is certain: inclusion is not just about where children are taught, but how.

Image: Rosebery School, Epsom. Google.

Related reports:

Surrey sent on a U-turn on SEND by MPs?

Surrey SEND parents owed money

Epsom SEND case highlights a national problem

Epsom's infamous murders

24 July 2025

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Epsom has witnessed several notable murder cases throughout the 20th century. These incidents, though tragic, have become part of the town's history.

Epsom is best known for its racing heritage, Georgian elegance and green Surrey charm — but it also holds its share of darker history. Between 1901 and 2000, the town was the site of several shocking murders that unsettled its sense of peace and left a permanent imprint on local memory. Here are three of the most notable.

The 1919 Epsom Riot and the Death of Station Sergeant Thomas Green

On the night of **17 June 1919**, only seven months after the Armistice, Epsom found itself in the grip of a riot that had little precedent in the town's history. The trouble came not from locals, but from **hundreds of Canadian soldiers** stationed at nearby Woodcote Park Camp. Frustrated by delays in repatriation after the end of World War I, the men — many of them battle-hardened veterans — were increasingly restless.

After one of their own was arrested during an earlier pub disturbance, a crowd of between **300 and 800 soldiers marched on Epsom Police Station**, demanding his release. Violence broke out, and **Station Sergeant Thomas Green**, a 51-year-old veteran officer and father of five, was struck on the head by a wooden post and seriously injured. He died the next day in hospital.

The aftermath shocked the country. Seven Canadian soldiers were tried at the Surrey Assizes. Though the **murder charge was dropped** and replaced by manslaughter, to avoid the risk of the diplomatic nightmare of execution, they were convicted only of **riot** and received sentences of **one year in prison**. But due to diplomatic sensitivities — and the fact that Britain was hosting Canada's forces — most served just a few months before being quietly released.

To this day, Green is commemorated locally. A **blue plaque** marks the site of the incident, and his grave lies in **Ashley Road Cemetery**. The riot remains a rare example of post-war military unrest spilling onto English streets — and one of the town's earliest 20th-century murders.

The 1930 Horton Lane Murder of Agnes Kesson

In June 1930, the peaceful lanes around Horton — home to several psychiatric hospitals at the time — became the scene of a macabre discovery. The **body of 20-year-old Agnes Kesson**, a young Scottish woman working as a waitress, was found dumped in a ditch beside Horton Lane.

Agnes had been living in Epsom while engaged to a man named **Robert Duncan Harper**, a local labourer with a reputation and a nickname: **"Scotch Bob."** Initial suspicion naturally fell on Harper, especially as they were last seen together, and witnesses had allegedly overheard arguments. However, police found **no conclusive evidence**, and Harper was released.

Despite inquiries, door-to-door searches and press appeals, **no one was ever charged** with the killing. The murder gripped the town — not only because of its brutality but because of the location: Horton Lane was a route many walked daily, close to the sprawling mental hospital estates that added their own shadows to Epsom's identity.

Though largely forgotten now, the case remains **unsolved**, and Kesson lies in an unmarked grave. Local historians continue to investigate the files, hoping for fresh insight into what was then one of Surrey's most talked-about unsolved crimes.

The 1970 Murder of Ann Smith

On the morning of January 28, 1970, two stable lads from Treadwell Stables, Noel Flanagan and Roger Harris, were exercising horses on Epsom Downs when they discovered the body of a young woman in a ditch near a footpath between Downs Road and Burgh Heath Road. The victim was partially clothed, and her tights and underwear were found nearby, but her shoes, handbag, and money were missing. She had been strangled, battered, and possibly raped before being transported to Epsom and dumped in the ditch.

The woman was later identified as 20-year-old Ann Smith (née Malone), who had been living in Crokerton Road, Tooting. She was separated from her 19-year-old husband, Thomas James Smith, and had a young son. A team of 40 detectives, led by Detective Chief Superintendent Ken Etheridge, investigated the case. Initially, police considered links to other cases, such as the Hammersmith Nude Murders and the Yorkshire Ripper investigation, but these connections were eventually dismissed.

Despite extensive efforts, the murder of Ann Smith remains unsolved. The case is documented in the National Archives

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under the reference: “A SMITH: victim of unsolved murder. Body discovered in a ditch on Epsom Downs on 28 January 1970.”

The 1998 Murder of Lee Harris

The fourth is also the most chilling. In the early hours of **4 September 1998**, **Lee Harris**, a 30-year-old man, was asleep in his ground-floor flat on **Rutland Close**, near Longmead in Epsom. Around 1:30 a.m., three masked men forced entry. In a brutal attack, Harris was **stabbed multiple times and shot in the chest**. His girlfriend, who was also home, was unharmed but left traumatised.

Neighbours reported hearing screams and a car speeding away. Police said it appeared to be a **targeted attack**. Harris had no known serious criminal ties, and his family maintained he had no enemies. Despite a large manhunt, interviews with over 100 people, and ballistic and forensic analysis, **no suspects were ever identified**.

The murder of Lee Harris remains **officially unsolved**. It sent shockwaves through a community unused to such violence and still resonates today as one of Epsom’s most disturbing modern crimes.

Final Thoughts

These four cases span different eras and different motives — military unrest, intimate violence, and possibly gang-related vengeance. But they share a haunting link: **none of the perpetrators were ever convicted of murder**. Each case remains incomplete, a story without justice.

Image: Sergeant Green’s funeral, Epsom 1919 **public domain**

Volunteers Tackle Plastic Waste in Epsom Town Centre

24 July 2025



Plastic waste is a global menace that often ends up closer to home than we think. According to recent studies, the average person could be consuming up to five grams of microplastic every week — equivalent to the weight of a credit card — through food and drink. With plastic present in around 70% of consumer products, and evidence of its harmful impact on marine life and ecosystems, managing our plastic footprint is becoming increasingly urgent.

On Sunday 29 June, local volunteers from ASEZ WAO UK, a community group with a focus on sustainability, staged a “Rethink Plastic” event around Epsom’s Clock Tower. Around 40 volunteers, joined by members of the public, took part in a litter pick, public awareness presentations, and an upcycling workshop to highlight practical solutions to plastic waste.

Their efforts drew the support of the Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, Councillor **Robert Leach** (RA Nonsuch), who questioned the scale of modern packaging waste and praised the volunteers for helping to keep the town clean. Councillor S**teven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley Vale) also lent his backing, commenting, “Wouldn’t it be great if people just used the bins?”

In total, volunteers collected around 35 bags of rubbish from the town centre. Under a pop-up gazebo, families were invited to transform discarded plastic bottles into creative items such as phone stands, piggy banks, toy cars and flowers — demonstrating how waste materials can be given a second life. A young mother taking part with her daughter described the workshop as “really good, really fun — a great idea.”

Upcycling — the process of turning unwanted materials into something of higher value — is gaining traction as one response to the growing problem of plastic pollution. However, recycling still faces challenges. For example, items such as greasy pizza boxes and disposable coffee cups often cannot be recycled through normal household collections, highlighting the importance of checking local guidelines to avoid contaminating recyclable waste streams.

Littering and plastic waste remain significant problems in the UK. The charity Keep Britain Tidy estimates that local councils spend nearly £700 million each year cleaning up litter, much of which includes plastic packaging. With plastic pollution known to damage habitats and harm wildlife, local action is seen as a vital part of tackling a wider environmental crisis.

ASEZ WAO UK says it plans to continue its local campaigns and is encouraging residents to get involved in future events. More information about their activities is available online or from volunteers active in the community.

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For those inspired to act, it’s a timely reminder: our throwaway habits may have far-reaching consequences — and tackling them starts on our own doorstep.

Image: Cllrs McCormick and Leach speak out against plastic waste

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

24 July 2025



Epsom, 26 June 2025 — Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has taken a significant step towards reshaping local governance in response to the wider reorganisation of local government in Surrey, voting to launch a consultation on the possible creation of a Community Council for the borough.

At a specially convened full Council meeting on 26 June, members debated a proposal introduced by Cllr John Beckett (RA Auriol), who set out the case for consulting residents on the potential establishment of a Community Council as a means of protecting local voices once Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is abolished under the forthcoming unitary council arrangements.

Opening the meeting, the Mayor’s Chaplain prayed for “wisdom as we look at conflicting interests, confidence in what is good and fitting, and the ability to work together in harmony even when there is honest disagreement.”

Cllr **Robert Leach** (Mayor) (RA Nonsuch) explained the urgency of the debate, stating: *“This item requires a proposal and a seconder… I would ask for you all to exercise some self-restraint… and keep your comments concise.”*

Cllr Beckett formally introduced the motion, drawing on the Council’s agreed strategic priorities for 2025–2027: *“Tonight, we have in front of us a report which follows on from the agreed strategic priorities… to explore the future local governance in the borough of Epsom and Ewell.”*

He described how the Government’s plans to create either two or three new unitary councils in Surrey — abolishing the twelve existing borough and district councils as well as Surrey County Council — had left many residents “extremely vocal in stating that they have had no real voice in the pre-decision-making process.”

Cllr Beckett continued: *“These changes are about centralisation of power and money at the expense of local democracy for our residents. This decision… gives the residents a choice. It gives the residents a voice.”*

Explaining why a Community Council could matter, he said: *“Community Councils provide a vital link between residents and larger proposed unitary authorities… They also aim to enhance local representation by providing a direct route for voices of residents and local communities on local issues and decision-making.”*

The meeting heard considerable debate about how the proposed consultation, budgeted at £300,000 from reserves, would work.

Cllr Julian Freeman (LibDem College) asked pointedly: *“Will we be using TikTok, Instagram, Snapper Chat… or are we just putting out bits of paper in various libraries and council buildings… And also have we set a threshold as to what would constitute adequate consultation?”*

Cllr Beckett responded that the Council’s communications plan meeting the following day would consider “all options,” including social media and traditional methods. He acknowledged concerns about digital exclusion, stating: *“We will be taking all options, both electronic and paper format, as to meet the needs of all of our residents.”*

Concerns over the financial implications were repeatedly raised. Cllr **Alison Kelly** (LibDem College) asked: *“Will we make it clear that there could be an extra level of tax required… and have we got any evidence that shows that the county council can’t run an allotment or all these other things any better than the new unitary authority?”*

Cllr Beckett emphasised that the £300,000 would be drawn from reserves and could be returned if the consultation failed to show support for a Community Council: *“If we don’t get to consultation two, those will go back into reserves because we won’t need them.”*

Several members, including Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) and Cllr **Phil Neale** (RA Cuddington), expressed scepticism about whether residents would genuinely engage with the consultation, and whether enough information was available to make an informed decision.

Cllr **Freeman** was forthright, describing the proposal as “a complete waste of time, money, officers’ time and effort, when we’ve got other priorities that are being neglected.”

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Others robustly defended the initiative. Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) argued: *"It's only right that while this Labour government talks about empowering local communities and devolution, we actually say to them, 'we are going to practice what you preach.'"*

Cllr **Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) similarly supported proceeding, while acknowledging: *"So much is going on in local government that our residents aren't really getting any opportunity to input on… We've got to at least ask our residents."*

The meeting closed with Cllr Beckett reminding colleagues that the evening's decision was only about launching the consultation, saying: *"Several of our colleagues seem to be jumping the gun… This is more than what LGR and other local authorities have done with our residents in the past."*

The first recommendation — to approve a community governance review — was carried by 19 votes to 0, with seven abstentions. The second recommendation, authorising the Chief Executive and Head of Legal to finalise consultation materials and take necessary steps to progress the review, was carried by 16 votes to six, with four abstentions.

An Epsom & Ewell Borough Council spokesperson confirmed afterwards that consultation with residents will start in July, with further details to be published on the Council's website.

In a press release following the meeting, Cllr Beckett said: *"We believe that parish councils would provide an essential link between Epsom & Ewell residents and a new unitary council… ensuring that resident and community voices in Epsom & Ewell are heard and considered by decision-makers in local government in the future."*

The Council is expected to finalise the consultation questions imminently, with public engagement running through the summer.

Related reports:

Two unitaries will save money says Surrey leader

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

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

Epsom and Ewell parents taking on the child smartphone challenge

24 July 2025



Local parents are joining a national movement to delay children's exposure to smartphones, with a sold-out event next week highlighting local concerns.

Epsom & Ewell's Smartphone Free Childhood (SFC) group is hosting *The Hidden Impact of Smartphones on our Children* on Wednesday 3 July, 7.30–9pm, at St Martin's Junior School on Ashley Road. The event will feature contributions from local headteachers, youth speakers, and safeguarding experts.

The movement, which has already attracted nearly 150,000 signatories to its "Parent Pact" across the UK, encourages families to hold off giving children smartphones before age 14. Surrey parents have been among the strongest supporters of the initiative, which aims to reduce the mental health and online safety risks faced by children in a hyper-connected world.

Laura Baker, from Epsom & Ewell's SFC group, said:

"It's all about strength in numbers — if your child knows that other kids in their class won't be getting a smartphone for a few years either, the peer pressure instantly dissolves."

The event's speaker line-up includes:

- Mrs Donna Dove, Health and Wellbeing Lead and teacher at St Martin's, Epsom
- Mr Joe Hordley, Assistant Headteacher at St Andrew's, Leatherhead
- Mrs Rachel Hall, Associate Headteacher at Glyn School
- Health Professionals for Safer Screens
- Advisors from the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, addressing online safety and child protection

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- Young people aged 13, 18, and 24 sharing personal perspectives on growing up in a digital age

Local MP Helen Maguire is expected to attend, and educators from more than ten primary and secondary schools across Epsom and Ewell are anticipated, reflecting the growing concern among school communities.

The organisers say school policies on smartphone use vary widely across Surrey, as staff attempt to manage the impacts of cyberbullying, mental health pressures, misogyny, and distraction in class.

Parents behind the initiative argue that urgent action is needed to protect children's wellbeing, rather than waiting for government regulation of Big Tech. The cultural conversation around children and screens has been driven by hard-hitting documentaries such as *Swiped* and dramas like *Adolescence*, adding momentum to calls for change.

Epsom & Ewell SFC hope the borough could follow in the footsteps of St Albans, Bromley, and Southwark in developing a "smartphone free childhood" community.

The event is free to attend, but places must be booked in advance. After an initial sell-out, a limited number of extra tickets have now been released.

Booking and further information:
Laura Baker
 07704 274727
 SFC.epsom@gmail.com

110-Home Scheme at Langley Vale Sparks Green Belt Fears

24 July 2025



A neighbour has spoken out against early proposals by developer Fairfax to build up to 110 new homes on farmland at Langley Bottom Farm in Langley Vale, describing the plans as a "devastating blow" to the character and heritage of the area.

Langley Vale, nestled between Epsom Downs and surrounding ancient woodland managed by the Woodland Trust, is described by residents as more than just a location — but a cherished community shaped by its open fields, green spaces, and rural setting.

"This isn't empty land up for grabs," one local resident told the *Epsom and Ewell Times*. "Our green belt is a living, breathing asset — a habitat for wildlife, a natural break from urban sprawl, and a place for families to enjoy the countryside. Once it's gone, it's gone forever."

The concerns centre on potential impacts including increased traffic, pressure on schools and GP surgeries, and the loss of valuable farmland that has been cultivated for generations. Neighbours fear that if this initial consultation leads to formal planning permission, it would "irreversibly alter" the area and set a worrying precedent for green belt development.

In their public exhibition materials, however, Fairfax describes the proposals as sensitive and environmentally responsible. The scheme, which is subject to local consultation, would deliver up to 110 homes on 5.2 hectares of land, with half of the properties designated as affordable housing.

According to Fairfax's consultation website and exhibition documents, the proposals include:

- a biodiversity net gain of at least 10%
- significant landscaping and green planting
- electric vehicle charging points
- improved footpaths and cycle storage
- a children's play area
- new public green space
- contributions to local infrastructure

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- funding to extend the Surrey Connect on-demand bus service

Fairfax argues that the site, currently an arable field, scores “relatively low” for biodiversity and offers opportunities to enhance wildlife habitats while protecting the adjacent ancient woodland with buffer zones.

The developer also points to the pressing local demand for housing, highlighting that Epsom and Ewell Borough Council faces strict targets for new homes, including affordable units. The homes would be built using energy-efficient methods and aim to promote sustainable travel, Fairfax says.

Residents were requested to give feedback by 16th June but the comments link is still live at the time of this post. Online at langley.your-feedback.co.uk or by contacting the project team by phone or post.

The plans are at a consultation stage only, but campaigners fear they could soon turn into a planning application. “The green belt is supposed to protect communities from precisely this type of development,” the neighbour added. “If we allow this, it will change Langley Vale for good.”

Image: Langley development layout. Courtesy Fairfax Homes.

Epsom & Ewell Biodiversity Action Plan’s five-year review ratified

24 July 2025



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council’s Environment Committee has formally endorsed the progress made on its Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) 2020–2030, following a scheduled five-year review presented at its meeting on 24 June. The review reflects both local achievements and national legislative changes introduced through the Environment Act 2021.

The Council’s Biodiversity Action Plan, which is linked to its Climate Change Action Plan, aims to protect and enhance local habitats and wildlife, supporting wider efforts to address climate change across the borough.

Key Achievements 2020–2025

The five-year progress report highlights a range of local initiatives, including:

- Integrating protected species considerations into the householder planning application process
- Improved grassland management across local nature reserves, Nonsuch Park, and Epsom Downs
- Establishment of an Ash Dieback Working Group to coordinate the management of diseased trees
- Enhanced mapping and management of veteran trees throughout the borough
- Creation of new ponds in Horton Country Park and Epsom Common Local Nature Reserves
- Development of new wetland habitat at Chamber Mead within Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve, delivered in partnership with the South East Rivers Trust

The review also noted Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve’s continued success, having secured its 18th consecutive Green Flag Award in 2024. Additionally, recent wetland restoration projects are enabling the reintroduction of water voles to Surrey for the first time in over two decades along the Hogsmill River.

Legislative Context

The Environment Act 2021 has introduced new statutory duties for local authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Among these measures:

- Most planning permissions must now deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain, with habitats protected for a minimum of 30 years
- Local authorities are required to produce biodiversity reports
- Mandatory Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) must be developed to support nature recovery

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According to Natural England, the Environment Act marks a significant shift in legally protecting and enhancing biodiversity, setting targets in areas such as air quality, water, waste, and species recovery by 2030.

Background

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Biodiversity Action Plan is a long-term strategy to safeguard and strengthen the borough's ecosystems. It works alongside the Council's Climate Change Action Plan, first launched in 2020 and refreshed for 2025–2029, which aims to reach carbon neutrality by 2035.

Councillor Liz Frost, (RA Woodcote and Langley Vale) Chair of the Environment Committee said**:** "We are committed to creating and maintaining habitats that support resilient ecosystems in our local nature reserves and green spaces across the borough. Our Biodiversity Action Plan plays a vital role in tackling climate change.

This five-year review has highlighted the vast amount of work, and wide-ranging activities, that we deliver. A prime example is Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, that was awarded its 18th consecutive Green Flag Award in 2024. Also, fantastic partnership work to create wetlands is enabling the reintroduction of water voles to Surrey for the first time in over 20 years along the Hogsmill River.

Thanks to our countryside team for their passion, hard work and expertise in shaping biodiverse habitats across the borough. Also, a huge thank you to our partners and volunteers, without their support we wouldn't be able to enjoy such wonderful green spaces."

For further details, residents can view the Environment Committee's report on the Council's website or visit the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) for information about biodiversity net gain measures.

Image: Comma Butterfly

Epsom and Ewell Council Tax Arrears Top £1.8 Million

24 July 2025



Council tax arrears in Epsom and Ewell have reached £1.8 million, according to new figures from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The amount contributes to a record £6.6 billion of outstanding council tax across England, highlighting a deepening crisis in household finances.

The local figure reflects the ongoing pressures of the cost-of-living crisis, with many households struggling to pay essential bills. National Debtline, the free debt advice service run by the Money Advice Trust, reports that one in four people contacting them for help has council tax debt, with an average shortfall of £1,958 per person.

Research from the Money Advice Trust found that, as of March 2025, around 2.2 million people in England — equivalent to 5% of households — were behind on their council tax.

Council tax is a critical source of revenue for local authorities, funding services including social care, waste collection, and local infrastructure. But with budgets increasingly stretched, councils have relied more on council tax income, pushing bills higher and making payment harder for some residents.

Currently, rules mean that if a resident misses a single council tax payment, they can become liable for the full annual amount, which can quickly escalate to court action and bailiff involvement.

In response, the Government has proposed extending the timeframe before enforcement action begins, giving people more opportunity to catch up on missed payments. The Ministry of Justice has also announced a consultation on strengthening oversight of the bailiff industry, with proposals to give the Enforcement Conduct Board statutory powers to regulate bailiff practices.

Steve Vaid, Chief Executive of the Money Advice Trust, said:

"Unless changes are made at a policy level, arrears are likely to keep climbing. At National Debtline, we're calling for improved collection practices, as well as greater investment in council tax support schemes, to prevent people falling behind in the first place."

National Debtline encourages any resident worried about their council tax payments to seek free, independent advice before their debts spiral. Their helpline is available on **0808 808 4000** or via **www.nationaldebtline.org**.

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