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26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

East Surrey seeks planning head start as Epsom faces two Local Plans at once

30 September 2026





East Surrey's incoming council has urged ministers to let it begin preparing a Local Plan before it takes over next April, highlighting a problem already confronting Epsom and Ewell: being required to start another plan while still struggling to complete the current one.

In a letter to Housing and Planning Minister Matthew Pennycook MP, cllr Bradley Nelson (LibDem Dorking), the shadow council's executive member for strategic planning and growth, has asked for arrangements allowing the new authority to begin plan-making preparations before 1 April 2027.

East Surrey will replace Epsom and Ewell, Elmbridge, Mole Valley, Reigate and Banstead, and Tandridge councils. Its press release warns that requiring those authorities to continue separate planning processes, while their successor cannot formally begin a plan for the whole new area, risks duplication and wasted resources.

For Epsom and Ewell, the request follows months of controversy over Green Belt development, councillor scrutiny and the cost of preparing a plan that will outlive the council responsible for it.

Five councils and competing timetables

The five authorities are at different stages. Mole Valley adopted its Local Plan in December 2024, while the others are progressing existing plans or beginning work under the new planning rules. Epsom and Ewell faces both processes simultaneously.

Cllr Nelson said: "The challenge is that the councils which currently hold planning responsibilities are being asked to continue, or in some cases start work on plans that they may not ultimately be able to complete, while East Surrey Council cannot formally begin the process until it becomes a vested authority."

He added: "We believe there is an opportunity to make better use of the period before April 2027 by allowing preparatory work to begin sooner. This could help avoid duplication, make the best use of public resources and enable the new council to progress plan-making at the earliest opportunity."

The shadow council says it wants a single Local Plan to guide housing, employment, infrastructure and environmental protection across East Surrey. Nelson's letter also identifies rail capacity and sewage treatment as constraints on growth.

Epsom's long road to a plan

Epsom and Ewell's current examination follows an already protracted process. The council paused preparation in March 2023 before voting to resume it that October. Its 2022–2040 Local Plan was eventually submitted for examination on 10 March 2025, shortly before a national transitional deadline.

Submission did not end the disputes. EET has reported repeated challenges over additional evidence submitted during the examination and whether elected members had sufficient opportunity to scrutinise it.

At an extraordinary council meeting on 21 July 2026, a motion seeking greater committee oversight was defeated by 15 votes to 12, with three abstentions. Proposed amendments seeking an independent governance review were ruled out of order. The disagreement concerned the use of delegated powers and democratic oversight as well as the planning merits of development sites.

On 22 September, the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee recommended, by six votes to three, that Full Council approve consultation on the Inspector's proposed modifications. These include 12 additional urban sites and four additional Green Belt sites, with proposals for at least 530 homes at Downs Farm and 275 at Priest Hill.

As EET reported on 25 September, that recommendation was a further step towards consultation, rather than approval to adopt the plan. The Inspector must consider consultation responses before issuing a final report, and Full Council would still have to decide on adoption if the plan is found sound.

Why another plan is required

The requirement to begin a second plan stems from national reforms and higher assessments of housing need.

Government rules require certain authorities whose plans were submitted under transitional arrangements, but provided for less than 80 per cent of the newly calculated housing need, to start again under the new system while their existing plans continue.

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Epsom and Ewell is explicitly listed among those authorities. Its deadlines were to publish a notice of intention by 30 June 2026 and a “Gateway 1” readiness assessment by 31 October. That assessment starts the new system’s 30-month plan-making timetable.

In an August letter to the council, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government acknowledged the resource pressures involved in producing two plans simultaneously. It nevertheless rejected impending reorganisation as a reason to defer the new work and reiterated the deadlines.

The financial implications are substantial. EEBC’s September committee report estimated that taking the new plan through to adoption would cost approximately £1 million, plus officer time. No budget had been allocated.

The report also recorded earlier allocations for the existing plan of £75,000 in 2019, £712,000 in 2021 and £629,000 in 2023. These are funding allocations, rather than a statement of final expenditure.

The committee voted seven to two for officers to seek discussions with East Surrey’s chief executive and planning executive member about how to proceed, with the outcome to return to a future meeting.

National pause offers Surrey no reprieve

The Government’s wider pause and review of local government reorganisation does not extend to Surrey.

Planning guidance updated on 24 September expressly confirms Surrey’s exemption. It also says councils must continue plan-making even where they cannot complete adoption before their successor authority becomes operational.

The same guidance exposes the difficulty behind East Surrey’s request. A plan for the new unitary area cannot begin until that authority is operational, although existing councils can collaborate on joint plans, shared evidence and cross-boundary issues beforehand.

Ministers intend to introduce transitional regulations covering unfinished plans, existing adopted plans and the timetable for new unitary-wide plans. However, the guidance describes itself as a statement of intention, rather than finalised policy.

East Surrey’s press release says further details and timings remain unconfirmed. Nelson has requested a meeting with ministers and officials.

Housing need remains urgent

The argument over duplication comes against a stark local record. EET’s latest report on the September committee meeting recorded just 37 homes completed in Epsom and Ewell during 2025–26, none affordable, and an inability to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply.

Cllr Julian Freeman (LibDem College) described the consequences for younger residents: “My own children can’t even imagine owning their own home.”

East Surrey’s intervention therefore raises a practical question: how can councils meet urgent housing needs while spending money on overlapping plans during their final months?

The request does not itself remove EEBC’s obligations or halt its current examination. It asks ministers to make the transition work more efficiently. For Epsom and Ewell residents, the test will be whether that produces a clearer, properly scrutinised route to homes and infrastructure—and a credible explanation of what the additional planning work will cost.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Epsom and Ewell's New Local Plan sites advance amid clash over scrutiny and cost

30 September 2026





Epsom and Ewell's Local Plan moved closer to public consultation on Tuesday 22 September, but cllrs clashed over proposed Green Belt development, decisions taken without committee debate and a government requirement to begin another plan before the borough council is abolished.

The Licensing and Planning Policy Committee voted **six to three** to recommend that Full Council approve a consultation lasting at least six weeks on modifications proposed by the Planning Inspector. Full Council has yet to make that decision; the council expects it to meet next month.

The modifications include **12 additional urban sites and four additional Green Belt sites**. Proposals for the latter include at least **530 homes at Downs Farm** and **275 at Priest Hill**. Planning officers said land south of College Road at Downs Farm would remain in the Green Belt for open space, routes and playing pitches. They said the Sutton and Epsom Rugby Football Club playing fields were outside the proposed Priest Hill allocation.

Who chose the additional sites?

Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development Ian Mawer told the committee that many changes to the plan's policies arose from examination hearings. Following a further hearing in July, he said, the Inspector's programme officer asked the council to draft modifications for 12 urban sites and subsequently confirmed which Green Belt sites to include.

"The main modifications are those that the inspector considers are necessary to make the plan sound," Mr Mawer said. "They must be consulted on as they are presented."

Cllr **Christine Howells** (Independent Nonsuch) challenged the absence of a further decision by elected members on the sites. "At no time did elected councillors agree to these material changes, both to the evidence base and the proposals for the local plan," she told the committee.

Cllr **Bernie Muir** (Conservative Horton) raised concerns about flooding assessments, school capacity and traffic. Cllr **Steven McCormick** (Conservative Woodcote and Langley Vale) criticised the opportunity members had been given to scrutinise the changes, calling them "an unprecedented sacrifice of our green belt".

The dispute concerned both the proposed development and the process that brought it before the committee. Officers said the Inspector had requested the draft modifications as part of the examination. Members were told they could recommend whether the modifications went out to consultation, but could not rewrite the Inspector's proposals beforehand.

The committee voted **seven to two** to note the modifications and **six to three** to recommend consultation. It then voted **five to four** on each of two delegations: allowing Mr Mawer, in consultation with the committee chair, to make further amendments required by the Inspector after consultation and to update the Local Plan timetable.

The Inspector will consider responses before issuing a final report. If the plan is found sound, Full Council will still have to decide whether to adopt it.

No affordable homes completed in 2025–26

The committee also agreed, by **eight votes to one**, to publish its Authority Monitoring Report. It records **37 homes completed in the borough during 2025–26, none of them affordable**. The council cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of housing land.

Cllr McCormick described the report as "an annual health check on our borough's planning performance" that showed a serious shortfall. Cllr **Julian Freeman** (LibDem College) focused on younger residents priced out of housing. "My own children can't even imagine owning their own home," he said.

Cllr **Neil Dallen** (RA Town) agreed that delivery was a problem but said the council could not force developers to build homes for which they had permission. Mr Mawer also pointed to building costs, market conditions and the limited number of large sites ready for development.

Urgent decisions challenged

Earlier in the meeting, members examined EEBC's responses to Local Plan consultations by neighbouring Tandridge and Kingston. Both had already been submitted using urgent decision procedures. The committee was asked to note them afterwards and did so in each case by **five votes to three, with one abstention**.

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Cllr McCormick called the Tandridge decision a “fait accompli”. He said its consultation had been open for weeks and asked why members had not been convened to consider a response. Cllr Kieran Persand (Conservative Horton) repeatedly questioned why a special committee meeting had not been arranged.

Committee chair Cllr **Peter O’Donovan** (RA Ewell Court) said he had been advised that the response needed to be submitted and had agreed to it. Asked why a meeting had not been called, he said: “Can’t give you an answer this evening.” He undertook to seek an explanation.

Cllr **Phil Neale** (RA Cuddington) acknowledged the frustration but argued that the summer holiday period and the unusual pressure created by reorganisation and the Local Plan made urgent decisions necessary in this instance.

The exchanges raised a question that extends beyond these two consultation responses: decisions made by councils shortly before they join East Surrey may affect the new authority, while members of the existing councils have limited time left to scrutinise them.

Government seeks work on another plan

The final item brought a further complication. Mr Mawer reported that new government rules placed EEBC among authorities expected to begin preparing another Local Plan, even though its **2022–2040 plan remains under examination** and the borough council is due to be replaced by East Surrey Unitary Council on **1 April 2027**.

He said the government recognised the resources involved in working on two plans at once but did not accept local government reorganisation as a reason to defer the new work. He estimated that taking a plan through to adoption under the new system could cost **about £1 million**, stressing that this was an estimate for a system no authority had yet completed.

Cllr McCormick criticised the absence of money in the budget for the work and called for a costed plan of action. Cllr Alex Coley (Independent Ruxley) asked why it had not been made a priority. Cllr O’Donovan said he would have to find out.

By **seven votes to two**, the committee agreed that officers should seek a meeting with the Shadow East Surrey authority’s chief executive and executive member for strategic planning and growth, then report back.

Surrey’s local government reorganisation is proceeding despite pauses announced elsewhere. That leaves EEBC facing the cost and staff demands of a new planning requirement during its final months, while East Surrey prepares to take over. The committee was given no assurance of additional government funding. How much work EEBC should commission before April, and who will pay for it, remain unanswered.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Time for Cllr Dallen to drop his taxpayer funded complaint?

30 September 2026



A few minutes of video from an Epsom and Ewell Borough Council meeting have now generated an external investigation, a legal adviser’s attendance at the Town Hall and a standards hearing that could not get past a basic question: **which rules is the Council using?**

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Councillor **Neil Dallen** (RA Town) complained that Councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) had failed to treat him with respect during a heated exchange about the Rainbow Leisure Centre in January. An external investigator recommended a finding against Ames. But at a preliminary hearing on 22 September, the panel made no finding on his conduct. Instead, it heard a sustained challenge to the Council's handling of the complaint and paused proceedings to consider it.

The question for Cllr Dallen is whether he still wants taxpayers to fund the pursuit of his complaint. He is entitled to make one. He is also free to withdraw it.

The rules the Council used in 2019

The Council's own papers for its February 2019 standards hearing provide a striking point of comparison. This being the only other hearing of the committee on a complaint against a councillor since 2015. That hearing's officer report said the Council had **approved a process for investigating complaints in July 2012**. It attached a document headed *Arrangements for dealing with standards allegations under the Localism Act 2011* and identified it as the procedure for investigating and determining the complaint. The eventual decision recorded that the Independent Person's views had been sought and taken into account.

The 2012 document remains in that publicly available hearing pack. It says the Independent Person's views must be considered before a decision on whether a councillor breached the Code and on any action to follow. It also gives a councillor the right to require a further hearing sub-committee to **review a sanction**.

Yet the officer report prepared for the Ames hearing did not mention that document or explain whether it had ever been withdrawn or replaced. It instead pointed to provisions of the Constitution and guidance for people making complaints, while acknowledging that the arrangements it identified did not provide a standards hearing procedure. Officers asked the three-member panel to adopt a newly proposed procedure or amend it for fairness.

That omission is extraordinary. If the Council used the 2012 arrangements at its last publicly documented hearing in 2019, what changed, who approved the change and when? Those questions should have been answered in the report placed before the panel.

Safeguards missing from the proposed procedure

The differences matter. The proposed 2026 procedure does not expressly require the Independent Person's views to be sought **before** the panel decides whether the Code was breached. It says there is **no right of appeal**, without preserving the sanction review set out in the 2012 arrangements. It also offers a wider list of actions, ending with "any other sanction" considered appropriate in consultation with the Independent Person.

A hearing panel appointed to determine one councillor's complaint has not been shown to have power to replace the Council's standing complaints arrangements or expand the sanctions it may impose. The 2012 arrangements were approved by the Council. If different standing arrangements have since been made under a valid delegation, the Council should identify the decision. Adopting new rules in the middle of Ames's case cannot substitute for showing which rules lawfully applied when the complaint was handled.

At the hearing, Ames and his Labour Party legal representative, Matthew Burn, repeatedly asked for that answer. The external legal adviser to the panel argued that the Council's arrangements need not be contained in one document: in his view, they could be found across the Constitution, delegations and published guidance. But he could not identify when the complaints leaflet on which Ames said the Monitoring Officer had relied was adopted. He accepted that a clear, consolidated document would help the Council. The adviser's position was that the Council nevertheless had sufficient arrangements and powers to investigate the complaint. The panel did not resolve that disagreement.

Nor was this a question sprung on officers at the Town Hall. Ames and Burn said they had been seeking an explanation for months. Monitoring Officer Piero Ionta and his deputy did not attend to give one. The panel's chair, Councillor Rachel King, eventually called a pause so members could consider what they had heard.

How much has this cost?

The Council's hearing report confirms that it commissioned an external investigation and instructed an external adviser for the panel. It says the bills will be met from corporate reserves but gives no amount, stating that final invoices had not arrived. EET has also sought cost information from the Council without obtaining a figure. Officer preparation and attendance have not been costed publicly either.

CH&I Associates director Alex Oram declined to tell Epsom and Ewell Times his firm's fees or hourly rate. He confirmed that the rate was **no more than £100 an hour**, but would not say whether it was below £50. A representative of the Norwich-based firm also travelled to attend the Epsom hearing in person.

Could the total already be as much as £5,000 once external fees, travel and officers' time are counted? That is a question, not an established estimate: without invoices and a record of staff time, we cannot calculate the total. The Council should publish what it has spent so far and the anticipated cost of any further hearing, including additional external advice.

A complaint born of unanswered Rainbow questions

The underlying incident is recorded on the Council's meeting video. Ames was asking who had decided to keep confidential an urgent decision concerning up to £500,000 of potential repairs at the Rainbow Leisure Centre. Dallen had supported that decision and was chairing the meeting when Ames questioned it. Dallen stopped further discussion, saying, "It is my meeting" and failed to stand aside for his vice-chair to rule on the matter. Ames called him "arrogant"

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ISSN 2753-2771

and alleged a “cover-up”.

Ames has since said he regrets using “arrogant” and should instead have raised a formal point of order about Dallen continuing to chair that item. The investigator recommended a finding that Ames had failed to show respect, while recognising that he was pursuing a genuinely held argument about transparency. The investigator did not decide whether his questions about the Rainbow decision were right. The hearing panel has not determined the complaint.

Speaking after the preliminary hearing, Ames said he was grateful that the panel did not press ahead without clarity about the applicable arrangements. He accused the administration of spending taxpayers’ money pursuing a “low-level complaint” while his complaint about Dallen’s conduct at the same meeting had been rejected. Those are Ames’s criticisms, not findings by the panel.

The recorded exchange will still be there if a properly constituted panel is asked to judge it. First, the Council needs to explain why its 2019 hearing used arrangements absent from the 2026 report, what authority supports the proposed replacement and what this process has cost. Dallen, meanwhile, has a simpler decision: **is continuing this complaint a proportionate use of public money?**

Sam Jones – Reporter

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Epsom’s Rainbow questions persist as £4.7m revamp advances

30 September 2026



Places Leisure has detailed improvements at Epsom’s Rainbow Leisure Centre but questions remain over the discovery of substantial dilapidations at the end of the previous operator’s tenure – and who will ultimately meet the cost.

Places Leisure took over the Council-owned centre from Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), which trades as Better, on 1 October 2025.

Shortly afterwards, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council authorised potential expenditure of up to £500,000 on works allegedly arising from the condition in which the centre was handed back. The decision was taken under the Council’s urgent-decision procedure and much of the supporting information, including a survey of the building, has remained confidential.

The controversy was intensified by confirmation that no formal condition surveys or inspection records could be found covering much of GLL’s approximately 20-year operation of the centre.

The Council has relied upon “legal professional privilege” and “commercial confidentiality” in declining to disclose the survey and related advice. It has not yet even acknowledged the Epsom and Ewell Times’ latest questions since 3rd September asking whether it has sent GLL a letter before action, begun legal proceedings or asserted any claim for failure to maintain the centre or breach of its contractual obligations.

GLL told the Times on 3 September that it had heard nothing further from the Council since its earlier correspondence and that its position had not changed: “*the Council undertook, via specialist contractors, a full survey of the building prior to GLL exiting. As is normal in all leisure transfers, items that were identified in that survey for GLL were all completed prior to handover and signed off by the specialist contractors on behalf of the Council. GLL handed the building over to the standard required by the Council and under the contract.*”

£4.7 million investment

Places Leisure has now told the Times that it is investing approximately £4.7 million in modernising the centre – £200,000

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more than the approximately £4.5 million previously publicised.

Work completed so far includes a full refurbishment of the fitness suite, new equipment and EGYM technology, refurbished group-exercise studios and a new immersive spin studio.

A new health suite, with steam rooms and saunas, is expected to open by the end of November. Further plans include improvements to the café and teaching pool and a new Reformer Pilates studio due to open in the new year.

Places Leisure said the improvements would broaden community activities, encourage healthier lifestyles and generate more than £5 million of "social value" each year.

However, the operator did not provide a breakdown of expenditure on the different elements of the project. Nor did it answer questions about membership numbers, how the investment is being financed or whether any payments or other financial arrangements with the Council have been altered because of the centre's condition or the closure of facilities.

On the separate dilapidation works, Places Leisure said these fell outside its planned investment programme and were being instructed by the Council.

It said: "Places Leisure is supporting and working with the Council to complete any necessary works quickly and with minimal impact on our customers."

Membership changes

A centre member told the Times that his monthly payment had risen from £45.50 under GLL to £60 following the change of operator. He said another long-standing member, previously paying closer to £30, had experienced a similar increase.

Places Leisure said existing membership prices remained unchanged until February 2026, when members were transferred to the closest Places Leisure equivalent. For some customers, that change of membership category resulted in a price increase, of which they were informed beforehand.

The present headline monthly rates include:

- Premium membership, covering the gym, swimming and classes: £60.
- Swimming only: £29.
- Premium membership for 16 to 18-year-olds: £30.
- Premium membership for 19 to 25-year-olds: £40.

A £75 Premium+ option, which will include the health suite, is expected to be introduced when that facility reopens. Places Leisure said existing members would not be transferred automatically to the more expensive category.

The member who contacted the Times praised the refurbished gym and fitness studios, describing the work as fresh and modern. He said, however, that he was unaware of significant changes to the pool or sports halls and that the health suite had remained closed.

Complaint reaches standards process

The Rainbow controversy also forms part of the background to a pending preliminary hearing into a councillor conduct complaint made by Councillor **Neil Dallen** (RA Town Ward) against Councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour Court).

At a meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee in January, Cllr Ames pressed Cllr Dallen about the secret urgent decision which Dallen had signed off. From the chair Cllr Dallen stopped his questioning declaring "It's my meeting". During a heated exchange, Cllr Ames used the words "cover-up" and "arrogant".

Cllr Dallen subsequently complained that Cllr Ames had breached the councillors' Code of Conduct. Cllr Ames maintains that his language arose from a legitimate attempt, as an elected councillor, to establish what had happened and why councillors and the public were being denied the relevant information.

The preliminary hearing will address procedural issues surrounding the determination of the complaint before any final hearing. This follows an expensive external investigation being authorised by the Council into Ames conduct. The controversial January meeting is available for all to see on the Council's YouTube channel. The preliminary hearing will be in Committee troom 1 at the Town Hall and the agenda includes a resolution as to whether the press and public should be excluded. Epsom and Ewell Times has been told that the committee room is not sufficient for any public presence anyway.

A complaint made by Ames against Dallen for his conduct of the meeting was dismissed by the Council's Monitoring Officer, who advised at the heated meeting, and without an independent investigation.

Residents still do not know precisely what defects were discovered, when they arose, why routine inspection records appear not to exist, whether GLL is considered legally responsible for any of the work or how much of the authorised £500,000 will ultimately be borne by local taxpayers.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Epsom and Ewell to have three tiers of government when promised one?

30 September 2026



Following Surrey County Council's release reported here Plans for East Surrey Council continue to progress that the new East and West Unitary Councils will work toward adoption of an overarching Foundation Strategic Authority for all of Surrey and a local Charter Trustees body for Epsom and Ewell, Epsom and Ewell Times provides our readers with a summary guide to what Foundation Strategic Authorities are:

Surrey's proposed new strategic authority: what would it do?

Surrey's two new shadow unitary authorities have backed the creation of a county-wide Foundation Strategic Authority, adding another layer to the local government structures due to take effect in April 2027.

The proposed body would bring East Surrey Council and West Surrey Council together to make decisions on matters considered too large or interconnected to be handled effectively by either authority alone.

An analysis published by the Local Government Information Unit describes Foundation Strategic Authorities, or FSAs, as the entry level in the Government's new system of devolved regional government.

Unlike a Mayoral Strategic Authority, an FSA would not have a directly elected mayor. It would instead be governed collectively by representatives of its constituent councils.

For Surrey, this would mean the two new unitary councils retaining responsibility for everyday services such as social care, waste collection, local planning, housing and environmental health, while working through the FSA on broader county-wide priorities.

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What powers would it have?

According to the LGIU, Foundation Strategic Authorities are intended to provide a statutory framework for strategic functions including:

- transport planning;
- adult education and skills;
- economic development;
- infrastructure and investment;
- housing strategy; and
- the preparation of a Spatial Development Strategy.

The last of these could be particularly significant. A county-wide spatial strategy would establish the broad direction for development, housing and infrastructure across Surrey, above the more detailed local plans prepared by East and West Surrey councils.

An FSA could also act as Surrey's Local Transport Authority, allowing decisions about buses, roads and other transport investment to be planned across the whole county rather than divided between the two new councils.

The Government argues that operating at this larger scale will make it easier for areas to negotiate with Whitehall, attract investment and coordinate services that cross council boundaries.

Not as powerful as a mayoral authority

The LGIU stresses, however, that an FSA occupies the lowest of the Government's three strategic-authority tiers.

Above it sits a Mayoral Strategic Authority, led by a directly elected mayor, and then an Established Mayoral Strategic Authority. Authorities in the higher tiers can gain greater powers, more influence over government departments and access to broader, longer-term funding arrangements.

A Foundation Strategic Authority would therefore give Surrey a formal seat at the devolution table, but it would not initially receive all the powers or financial freedoms available to areas such as Greater Manchester.

This raises the question of whether an FSA is intended to be a lasting form of government in its own right or principally a "waiting room" on the way to an elected Surrey mayor.

The Government has said that areas may choose a non-mayoral arrangement, but its most substantial devolution offers have generally been attached to mayoral authorities.

A third level of decision-making

From April 2027, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council and Surrey County Council are due to disappear, with their responsibilities passing to East Surrey Council.

The FSA would sit above both East and West Surrey councils for specified strategic functions. Residents would therefore be governed locally by a unitary council and, on county-wide matters, by the strategic authority.

This would not reproduce the present county-and-borough division because the FSA would have a narrower and more strategic role. Nevertheless, its creation means the replacement of Surrey's current two-tier system will not leave the county with a single level of local decision-making.

Questions remain about how the FSA would be constituted, how its decisions would be scrutinised, how costs and votes would be divided between East and West Surrey and how clearly residents would be able to identify which authority was responsible for a particular policy.

Why Surrey wants one

Surrey County Council has argued that establishing an FSA will unlock further devolution and allow more decisions and funding to be transferred from central government.

The two shadow councils would remain separate unitary authorities, but the strategic body would preserve a mechanism for county-wide coordination after Surrey County Council is abolished.

Its practical importance will depend on the powers and funding ultimately transferred by ministers. Without substantial resources, the FSA could amount mainly to another coordinating committee. With meaningful control over transport, skills, strategic planning and investment, it could become one of the most influential public bodies affecting Epsom and Ewell.

The central issue identified by the LGUI analysis is therefore not simply whether an FSA is created, but whether it is given sufficient authority, money and public accountability to make a noticeable difference.

Sam Jones – Reporter

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ISSN 2753-2771



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Surrey burglary figures spark row

30 September 2026



Helen Maguire MP has accused the Government of leaving Surrey families and businesses to "fend for themselves" after Liberal Democrat analysis suggested that fewer than one in 15 burglaries recorded by Surrey Police in 2025 resulted in somebody being charged or summoned.

However, Surrey Police and the county's Police and Crime Commissioner have responded that burglary has been falling, detection rates are improving and officers attended almost 97% of reported residential burglaries during the latest financial year.

The Liberal Democrat MP for Epsom and Ewell said 3,045 burglaries were recorded across Surrey in 2025. According to figures supplied by her office, 6.4% resulted in a charge or summons, while 2,272 cases – 74.61% of the total – were closed without a suspect being identified.

Nationally, the party said 223,194 burglaries were recorded in England and Wales during the same calendar year. Of these, 13,936 – 6.24% – resulted in a charge or summons, while no suspect was identified in 160,396 cases, or 71.86%.

The figures were described as having been drawn from Home Office crime outcome statistics and analysed by the Liberal Democrats.

Mrs Maguire said: "It is unacceptable that families and businesses across Surrey are being left terrified as the vast majority of burglaries go unsolved. The Government has been asleep at the wheel; a persistent lack of support for community policing has left our streets vulnerable.

"In 93.6% of burglary cases in Surrey, the victims never see someone charged – this has to change. Surrey Police work tirelessly, but they require the proper resources and mandate from central government to ensure every single case is rigorously investigated.

"That's why I'm demanding urgent action from the Prime Minister to restore neighbourhood policing and to back our calls for an investigation guarantee for all burglaries in Surrey."

The Liberal Democrats are calling for what they describe as a "Burglary Response Guarantee", backed by legislation requiring the police to attend and properly investigate every domestic burglary.

Police points to higher 'solved' rates

Surrey Police said the figures needed to be placed in context, particularly because the classification of burglary offences changed in April 2023. Burglaries are now divided into residential and business offences.

Detective Chief Inspector Jo Horner, the force lead for burglary, acknowledged that further improvement was required.

She said: "We know there is more to do to improve burglary detection rates, but it is also important to provide context to

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ISSN 2753-2771

the data which has been used."

Between April 2025 and March 2026, Surrey Police attended 96.9% of reported residential burglaries, according to the force.

Over the same period, it recorded a "solved rate" of 10.44% for residential burglary and 12.18% for business burglary.

A solved outcome is not necessarily the same as a charge or summons. It can include other recognised outcomes, so the police percentages cannot be compared directly with the 6.4% charge-or-summons figure quoted by the Liberal Democrats. The figures also cover different periods: calendar year 2025 in the MP's release and the 2025/26 financial year in the police response.

DCI Horner said burglary remained "an area of continued focus and priority" for the force.

She highlighted an investigation that led to five offenders admitting a series of car-key burglaries, attempted burglaries and vehicle thefts across Surrey, Sussex and Kent. Investigators linked the group to more than 20 stolen vehicles with a combined value of £337,100.

A separate East Surrey operation resulted in six men being charged with nearly 80 offences, including burglary, motor vehicle theft and vehicle interference. Five of the men are now serving prison sentences.

Surrey Police said each of its two divisions has a proactive team monitoring burglary patterns, identifying hotspots and targeting prolific offenders and organised criminal networks.

PCC says burglary is falling

Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend said domestic burglary was "deeply invasive" and could have a profound effect on its victims, while acknowledging that improving detection remained a challenge for police forces nationally.

She said: "The good news is that Surrey Police is one of the fastest improving forces in the country and burglary rates across the county have been consistently falling.

"According to figures available on my Data Hub, the number of domestic burglaries fell by over 15% between 2023 and 2025. And more recent provisional data shows that in April and June this year, we saw the lowest monthly rates of domestic burglary in the latest three years."

Mrs Townsend said the force's burglary solved rate between April 2025 and March 2026 was more than 10%, which she described as considerably higher than the national average.

She added: "Surrey Police is already committed to deploying to every residential burglary reported in the county and each policing division has its own proactive team which identifies trends and 'hotspot' areas and targets offenders.

"The force has made great strides in tackling burglary over the last two years and this will be an area I will continue to scrutinise performance on to ensure they maintain that trajectory going forward."

What the figures do – and do not – show

The competing statements measure several different things.

A 6.4% charge-or-summons rate does not necessarily mean that the offender "got away scot-free" in every other case. Cases may remain under investigation, be resolved through another recorded outcome or fail to proceed for evidential or other reasons. Nevertheless, the figures supplied by Mrs Maguire's office indicate that no suspect was identified in almost three-quarters of Surrey's recorded burglaries in 2025.

Conversely, attending a burglary does not mean that it will be solved. Surrey Police's 96.9% attendance figure relates only to residential burglary and not to the business burglaries included in the MP's overall total.

Neither side supplied Epsom and Ewell-specific figures, so the statistics in the exchange relate to the Surrey Police area as a whole.

Residents can report suspicious activity through Surrey Police's website, by calling 101 or anonymously through Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111. A crime in progress or an immediate danger should be reported by calling 999.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Crime and Safety Round-Up: June to August 2026

30 September 2026

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

26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771



The summer months brought a mixture of serious incidents, court outcomes, crime-prevention work and neighbourhood policing activity across Epsom and Ewell.

The Epsom and Ewell Times does not normally report every individual crime. This periodic round-up draws together incidents of wider public interest, police appeals and developments affecting community safety.

Eleven arrests during the Derby

Surrey Police mounted its largest annual pre-planned policing operation for the Epsom Derby Festival on 5 and 6 June.

Officers, staff and volunteers from Surrey and Sussex Police worked with the Jockey Club, supported by drones, intelligence teams, public-order specialists and local policing officers. The presence of King Charles III and Queen Camilla added to the security requirements.

Police reported that 11 arrests were made in and around the racecourse during the two days. Additional patrols were also deployed in Epsom town centre to respond to crime and anti-social behaviour.

Chief Superintendent Graham Barnett thanked residents for their patience during an operation which inevitably caused some disruption.

Morning assault near Rosebery Park

Police appealed for witnesses following an assault on the footpath between Avenue Road and Rosebery Park between 7.30am and 7.50am on Wednesday 10 June.

An altercation reportedly took place between two people, during which a man was kicked and punched in the face. Officers particularly wished to speak to the driver of a bronze-coloured BMW who may have witnessed the incident.

Anyone with information or relevant video footage was asked to contact police quoting reference PR/45260070249. The witness appeal remains available on the Surrey Police website.

Ewell murder trial ends in acquittals

On 30 June Surrey Police announced the outcome of the trial arising from the fatal stabbing of 23-year-old Alfonso “Alfie” Sibley in Kingston Road, Ewell, on 9 December 2025.

Three teenage boys had faced charges following Alfie’s death. After a four-week trial at Kingston Crown Court, a 15-year-old boy was found not guilty of murder, manslaughter and conspiracy to commit robbery. A second 15-year-old and a 17-year-old were also found not guilty of conspiracy to commit robbery.

None of the defendants could be named because of their ages. The Major Crime Team said Alfie’s family had thanked the members of the public who tried to help him and the witnesses who assisted the investigation. Surrey Police published the full court update.

Town-centre licensing restrictions rejected

Community safety featured prominently in a June debate over whether Epsom town centre should be designated as a Special Stress Area, sometimes called a cumulative impact area.

Such a designation can make it more difficult to secure new or extended alcohol licences where there is evidence that the concentration of licensed premises is contributing to crime, disorder or public nuisance.

Epsom and Ewell borough councillors decided not to begin the process of introducing the policy at this stage. The issue is to remain under review, with councillors divided over whether the available evidence justified additional restrictions.

Attempted motorcycle robbery on Ewell Bypass

At approximately 11.30pm on Sunday 19 July, a motorcyclist was approached by two people in a vehicle on the Ewell Bypass near its junction with London Road.

The two reportedly tried to take the motorcycle and attempted to assault the rider by punching and pushing them.

A man in his thirties was arrested on suspicion of robbery and subsequently released on conditional bail while enquiries continued. Police sought witnesses and dashcam footage recorded between 11.15pm and 11.45pm, under reference PR/45260087038. Surrey Police issued a public appeal on 23 July.

Vehicle theft charge figures

Figures published during July showed that Surrey Police recorded 1,551 thefts or unauthorised takings of motor vehicles

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ISSN 2753-2771

during 2025. Charges or summonses were recorded in 34 cases.

Local officers continued to warn that motorcycles and mopeds can be stolen within seconds. Owners were encouraged to use several layers of security, including a disc lock, a separate chain attached to an immovable object and, where possible, a cover and tracking device.

Police also used their local social-media channels in July to provide advice to tradespeople about thefts from vans. Owners were encouraged to remove valuable tools overnight, use secure internal storage, mark equipment and keep photographs and serial numbers.

Fatal collision on Christ Church Road

The most serious local road incident of the summer occurred shortly before 11.40pm on Wednesday 5 August.

A black Smart car collided with a stationary street-cleaning vehicle on Christ Church Road, Epsom. A woman in her twenties who was travelling as a passenger in the Smart car died at the scene.

The driver, also a man in his twenties, was arrested on suspicion of causing death by dangerous driving, driving while over the prescribed alcohol limit, failing to provide a specimen for analysis and causing death by driving while uninsured. He was taken to hospital for treatment.

Christ Church Road remained closed for several hours while collision investigators examined the scene. Police asked for witnesses and footage showing the Smart car between 11.35pm and 11.40pm, particularly evidence of the manner in which it was being driven. The appeal was issued by Surrey Police on 6 August.

Retail crime remains a policing priority

In August, the Epsom Safer Neighbourhood Team reaffirmed what it described as a zero-tolerance approach towards retail crime.

The measures include the prompt investigation of known offenders, cooperation with retailers and remote CCTV providers, visible and covert patrols and jointly funded private security in Epsom town centre.

Stores are also being encouraged to use the DISC information-sharing system. Police said this allows retailers to exchange information about offenders and enables a person caught stealing from one participating business to be excluded from others.

The team said its approach had resulted in a significant reduction in offending by known local shoplifters, although no supporting figures were published. Anti-social behaviour powers may also be used to prevent persistent offenders returning to shopping areas. Retail crime is listed among the neighbourhood team’s policing priorities.

Callers impersonating police officers

On 18 August Surrey Police warned residents about fraudulent telephone calls in which criminals pretended to be police officers.

The callers may claim that a bank account has been compromised, that someone has been arrested using the resident’s bank card or that money must be transferred for safekeeping. Criminals can use “number spoofing” to make a call appear to originate from a genuine police or bank telephone number.

Police will never ask someone to disclose a PIN, hand over a bank card or transfer money to a supposedly safe account. Anyone receiving such a call should hang up and contact the organisation independently, preferably from another telephone. Surrey Police published further advice about the impersonation scam.

What the recorded figures show

Published Police.uk data currently extend only to July, so August cannot yet be included in a like-for-like comparison.

Across the three Epsom and Ewell neighbourhood policing areas, 335 offences were recorded in June: 152 in Central, 106 in West and 77 in East. The combined total fell to 319 in July: 154 in Central, 90 in West and 75 in East. That represents a reduction of just under five per cent between the two months.

In Epsom and Ewell Central, the largest recorded category in July was violence and sexual offences, with 53 reports. There were also 33 reports of anti-social behaviour, 14 public-order offences and 14 shoplifting offences.

These categories record allegations reported to police and should not be read as numbers of convictions. A single incident may also generate more than one recorded offence. Neighbourhood statistics can be examined through Police.uk.

Police engagement through the summer

Local officers continued to hold “Meet the Beat” sessions at locations including Bourne Hall, Long Grove Park, Epsom High Street, the Horton Estate and Epsom Hospital.

A particularly concentrated programme took place during August, with opportunities for residents to meet neighbourhood officers in the town centre, local parks and hospital reception area.

Residents should call 999 where a crime is in progress or somebody is in immediate danger. Non-emergency matters can be reported to Surrey Police online or by calling 101. Information can be provided anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

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

26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Friendly finding puts Epsom and Ewell in England’s top fifth

30 September 2026



Epsom and Ewell has been ranked among the friendliest and most connected places in England in a new national index examining the strength of community life.

The borough placed 56th out of 296 local authority areas on the National Conversation’s Connection Barometer, giving it a score of 71.2 out of 100 and an “A” grade.

That puts Epsom and Ewell comfortably inside England’s top fifth and fourth highest among Surrey’s 11 boroughs and districts. Waverley was ranked 13th nationally, Mole Valley 21st and Elmbridge 23rd.

The results attracted national attention after The Guardian reported that the Isles of Scilly had been named England’s friendliest place. The islands were followed by South Hams, West Devon, Derbyshire Dales and the nearby London Borough of Richmond upon Thames.

However, the description of the findings as a vote for England’s “friendliest” places needs some qualification. Residents were not simply asked to rate the friendliness of their towns and neighbours.

Instead, the barometer combines eight measures taken from the Government’s Community Life Survey 2024/25. Each council area was ranked against the other 295 areas on every measure, with those rankings averaged to produce a score out of 100.

The Epsom and Ewell figures were:

- 4.6% said they felt lonely often or always;
- 65.7% felt strongly that they belonged to their immediate neighbourhood;
- 48.4% believed many people in their neighbourhood could be trusted;
- 85.6% agreed that people from different backgrounds got on well together;
- 70.1% were proud to live in their local area;
- 69.1% chatted to their neighbours at least once a month;
- 20.1% undertook formal volunteering at least once a month; and
- 37.5% had participated in civic activities during the previous 12 months.

The borough performed particularly strongly on civic participation, volunteering, local pride and relations between people from different backgrounds. Its relatively low reported level of frequent loneliness also contributed positively to the overall score.

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ISSN 2753-2771

The findings provide statistical support for the familiar picture of Epsom and Ewell as a borough sustained by residents' associations, charities, sports clubs, faith groups, heritage organisations and other voluntary bodies.

There are nevertheless reasons for treating precise league-table positions cautiously. The Government survey estimates come with margins of error, meaning small differences between neighbouring positions may not be statistically significant.

The barometer itself describes its score as a "rough guide, not a final measure". Its eight indicators are given equal weight and cannot capture every aspect of living in a particular community. The survey also covers the whole borough, so it does not reveal whether experiences differ between individual neighbourhoods.

The Community Life Survey questioned adults aged 16 and over between October 2024 and March 2025. A larger sample in 2023/24 and 2024/25 allowed the Government to publish meaningful estimates for individual local authority areas.

The index was produced by the secretariat of the Independent Commission on Community and Cohesion to support the wider National Conversation, a UK-wide exercise examining what connects and divides people.

The Commission is co-chaired by former Conservative Home Secretary Sir Sajid Javid and former Labour MP Jon Cruddas. It has brought together representatives from politics, academia, business, faith and civil society to consider growing concerns about social isolation, division and the weakening of community institutions.

The National Conversation explained that official statistics provide only part of the picture and that the index was intended to prompt discussion about whether the figures reflect people's lived experiences.

Its public survey closed on 31st August. The findings are expected to contribute to a report by the Independent Commission on Community and Cohesion later in 2026.

At the opposite end of the barometer, Barking and Dagenham ranked 296th, below Stoke-on-Trent, Ashfield, Mansfield and Ipswich.

For Epsom and Ewell, 56th place is not quite a claim to being England's single friendliest community. It does, however, provide encouraging evidence that neighbourliness, civic involvement and local pride remain notable strengths of the borough.

Lionel Blackman

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Idealised image

Secret Surrey leaders' talks challenged by Epsom councillor

30 September 2026



An Epsom and Ewell councillor has launched a sustained Freedom of Information campaign to uncover what Surrey's council leaders have discussed and agreed behind closed doors.

Councillor **Alex Coley** (Independent, Ruxley) is seeking the agendas, minutes and decisions of the Surrey Leaders' Group, a forum bringing together the leaders of Surrey County Council and the county's 11 borough and district councils.

The Group is currently chaired by Epsom and Ewell Borough Council Leader Councillor Hannah Dalton (RA, Stoneleigh).

Cllr Coley's efforts began in March, when he requested records covering the civic years 2022/23 to 2025/26. Establishing which authority was responsible for answering proved to be the first hurdle.

Surrey County Council said that it did not hold the information. A response sent through a WhatDoTheyKnow account bearing the name "Surrey Leaders' Group" came from Guildford Borough Council, which also said it did not hold the records because it did not provide the Group's secretariat.

Guildford directed Cllr Coley to Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, which eventually confirmed that it held at least some of the material.

However, Reigate and Banstead initially refused the four-year request on cost grounds. It said more than 200 documents were spread across different authorities, including records kept by a previous secretariat. Locating, retrieving and reviewing them would exceed the Freedom of Information Act limit of £450, calculated as 18 hours of staff time at £25 an

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ISSN 2753-2771

hour.

Cllr Coley expressed surprise that the basic records of a body composed of senior elected representatives should be so difficult to retrieve.

He argued that the failure to maintain a readily accessible publication scheme had itself helped create the situation in which answering an FOI request was said to be too expensive.

He subsequently narrowed his request to 2024/25 and 2025/26 and asked which council held the records for the two earlier years.

After extending its response deadline to consider the public interest, Reigate and Banstead released the Group's constitution and collections of agendas. It has, however, refused to disclose the minutes.

The Council relied upon section 36 of the Freedom of Information Act, which can protect information where disclosure would be likely to inhibit the free and frank provision of advice or exchange of views.

It said the Group provided a "safe space" in which senior councillors could test ideas, challenge assumptions and discuss politically sensitive or developing issues before proposals entered the formal decision-making processes of their respective councils.

Disclosure, it argued, could have a "chilling effect", making participants less candid and ultimately weakening the quality of subsequent council decisions.

The Council also maintained that the Surrey Leaders' Group is not itself a formal decision-making body. It said any binding decision would still have to be taken through the constitutional and democratic procedures of the council concerned.

Constitution complicates the picture

The constitution disclosed through the FOI request presents a more complicated picture.

Among the Group's stated objectives is taking decisions about joint activities across Surrey. It may make representations, determine certain nominations to outside bodies, levy subscriptions upon its member councils and maintain a fund that can be used to employ consultants or commission research.

Although it cannot bind constituent councils without referring an issue back to them, the constitution states that the decision-making powers of the former Surrey Delivery Board are to be exercised by the Leaders' Group, subject to council ratification where required.

It also provides for voting, with each council leader having one vote, although the stated aim is to reach decisions by consensus.

The agendas demonstrate that the Group has considered matters extending far beyond informal networking. Subjects have included local government reorganisation, the allocation of reorganisation costs, strategic planning, health services, policing, economic growth, staff retention and the future governance of Surrey.

One agenda expressly recorded that a "decision" was required from leaders on proposals for funding the implementation of local government reorganisation. Leaders were asked to agree the proposals and take steps to set aside money from their councils' budgets or reserves.

Another item asked leaders to provide a "steer" on proposed voluntary financial controls associated with the restructuring.

"No transparency"

Cllr Coley has now requested an internal review of the refusal to release the minutes.

He disputes the claim that publication would provide only limited additional transparency. He says the Group does not routinely publish its agendas, minutes, decision notices or even its constitution.

He also claims that at least one Surrey chief executive has acknowledged in writing that decisions were made at the Group rather than by its constituent councils. He says the current chair Cllr Dalton has told councillors that a particular course had to be followed because it had already been agreed by Surrey Leaders.

"The Surrey Leaders Group should not be a secret forum to circumvent public scrutiny," he wrote in his request for a review.

Cllr Coley contrasted its private proceedings with the new East and West Surrey joint committees, whose agendas, minutes and decisions have been published and whose meetings have been open to the public and available to watch online.

That distinction is particularly important during the reorganisation of Surrey's councils. Decisions and informal agreements made now could influence the structures, finances and services inherited by the two new unitary authorities.

Cllr Coley also argued that any need for continuing secrecy should be reduced by the impending abolition of the Group's constituent councils. He told the Epsom and Ewell Times " Your readers might chuckle at the idea of a "deep state" in Surrey, but what else should we call these arrangements where the most far reaching decisions are made in private with no scrutiny or public record and the mere existence of the Surrey Leaders Group is shrouded in mystery?"

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council acknowledged the internal review request on 2nd September. It aims to provide its decision by 30th September.

The complete FOI correspondence and released documents can be read on WhatDoTheyKnow.

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

26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

Sam Jones – Reporter



Surrey campaigners seek independent appeal rights over new flight paths

30 September 2026



Surrey countryside campaigners have joined a national call for residents to be given an independent right of appeal when changes are proposed to flight paths over their homes.

CPRE Surrey is among 22 community and environmental organisations that have signed a letter delivered to 10 Downing Street warning that the Government's aviation reforms could leave the Civil Aviation Authority as both the regulator making decisions on airspace changes and the body answering complaints about those decisions.

The letter, addressed to Prime Minister Andy Burnham, calls for the Civil Aviation (Consumer Protection and Regulatory Reform) Bill to be amended to establish an independent airspace ombudsman.

Campaigners say this would give residents somewhere outside the CAA to seek a review of decisions capable of concentrating aircraft noise over homes, schools and previously quieter areas.

The proposed legislation arrives as the Government begins the most extensive redesign of British airspace for decades. Although the Bill does not itself draw new flight paths or change airport operating hours, it would strengthen the machinery through which approved airspace changes can be implemented.

Its significance for Surrey arises particularly from the planned redesign of the highly congested airspace over London and the South East, involving Heathrow, Gatwick and other airports.

What the Bill would change

The Civil Aviation (Consumer Protection and Regulatory Reform) Bill is a wider aviation measure covering passenger rights, enforcement of consumer law, airport slots, safety regulation and airspace modernisation.

It completed its stages in the House of Lords on 20th July and received its formal first reading in the House of Commons on 1st September. A date for its Commons second reading has yet to be announced.

Under existing legislation, the Transport Secretary can direct an airport, air navigation provider or another organisation involved in airspace change to prepare and progress a proposal. Clause 4 of the new Bill would extend that power so a direction could also require an airspace change already approved by the CAA to be implemented.

The Government's explanatory notes say this would make the direction-making power available at every stage of the process, including putting an approved design into operation and implementing alterations identified by a subsequent review.

The Government argues that Britain's underlying airspace design has changed little since the 1950s and is increasingly unsuitable for modern aircraft and present-day traffic levels. It says redesigning routes could permit more direct journeys and improved climb and descent profiles, cutting delays, fuel use and emissions.

The Bill would also allow the CAA to make detailed rules covering aviation safety and operations. However, these general rule-making provisions are distinct from the CAA's function of deciding individual airspace change proposals. The measure does not expressly abolish consultation on individual proposals or create new flight paths by itself.

A new "guiding mind" for UK airspace

The broader reform centres on the new UK Airspace Design Service, known as UKADS. It is being provided by NATS En

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ISSN 2753-2771

Route Ltd, the monopoly provider of en-route air traffic control services.

In its June 2025 announcement, the Government described UKADS as a single “guiding mind” capable of producing a coordinated design instead of relying upon airports to develop overlapping proposals separately.

The Government said UK airspace handled around 200,000 flights annually in the 1950s, compared with 2.47 million in 2024. Without modernisation, it estimated that one flight in five could experience disruption or delay by 2040.

The first priority for UKADS is the London airspace “cluster”. This includes the routes serving Gatwick and Heathrow and would also encompass airspace alterations needed for a third runway at Heathrow.

For Surrey residents, modernisation could therefore determine not merely how many aircraft use the region’s airports but where arriving and departing aircraft fly, at what heights and how noise is distributed.

Modern satellite navigation allows aircraft to follow routes much more accurately. That can reduce the total population affected by noise but may also concentrate flights over a narrower corridor, leaving households directly beneath it exposed more frequently.

How the public is consulted

Individual permanent flight-path changes must normally follow the CAA’s CAP 1616 airspace change process. A proposal is generally sponsored by an airport or air navigation service provider, although UKADS will now take a coordinating role in the London region.

Depending on the scale and likely effects of a proposal, the process includes development of design options, environmental assessment, engagement and public consultation. Consultation responses and other documents are published through the CAA’s Airspace Change Portal.

The portal allows residents to search by postcode or place name for proposals near them. The CAA says CAP 1616 is intended to provide a transparent, impartial and evidence-based assessment taking account of everyone affected.

When making a decision, the CAA must give priority to safety and then consider matters including efficient use of airspace, the needs of aircraft operators, environmental guidance and the interests of people on the ground.

The Government’s revised 2026 air-navigation guidance also sets expectations for engagement and consultation with affected communities and for the assessment of noise and other environmental consequences.

Consultation, however, is not the same as a right of appeal. It allows people to comment before a decision is made but does not necessarily provide an independent tribunal to reconsider the eventual decision.

Existing routes of challenge are limited

Anyone may ask the Transport Secretary to “call in” an airspace proposal and decide it in place of the CAA. But the request must normally be made during a four-week window and satisfy restricted criteria.

According to the CAA’s call-in guidance, a proposal must be of strategic national importance, have a potentially significant effect on UK economic growth, or meet a specified test involving both aircraft noise and its effects on health and quality of life.

The noise test requires a net increase of at least 10,000 people exposed to 54 decibels or more during the relevant 16-hour daytime period. Even if a proposal qualifies, the Secretary of State is not obliged to take it over.

Otherwise, a dissatisfied community may be left to pursue a complaint about whether the proper process was followed or consider judicial review. Judicial review is generally concerned with the lawfulness of a decision, rather than providing a complete reconsideration of whether a different route would have been fairer or less damaging. It can also be costly and procedurally demanding.

The Bill preserves an appeal against a ministerial direction for the person or organisation directed to carry out an airspace change. That is not an equivalent appeal for residents affected on the ground.

It is this gap that CPRE Surrey and the other signatories want an ombudsman to fill.

“Decisions made over their heads”

CPRE Surrey Chair Jennet Eyre said: “This Bill risks giving communities the worst of both worlds: more decisions made over their heads, with no independent way to review them.

“Residents deserve a process that is transparent, accountable and genuinely fair. If there can be independent oversight for passengers, consumers and proposed for the Clean Water Bill then there must also be independent oversight for the communities living under flight paths.”

The campaigners say they are not opposed to airspace modernisation or aviation but believe the interests of the industry should not override the health, sleep and quality of life of affected communities.

Ms Eyre added: “Families on the ground should not be left to live with increased noise, sleep disruption, health impacts or loss of amenity from concentrated flight paths without a clear, independent way to challenge how those decisions are made.”

The Government maintains that modernisation can produce “quicker, quieter and cleaner” flights and says future airspace designs will remain subject to environmental assessment and community engagement.

The central dispute is consequently not whether the public will be consulted at all. It is what residents can do after

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ISSN 2753-2771

consultation if they believe their evidence has been disregarded, the effects have been underestimated or the burden of aircraft noise has been distributed unfairly.

CPRE Surrey is now urging MPs to amend the Bill during its Commons stages to provide an independent review mechanism outside the CAA. Whether ministers accept that argument may determine how much confidence communities place in the consultations that accompany the coming redesign of the skies above Surrey.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Heritage doors open across Epsom and Ewell

30 September 2026



Historic buildings, forgotten stories and rarely seen corners of Surrey will be brought to life when Heritage Open Days return from Friday 11th to Sunday 20th September.

The annual festival offers free access to historic places, guided walks, exhibitions and talks. This year's theme, "Everyday Histories", celebrates the lives, work and experiences of people whose stories may not always feature in traditional accounts of the past.

Among the many events taking place across Surrey are a dozen opportunities to explore the heritage of Epsom and Ewell, ranging from the history of the borough's spa and racecourse to Ewell's buildings, local currency and the lives of thousands of patients once treated in Epsom's psychiatric hospitals.

Remembering the 9,000 at Horton Cemetery

A particular focus of the local programme will be Horton Cemetery – 9,000 People Remembered, taking place on Saturday 12th September from 10am to 4pm.

Around 9,000 former patients of Epsom's cluster of five psychiatric hospitals were buried in Horton Cemetery between 1899 and 1955. Most lie in unmarked graves and, for decades, their individual identities and life stories were largely forgotten.

The Friends of Horton Cemetery have been working to restore those identities through historical and family research. Visitors will be able to meet researchers and volunteers, explore displays, listen to audio material and learn about some of the people buried there.

The event will be held on land adjacent to the cemetery in Hook Road. The cemetery itself remains inaccessible, but free parking will be available close to the event. Admission is free and advance booking is not required, although the organisers expect the site to become busier later in the day.

A linked event, The History of Horton Asylum and Horton Cemetery, will run at The Horton Arts Centre in Haven Way from 10am to 4pm on the same day.

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For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

The Grade II-listed arts centre occupies the former chapel of Horton Hospital. Its exhibitions, presentations and tours will examine the history of Epsom's five psychiatric hospitals and the lives of the patients and staff who lived and worked within them. Researchers will also be available to help visitors investigate possible family connections.

Local events across the ten days

The borough's programme begins on Friday 11th September, when St Martin of Tours Church in Church Street, Epsom, will open from 9.30am to 1pm. The parish church will also be open on most days during the festival:

- Saturday 12th September, 10am to 5pm
- Sunday 13th September, noon to 6pm
- Monday 14th to Friday 18th September, 9.30am to 1pm
- Sunday 20th September, noon to 6pm

On Sunday 13th September, a guided Epsom Salts and Spa Walk will leave the historic Assembly Rooms in the High Street at 11am. The walk will explore how Epsom's mineral waters transformed the town into a fashionable spa destination. Advance booking is required.

Ewell Court House, in Ewell Court Avenue, will welcome visitors between 10am and 2pm that day, offering an opportunity to discover more about the history and architecture of the house. No booking is required.

Also on Sunday, the Service Wing Museum at Nonsuch Park will open from noon until 4pm. The museum occupies part of the surviving service wing of the former Nonsuch Mansion and contains displays relating to the history of the estate and the lost Tudor Palace of Nonsuch. Admission is free without advance booking.

Bourne Hall will host Everyday Histories in Worcester Park from the Iron Age to the Computer Age at 2pm on Monday 14th September. The talk will follow the development of the area through archaeological discoveries, changing communities and more recent technological history. Booking is required.

On Tuesday 15th September, former professional jockey Caroline Baldock will lead Life on the Downs, a guided walk around the Derby course at Epsom Downs Racecourse. The walk begins at 10am and is expected to last approximately 90 minutes. Places are limited and must be booked in advance.

Lost Buildings of Epsom will be the subject of a talk at Bourne Hall at 2pm on Wednesday 16th September. It will recall notable local buildings that have disappeared through redevelopment, demolition or changing uses. Advance booking is required.

Two events follow on Thursday 17th September. Ewell Village, People and Places is a guided walk leaving Bourne Hall at 10am, while Token Coins in Ewell and Epsom, at Bourne Hall Museum at 2pm, will explore the tokens issued by local traders when official coinage was in short supply. Both events require booking.

The local programme concludes on Saturday 19th September when Ewell Castle School opens its doors to visitors from noon until 3pm. The school is celebrating its centenary, having been founded in 1926 when H R Budgell acquired the Castle and opened a school for an initial intake of 40 boys. Advance booking is required.

All Heritage Open Days events are free, but capacity is limited for several of the guided walks and talks. Visitors should book promptly where required and check the individual listings before travelling, as arrangements can change.

The full Surrey Heritage Open Days programme and event search provides details of events across the county, including opening times, accessibility information and booking arrangements.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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ISSN 2753-2771

Epsom Hospital in top national league for car park charges

30 September 2026



Epsom and St Helier parking among UK’s most expensive, study claims

Patients and visitors parking for more than eight hours at Epsom or St Helier Hospital face a £20 charge, placing the NHS trust among the most expensive in the country, according to newly published research.

The analysis by short-term lender Fast Loan UK compared the maximum daily parking charges advertised by NHS trusts on their websites.

It placed Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust joint seventh in its table, alongside Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and Devon Partnership NHS Trust.

St George’s University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust in Tooting was found to have the highest daily charge, at £30. Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust was second at £29, followed by University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust at £26.50.

The ten highest charges identified by the research were:

1. St George’s University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust – £30
2. Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust – £29
3. University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust – £26.50
4. Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust – £26
5. York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust – £22.50
6. The Hillingdon Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust – £22
7. Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust – £20
8. Devon Partnership NHS Trust – £20
9. Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust – £20
10. Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust – £19

The local charge is confirmed by the Epsom and St Helier hospitals’ published parking tariffs, which have applied since April 2025.

Parking is free for the first 20 minutes. Charges then rise from £3.50 for up to one hour to £6 for two hours, £8 for three hours, £10.50 for four hours and £18 for seven hours. A fixed daily rate of £20 applies to stays exceeding eight hours.

The trust says parking spaces are limited and encourages patients and visitors to use public transport or active travel where possible. Epsom Hospital has 252 spaces, including 32 disabled bays and six drop-off and pick-up spaces.

Several bus services stop at Epsom Hospital itself:

- 166: Croydon – Purley – Chipstead – Banstead – Epsom – Epsom Hospital
- 293: Morden – North Cheam – Ewell Village – Epsom – Epsom Hospital
- 467: Kingston – Chessington – West Ewell – Epsom – Epsom Hospital
- 408: Woodmansterne – Banstead – Epsom – Epsom Hospital – Ashtead – Leatherhead – Effingham
- 479: Guildford – Fetcham – Leatherhead – Epsom Hospital – Epsom – Banstead – Chipstead
- E5: West Ewell – Epsom – Epsom Hospital – Langley Vale
- 516: Epsom – Ashtead – Leatherhead – Box Hill – Dorking
- 623: Ashtead – Epsom Hospital – Epsom

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- 21: Crawley – Dorking, Box Hill, Headley, Leatherhead, Ashtead, Epsom Hsopital – Epsom

Other services connect surrounding areas with Epsom town centre, from which the hospital is approximately a 15-minute walk:

- 406: Kingston – Surbiton – Tolworth – Ewell – Epsom
- 418: Kingston – Surbiton – Tolworth – West Ewell – Epsom town centre
- E9: Epsom – West Ewell – Clarendon Park – Livingstone Park – Manor Park
- E10: Epsom – Manor Park – Noble Park
- E16: Epsom – Stoneleigh – Worcester Park – Ewell
- 318: Burgh Heath – Banstead – Nork – Tattenham Corner – Epsom
- S2: Epsom High Street to St Helier Station

Free hospital parking is available to Blue Badge holders. Outpatients attending hospital three or more times in the same week and parents staying overnight on paediatric wards also qualify for free parking.

Other concessions include a £3.50 ticket for outpatients whose appointment overruns by more than an hour and weekly tickets for dialysis and oncology patients and the immediate relatives of people receiving intensive, high-dependency, coronary, neonatal or end-of-life care.

The trust says all money raised from parking goes towards managing and maintaining its car parks, security, environmental and travel initiatives and its shuttle bus. Any remaining income is directed towards clinical services.

Fast Loan UK said its figures were collected from NHS trust websites in June 2026. Where a trust operated several sites with different tariffs, the comparison used its highest published charge for a standard 24-hour stay.

The research also reported that 33 NHS trusts in England offered free parking and that hospital parking was free in Scotland.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Image: Epsom Hospital public car park

Olympic star helps launch children’s gymnastics and ninja club in Epsom

30 September 2026



Children in Epsom will have a new opportunity to try gymnastics, parkour and free running when a community sports club opens at Blenheim High School in September.

Gymfinity Kids is launching gymnastics and “ninja” classes for children aged from two to 14, with an introductory opening

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weekend taking place from Friday 4 to Sunday 6 September.

Olympic medallist and former Commonwealth Games champion Beth Tweddle MBE, who designed the organisation's gymnastics programme, will support the launch by visiting schools in the Epsom area.

The new club will run one-hour sessions intended to help children develop physical skills, confidence and an enjoyment of exercise, regardless of their previous sporting experience.

Its ninja classes combine elements of parkour and free running, while the gymnastics programme introduces children to the core skills of the sport. Sessions will be led by trained coaches.

Inspiring children to get moving

Beth Tweddle said: "I'm really excited to be bringing Gymfinity Kids' gymnastics and ninja classes to Epsom and creating more opportunities for children in the area to get active and try something new.

"Whether they're discovering gymnastics for the first time, giving ninja a go, or simply finding a new way to move and have fun, I want every child to feel welcome and encouraged to explore what they're capable of.

"Community clubs like this are a fantastic way to make activity more accessible to children and families, while giving children the opportunity to build confidence, learn new skills and find something they really enjoy.

"I'm looking forward to visiting schools in the area and helping inspire the next generation to get moving."

Tweddle won bronze on the uneven bars at the London 2012 Olympic Games and was a three-time world champion. Her career also included Commonwealth Games gold medals for England.

Five community clubs in the area

The opening will bring the number of Gymfinity Kids community clubs in the wider area to five. The company also operates purpose-built centres in Bracknell and Walton-on-Thames.

Paul Kirwin, chief executive of Gymfinity Kids, said: "We're passionate about making it easier for children to get active and discover a sport that they enjoy, which is exactly what our community clubs are designed to do.

"Our new Epsom Community Club will give children the opportunity to try something new, develop physical skills and build confidence in a fun and supportive environment.

"Whether they discover a passion for gymnastics or ninja, or simply find a new way to enjoy being active, we want every child to feel that sport is for them."

The club will be based at Blenheim High School, Longmead Road, Epsom, KT19 9BH.

Further information and booking details are available from the Gymfinity Kids Epsom club page and its online timetable.

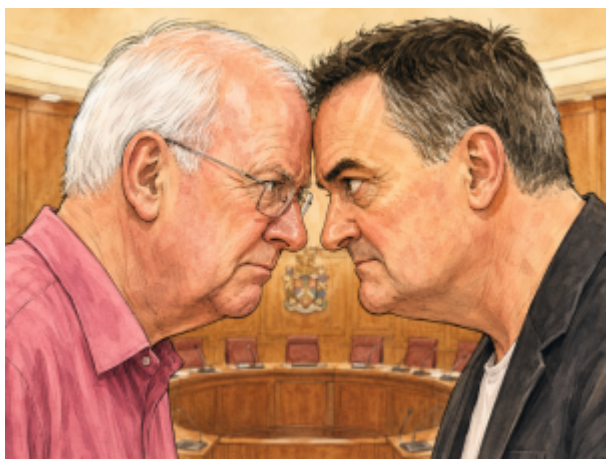
Sam Jones – Reporter



Photo: Beth Tweddle with a child

Epsom & Ewell Council refuses to explain complaints disparity

30 September 2026



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has refused to answer detailed questions about the apparent disparity between its vigorous pursuit of a complaint made by Cllr **Neil Dallen** (RA Town) and its handling of complaints made against him.

Epsom and Ewell Times asked a series of specific questions concerning the Council's decision to send a complaint against Labour councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) to a formal hearing, the involvement of Monitoring Officer Piero Ionta, the

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composition and powers of the proposed Hearing Panel and the progress of complaints against Cllr Dallen.

The Council responded within 45 minutes with a single paragraph.

A Council spokesperson said:

“As a matter of principle, the Council does not comment on allegations or complaints concerning individual elected members. Any such matters are considered in accordance with the Council’s standards procedures and applicable confidentiality requirements.”

That response did not answer any of EET’s questions.

Many did not seek comment on the truth of allegations against individual councillors. They concerned the Council’s procedures, constitutional powers, management of possible conflicts and the legal basis for conducting an entire hearing in private.

The refusal leaves unanswered who referred the complaint against Cllr Ames to a hearing, whether that person had authority to do so, whether the Council’s Independent Person was consulted and why councillors involved in the original dispute have been selected to judge it.

It also leaves the Council unable or unwilling to demonstrate that complaints against Cllr Dallen are being treated with the same urgency as the complaint he made against an opposition Labour councillor.

The Dallen complaint against Ames

Cllr Dallen complained about Cllr Ames following the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting of 27 January.

Cllr Ames repeatedly questioned the secrecy surrounding an urgent decision making up to £500,000 available for work at the Rainbow Leisure Centre. The decision had been taken by officers in consultation with Cllr Dallen, who supported keeping it confidential and then chaired the meeting at which it was questioned.

Cllr Ames asked who had decided that the public interest in withholding the document outweighed the public interest in its publication.

Cllr Dallen and the Monitoring Officer repeatedly referred instead to the separate procedure for excluding the press and public if confidential information needed to be discussed during the meeting.

Cllr Ames was not asking to discuss the confidential information. His question was why the document had already been withheld and whether the required public-interest assessment had been undertaken.

The failure to identify and answer that distinction drove the confrontation.

What was really a point of order

The sequence in which the exchange deteriorated is important.

Cllr Ames first questioned Cllr Dallen’s understanding of the procedures and attempted to continue asking who had made the confidentiality decision.

Cllr Dallen then brought the discussion to an end, saying:

“It does say in the Constitution that this is the chairman’s meeting, and the Chairman has decided there’s going to be no further discussion.”

Only after that assertion did Cllr Ames call him arrogant:

“I’ve never known such an arrogant man in all my life, you’re completely out of your depth, you are completely out of your depth.”

Cllr Dallen then said:

“Councillor Ames, it is my meeting, I am Chairman of this meeting.”

Cllr Ames responded by accusing him of “more cover-up and more cover-up”.

The sequence does not excuse Cllr Ames’s descent into personal criticism. But it contradicts any simplified account in which an unprovoked insult caused the chair to assert his authority. Cllr Dallen had already described the committee as “the chairman’s meeting” and announced that questioning would cease.

Underneath the anger was an obvious procedural issue.

Cllr Dallen had participated in approving the urgent decision, supported its confidential treatment and was then chairing the committee while members questioned those actions. The appropriate issue was whether his involvement meant that he should relinquish the chair to the vice-chair for that item, allowing the questions to be considered by someone not personally connected with the decision.

Neither protagonist handled that issue properly.

Cllr Ames should have stopped, expressly raised a point of order and asked the Monitoring Officer for a ruling on whether Cllr Dallen should relinquish the chair. Instead, he personalised the dispute by attacking Cllr Dallen’s competence and character.

Cllr Dallen should have recognised that his own involvement was the subject of the questioning. Instead of characterising the committee as his meeting and using his authority to end scrutiny of his own conduct, he should have referred the point to the Monitoring Officer and invited the vice-chair to preside while it was resolved.

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The Monitoring Officer should also have recognised the conflict-management question and advised on it. He did not.

The confrontation was therefore not simply a case of one councillor disrespecting a blameless chairman. It resulted from the failure of Cllr Ames, Cllr Dallen and the Council's legal adviser to identify and deal appropriately with the procedural issue sitting in plain sight.

Only one of them is now facing a formal standards hearing.

Ames acknowledges his mistake

Cllr Ames subsequently told EET that he regretted calling Cllr Dallen arrogant. He said he should instead have raised a formal point of order challenging Cllr Dallen's continued chairmanship of the item.

That acknowledgement goes directly to the distinction between the legitimate issue and the inappropriate way in which it was pursued.

Cllr Dallen nevertheless submitted a Code of Conduct complaint on 11 February, alleging disrespect and bullying.

Independent investigators appointed by the Council recommended that Cllr Ames be found to have breached the requirement to treat other councillors with respect.

Their report concluded that his personal criticism, allegations of a cover-up and repeated interruptions went beyond acceptable political debate.

But it also made findings which place his conduct in a more complicated context.

The investigators accepted that Cllr Ames was pursuing "a genuinely held, good faith argument" about transparency and access to information. They found that he was not engaged in a calculated or malicious attack and recognised that political speech attracts enhanced protection.

They expressly declined to decide whether his questions were legally and procedurally correct.

"It is not within the scope of this investigation to comment on any of the concerns highlighted by Councillor Ames during the meeting," the report stated.

The investigation therefore examined how Cllr Ames challenged Cllr Dallen and the Monitoring Officer, but not whether his challenge was substantively justified.

Nor did it investigate whether Cllr Dallen's insistence that it was the chairman's meeting, his termination of questions about a decision in which he had participated or his failure to relinquish the chair contributed to the disorder.

The report treats respect for "the authority of the Chair" as a consideration against Cllr Ames without examining whether the authority of the chair was itself being exercised properly.

Who referred it to a hearing?

The complaint is now due to be considered by a Standards Hearing Sub-Committee on 22 September.

There is, however, a fundamental uncertainty over how it arrived there.

The Council's scheme of delegation states:

"Determination of complaints referred by an Investigating Officer regarding alleged breaches of the councillors' Code of Conduct shall be delegated to Hearing Panels."

Democratic Services told Cllr Ames:

"The hearing has been convened following receipt of the Investigating Officer's Report into the Code of Conduct complaint."

It continued:

"In accordance with the Council's arrangements, the determination of complaints referred by an Investigating Officer regarding alleged breaches of the Councillors' Code of Conduct shall be delegated to a Hearing Panel."

In this case, the Investigating Officer was the external investigator who wrote the report.

The report recommends that Cllr Ames be found in breach. It does not expressly recommend or direct that the complaint be referred to a Hearing Panel.

That distinction may be important.

The Council's Constitution gives the Monitoring Officer broad authority over Code of Conduct matters except for decisions reserved to a Hearing Panel or another decision-making body. But the specific delegation to Hearing Panels appears to apply to complaints "referred by an Investigating Officer".

If those words establish a mandatory gateway, the question is whether the external investigator actually made such a referral. The Monitoring Officer cannot necessarily substitute himself for the Investigating Officer or silently supply a procedural step which the Constitution assigns to someone else.

There may be an answer. The Council might argue that a report recommending a finding of breach necessarily constitutes an implied referral. It might identify a separate written decision by the external investigator which has not been included in the report supplied to Cllr Ames.

But the Council has declined to say.

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ISSN 2753-2771

EET asked who made the referral, when it was made, where it was recorded and under which constitutional power. The Council's blanket response does not identify any decision or decision-maker.

This was not a request to prejudge the allegation. It was a request for proof that the body proposing to judge it had been properly convened.

Report arrived after hearing invitation

The procedural uncertainty is compounded by the Council's communications with Cllr Ames.

On 7 August, Democratic Services sent an invitation to the proposed Hearing Panel. It did not identify Cllr Ames as the subject member in the body of the invitation.

When he replied that he did not know what the hearing concerned and would not attend, Democratic Services responded:

"For the avoidance of doubt, you are the subject of the Standards Hearing Sub-Committee."

Cllr Ames says that was the first time he had been told expressly that the complaint was proceeding to a hearing.

He had not received the final investigation report. The investigator subsequently attributed this to a "communication breakdown" between himself and the Council's legal services team.

Instead of acknowledging that failure and apologising, the Council adopted a tone which implied that Cllr Ames should already have understood the position.

Cllr Ames has asked who decided to refer the case, on whose recommendation and under what policy. No substantive answer is contained in the correspondence supplied to EET.

Monitoring Officer was involved in original dispute

The position of Monitoring Officer Piero Ionta creates a separate concern.

Mr Ionta attended the January meeting and gave advice supporting Cllr Dallen during the disputed exchange. It was the adequacy and correctness of that advice which Cllr Ames was challenging.

The Monitoring Officer also failed to identify and advise upon the underlying question of whether Cllr Dallen should relinquish the chair while his own part in the urgent decision was being questioned.

The independent investigation was subsequently commissioned on the Monitoring Officer's behalf.

Employing an external investigator does not necessarily remove an apparent conflict if the Monitoring Officer defines the remit, supplies the evidence, receives the report, manages the procedure and controls what happens next.

The external report placed the legal and procedural correctness of the Monitoring Officer's advice outside its scope. It then recommended a finding against the councillor who challenged that advice.

EET asked why Mr Ionta did not withdraw from managing the complaint and whether an unconnected monitoring officer from another authority had been considered. These are questions about institutional impartiality, not the merits of the complaint against Cllr Ames.

The Council declined to answer them.

A participant proposed as judge

The proposed panel consists of Cllrs **John Beckett** (RA Auriol), **Alan Williamson** (RA West Ewell) and **Julian Freeman** (LibDem College), with Cllr **Rachel King** (RA Town) named as reserve.

Cllr Beckett is scheduled to chair it.

But Cllr Beckett participated in the January exchange which the panel will be required to assess.

When Cllr Ames questioned why the Rainbow information had been withheld, Cllr Beckett defended confidentiality on the basis that private companies would not want their financial information published. Cllr Dallen immediately told him that he was right.

Cllr Beckett's intervention is quoted in the independent investigation report.

This does not prove that he has predetermined whether Cllr Ames breached the Code. Nevertheless, appointing someone who participated in the underlying dispute to chair the subsequent disciplinary hearing creates an obvious appearance problem.

EET asked whether all panel members had confirmed that they had not predetermined the complaint and why Cllr Beckett had been selected despite his involvement.

The Council declined to answer.

Hearing behind closed doors

The Council has announced in advance that the hearing will not be webcast and that "all evidence shall be received and heard in exempt session".

Some evidence about individual councillors may lawfully require protection. It does not follow that the whole hearing must be secret.

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ISSN 2753-2771

The incident occurred during a public meeting recorded on the Council's webcast. The complaint, the investigation and the proposed hearing concern the conduct of elected representatives performing public duties.

The Council has not identified which statutory exemption justifies excluding the public from the entire proceeding or whether the required public-interest assessment has been undertaken.

It has also declined to identify the sanctions constitutionally available to the panel if it finds a breach.

The Council's response invokes "applicable confidentiality requirements" without identifying what those requirements are or explaining why they prevent answers about jurisdiction, procedure and panel powers.

Complaints against Dallen

The contrast with complaints against Cllr Dallen is increasingly difficult to ignore.

Cllr Ames says that he made a complaint against Cllr Dallen arising from the same January meeting. Among other matters, it challenged Cllr Dallen's use of the chair to prevent continued scrutiny of a decision in which he had participated.

That complaint was rejected without an equivalent external investigation.

A complaint from a member of the public against Cllr Dallen was also reportedly rejected.

Cllr Ames has also made a complaint concerning Cllr Dallen's reported participation in a panel dealing with a complaint against the Chief Executive about the Rainbow Leisure Centre urgent decision.

His case is that Cllr Dallen's direct involvement in approving that decision created a conflict when he subsequently helped consider a complaint about the Chief Executive's account of it.

EET does not suggest that any complaint against Cllr Dallen must be upheld. Different complaints can properly receive different assessments and outcomes.

The issue is whether they have been examined with the same willingness to commit time and external resources as Cllr Dallen's complaint against Cllr Ames.

The Council could have answered that concern by publishing anonymised information about receipt dates, assessment dates, reasons for decisions and outcomes. Instead, it has invoked a blanket principle of silence.

Confidentiality or avoidance?

There are legitimate reasons for protecting information about unresolved complaints. Premature disclosure can damage reputations, discourage witnesses and undermine a fair investigation.

But confidentiality should protect the integrity of a process, not conceal whether a proper process exists.

EET did not ask the Council to decide publicly whether either Cllr Ames or Cllr Dallen had breached the Code. It asked:

- who exercised the power to refer the Ames complaint to a hearing;
- where that referral was recorded;
- whether the Independent Person was consulted;
- how the Monitoring Officer's involvement was managed;
- why a participant in the original incident was selected to chair the hearing;
- why the whole hearing was designated private in advance;
- what powers and sanctions the panel possesses; and
- how the Council ensures that complaints are prioritised consistently.

None of those questions required the Council to reveal confidential witness evidence or prejudge an allegation.

A response sent within 45 minutes which simply restates a policy of not commenting creates the impression that the Council did not attempt to distinguish questions about confidential merits from questions about public governance.

Standards or selective discipline?

The case against Cllr Ames is not fabricated. His language became personal and intemperate. An independent investigator has provided reasoned grounds for finding that it breached the Code.

But that is only one side of what happened.

Before Cllr Ames called Cllr Dallen arrogant, the chair had already declared that it was "the chairman's meeting" and terminated further discussion of an issue involving his own earlier decision. After the insult, he intensified the same assertion with the words: "It is my meeting."

Cllr Ames failed to convert his legitimate concern into the formal point of order it should have been. Cllr Dallen failed to recognise that the proper response was to obtain a ruling and consider relinquishing the chair to the vice-chair. The Monitoring Officer failed to guide either of them towards that procedure.

Yet only Cllr Ames's failure has been externally investigated and sent towards a disciplinary hearing.

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ISSN 2753-2771

The legitimacy of any finding against him depends upon the legitimacy of the process used to determine it.

A Council cannot demand meticulous respect for standards from an opposition councillor while treating its own compliance with constitutional gateways, impartial adjudication and transparent decision-making as matters upon which it will say nothing.

Nor can confidentiality be allowed to make unequal treatment impossible to test.

Different complaints can properly have different outcomes. A pattern of different outcomes does not prove political bias. But where a complaint by Cllr Dallen against a Labour opposition councillor receives an external investigation and formal hearing while complaints against Cllr Dallen are rejected or apparently progress no further, the Council must provide enough procedural information to demonstrate that the difference results from evidence and established criteria rather than identity or influence.

The unanswered question is no longer merely whether Cllr Ames spoke disrespectfully to Cllr Dallen. It is whether EEBC has constructed a fair and constitutionally valid process for deciding that question, while applying the same standards to the person whose conduct and chairmanship provoked the dispute.

By refusing to answer, the Council has not protected public confidence in its standards regime. It has deepened the doubts surrounding it.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Epsom and Ewell’s rock history goes under the hammer

30 September 2026



Rare posters from Ewell Technical College (today’s NESCOT) concerts featuring Nick Drake, Genesis, Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin are among more than 300 pieces of music memorabilia being auctioned from the collection of industry veteran **Lindsay Brown**.

A remarkable collection chronicling both Ewell’s place in British rock history and one man’s five-decade career in the music industry is to be sold at auction next month.

More than 300 posters, records, autographs, backstage passes and other pieces assembled by Lindsay Brown will go under the hammer at Omega Auctions in Merseyside on Tuesday 15th September.

Mr Brown began his music industry career in 1969 as social secretary at Ewell Technical College – now part of Nescot – where he helped bring emerging and established performers to the college.

The venue hosted concerts by artists including Deep Purple, Black Sabbath, Caravan, Taste, Genesis, Nick Drake and Atomic Rooster. Other celebrated acts associated with the college’s musical heyday included Led Zeppelin, King Crimson and Queen.

“It was a thrilling time to be involved in music,” Mr Brown told the Epsom and Ewell Times. “The great artists of the day were available for all to see. Hendrix, The Doors and Led Zeppelin, to name but a few.

“New artists were emerging all the time, some of which were booked to support at Ewell – Genesis, Black Sabbath, King Crimson, Queen and the now legendary Nick Drake.”

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ISSN 2753-2771

Mr Brown said the college became an important stop on the national concert circuit because successive social secretaries and entertainment committee members were adept both at securing major performers and identifying artists with the potential to become stars.

The college was also well placed near venues including the Toby Jug in Tolworth and the Fox Club in Croydon, with London's music clubs within easy reach.

"Many managers and agents would offer their talent and new signings for support slots at Ewell," he recalled.

Among the most valuable lots is an exceptionally rare poster advertising an Ewell Technical College concert by Atomic Rooster, Genesis and Nick Drake on 24th January 1970. It is expected to sell for more than £5,000.

Posters featuring Drake are particularly scarce because of his reluctance to perform live. The auction house believes the Ewell poster may be the first example of its kind to reach the open market.

Another lot is a small poster advertising what is described as the final public concert of Drake's career, held at Ewell Technical College on 25th June 1970. It has an estimated value of more than £2,000.

A red-and-gold poster by artist David Arnott, produced for a college performance by Black Sabbath supporting Caravan, is expected to fetch more than £1,000. An Arnott poster for Deep Purple's appearance at Ewell Tech on 18th April 1970 is being offered together with a ticket from the concert.

A framed 1968 Ewell Technical College poster originally advertising The Yardbirds is also expected to attract considerable interest. Following changes to the group, the concert instead featured an early incarnation of Led Zeppelin before a reported audience of just 150 people. The poster is estimated to sell for more than £2,000.

Mr Brown retains especially fond memories of concerts by Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple and Taste, although he said Caravan – which appeared at Ewell on several occasions – was the venue's most successful act.

"Seeing a very early King Crimson concert was a real privilege," he added.

After leaving Ewell Tech, Mr Brown went on to hold senior positions at Red Bus, MAM, Rock Exchange, Polydor and Eagle Rock Entertainment. As managing director of Eagle Rock, he signed The Rolling Stones for visual rights.

Across his career he worked with artists including Kate Bush, Elvis Costello, Barclay James Harvest, Dr Feelgood, 10cc, The Cure, Van Morrison, Björk, Alice Cooper, Queen, Jeff Beck and Simple Minds.

The wider collection reflects those associations. It includes authenticated Beatles autographs expected to fetch more than £3,000; a Fender Telecaster signed by Keith Richards; Rolling Stones autographs including that of Brian Jones; a 1969 Woodstock ticket; and Kate Bush tour posters, clothing, passes and merchandise.

A Queen collection relating to the band's 1976 Hyde Park concert includes autographs, a framed show flyer and a map of the band's route formerly owned by their driver. It is valued at more than £3,000.

Also for sale is a three-foot-high poster for the New York Dolls' first UK performance at the Rainbow Room at Biba in November 1973 – a concert attended by figures who would later help shape British punk.

A 1969 flyer for the Toby Jug Blues Club in Tolworth features Led Zeppelin's name misspelt and is valued at more than £500.

Although Mr Brown is parting with most of the collection, he has retained six particularly personal pieces. These include a poster from his farewell Caravan show at Ewell in 1970, a set of Rolling Stones autographs, a Kate Bush tour poster, a Barclay James Harvest gold disc and sales plaque, and a poster personally dedicated to him by Jeff Beck.

"It's sad to see the collection go, but I am thrilled by the continued worldwide interest in Ewell Tech's heritage, told through its posters, many of which were designed by the Redhill artist David Arnott," he said.

"Knowing these posters are going to good homes is very gratifying and lets the story continue to survive."

He believes collectors have an important role in protecting evidence of performances and events which could otherwise disappear from public memory.

"Without people keeping what might seem at the time inconsequential – tickets, stubs, flyers and so on – many of these shows would be completely forgotten in future years."

The collection, entitled "Time Has Told Me – 50 Years in Music", will be auctioned by Omega Auctions on Tuesday 15th September, with a public preview on Monday 14th September. The catalogue and bidding details are available from www.omegaauctions.co.uk.

1968 – 1971 Ewell Tech. Gig List – click here

Julie Kapsalis, CEO of NESCOT, responded to this story and told the Epsom and Ewell Times: "Music continues to be an important part of Nescot. The Entitled Sons played a gig at the college last year and Bazil Meade ran a masterclass on gospel music. Our music department also trains young people to enter the sector and this year they showcased their talents on the community stage at The Epsom Derby Festival. We now have a DJ club and college bands who regularly perform at college and external venues."

Lionel Blackman

Epsom and Ewell acknowledges with thanks the main contributions and research undertaken by Faye Blaylock of www.jvpublicity.com for this article

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

26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

Photo: The band Barclay James Harvest with Lindsay Brown: Left to right: Wooly Wolstenholme, John Lees, Lindsay Brown, Les Holroyd, Mel Pritchard

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