Casting vote approves 9 new homes in Epsom

Tripling the number of houses on a brownfield Epsom site vexed Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Planning Committee on 10th July.

The Application from Nuro Homes Limited proposed the erection of 9 new dwellings on adjacent plots of land acquired by the developers in the Whitehorse Drive and Bucknills Close roads of Epsom off the Dorking Road.

A previous application for this development had been refused by the Planning Committee in April 2024 and the developers appealed to a Planning Inspector. The appeal was refused where the Inspector was in agreement with the Council's refusal on the ground of highway safety but the objection concerning hazards in waste collection the Inspector stated could be addressed.

A revised application came before the Planning committee with a widened access from the development onto Whitehorse Drive. RA Councillors Neil Dallen, Jan Mason, Phil Neale and Humphrey Reynolds were not convinced that the revisions were sufficient to address safety concerns for pedestrians and in particular school girls attending Rosebery School in Whitehorse Drive.

Kate Chinn (Labour Court) emphasised the need for more housing – though this development was not providing anything affordable for those on low incomes, she added. With the improved access she stated people are mindful and the fears of pedestrian vehicular collisions should not be overstated.

The officers of the Council recommended the Application be granted.

Cllr Dallen proposed the Application be refused. The Chair of the Committee, Cllr Steven McCormick (RA Woodcote and Langley Vale) required him to cite the planning policies that justified refusal. As Cllr Dallen floundered through his papers an officer identified the reasons given at the meeting that refused the original application in 2024 and Cllr Dallen repeated them.

Cllr Julian Freeman (Liberal Democrat College) questioned the procedure of having a vote on a motion to refuse when the matter to be voted on was the recommendation to grant.

In a bizarre dance on the voting 2 voted in favour of refusal and two voted against refusal. The Chair cast his vote against refusal. This was followed by a vote on granting the Planning Application with 4 voting in favour and 4 voting against. The Chair voted in favour of granting the Application and therefore the officers' recommendation was carried.

Image: Top plan original with narrow access on Whitehorse Drive. Bottom plan revised plan showing proposed housing and widened access. Epsom and Ewell Borough Council planning documents.

Epsom Charity Hears Students' Plea: Cut the Cost of School Uniforms

As school doors close for the summer, an Epsom-based charity has shared powerful testimony from local students who say the cost of school uniform is putting their families under severe financial strain.

The Good Company, known for running the Epsom & Ewell Foodbank and wider anti-poverty initiatives, has been working with five secondary schools in the borough through its 'Cost of the School Day' project. Its aim: to listen directly to pupils on free school meals and help schools better understand the hidden costs that prevent some children from fully participating in school life.

"The most important takeaway for us has been listening to the voices of these students, and their personal journeys," said one participating Deputy Headteacher. "It is so powerful to hear from the students themselves."

A recurring theme across all schools was the financial pressure of uniforms — particularly the insistence on expensive, branded items.

"A problem I experienced when I was new to the school is the cost of uniform itself. It put my parents into the red," said Mike, a Year 11 student.

The findings echo national research. According to the Children's Society, the average cost of a secondary school uniform in the UK is £422 per year per child, while for primary pupils it is £287. A 2020 survey by the Department for Education found branded

items account for a significant proportion of the cost, often required to be bought from a single supplier.

In response to these concerns, the UK Government introduced the Education (Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms) Act 2021, requiring schools to keep branded items "to a minimum" and ensure uniforms are affordable. But campaigners say implementation remains patchy.

Local Action, National Relevance

The Good Company's report suggests that real change comes when schools engage with students directly and respond with practical steps. Among the suggestions from students and staff were:

- Reducing the number of compulsory branded items
- Expanding second-hand uniform schemes
- Partnering with local charities to provide direct financial support
- Promoting understanding among staff about the reasons students may not always comply with uniform rules

The charity is calling on more schools to engage with its free online resources and consider reviewing their own uniform policies.

"Let's keep working together to make schools a place where all children feel they belong, no matter their financial background," said Tom Sefton, Director of Participation and Prevention at The Good Company.

More Information

Schools or individuals interested in learning more or accessing free training resources can visit: goodcompany.org.uk/cost-of-the-school-day

To donate to the charity's School Uniform Fundraiser, visit the same website and click on the pink donation button.

Coroner visits Surrey cricket hero's mental decline

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

of England's current generation of batters.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Absence of CEO on audit Red Flag causes an outrage

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

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

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

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

However, due to another commitment of the Chief Executive on the 17th July, the Chair had invited her to attend the September

meeting of the Committee. Further, he assured Cllr Ames, the Committee could defer any particular matters requiring the CEO's attention to the next meeting.

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

His frustration was duly "noted".

Related reports:

Annual audit of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

"Audit and Scrutiny" under scrutiny

Local Audit meet: unexpectedly interesting...

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

Image EEBC YouTube. Cllr Ames.

Be positive about B negative blood donations

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

Stocks of B Negative Blood Hit Concerning Lows

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

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

Local Appeal and Priority Access for Donors

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

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

Why Your Donation Matters

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

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

How to Register

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

Donors can:

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

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

Local Voices

Gerry Gogarty, Director of Blood Supply at NHS Blood and Transplant, said:

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

The Bigger Picture

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Tale of Two Plans

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

protections.

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

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

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

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

Related reports:

Epsom & Ewell's Local Plan under the Green microscope

Epsom and Ewell Local Plan Submitted for Examination

The Local Plan plot thickens after revised NPPF

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

Epsom Town Centre Masterplan Unveiled

Mind the Epsom Town Centre Masterplan!

and many more....

Epsom and Ewell will judge change at their leisure

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

Why the Council Doesn't Run Itself

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

Transparency and Value for Money-Still in Question

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

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

A Closer Look at Places Leisure's Reputation

The local press release paints Places Leisure as a community-minded organisation, but reviews from employees and users tell a

different story. Feedback on sites like Indeed and Breakroom varies significantly. Some praise friendly culture and flexible working, while others warn of poor management:

- "Management loved to bully young lifeguards... poor pay"
- "Awful communication, awful leadership... spend too much time fixing their mistakes"

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

The Case of the 'Midnight Lane-Booking' Mystery

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

A Moment for Accountability

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

The Bottom Line

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

Time—and transparency—will tell.

Image: Credit Mertbiol Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fly-tipping in Epsom and Ewell part of national problem

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

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

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

How the Scams Work

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

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

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

Fly-Tipping in Epsom & Ewell: A Local Problem

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

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

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

- Old London Road
- Hook Road
- Christ Church Road

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

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

How to Avoid Illegal Waste Carriers

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

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

How to Report Fly-Tipping in Epsom

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

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

Phone: 01372 732000

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

A Shared Responsibility

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

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

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

Image from Pixabay licence free

SENDing Pupils to Epsom's Mainstream Schools?

The national conversation around how best to educate children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) has intensified, following proposals by Labour's Stephen Kinnock to increase the number of SEND pupils placed in mainstream schools. The aim, he says, is to promote inclusion and reduce the pressure on stretched specialist placements. But as the Government looks to reshape the SEND landscape — and amid growing concerns about funding — the question for residents of Epsom and Ewell is this: should more children with SEND be placed in local mainstream schools?

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

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

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

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

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

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

The reality is that the success of inclusion depends heavily on how it is implemented. A mainstream classroom with adequate resources, specialist support, and small group instruction may serve some SEND pupils well. But without those conditions — and



without proper funding and planning — the risk is that no one in the classroom gets the education they need.

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

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

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

Image: Rosebery School, Epsom. Google.

Related reports:

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

Surrey SEND parents owed money

Epsom SEND case highlights a national problem