



Neighbour Area Committees in Surrey

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Surrey author's unexpected journey to global football goodwill

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

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

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

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

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

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

He ended up sponsoring the *Berry Town* Cup — awarded to the runners-up of the Pohnpei Premier League. The main trophy had already been sponsored, so he took the next one available. Only later did he realise the league was often improvised, with teams struggling to assemble due to travel costs. "But none of that mattered. I just wanted to help," he says. He also sent copies of the books to local schools, where they became unexpected resources for children learning English.

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

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

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

Sam Jones – Reporter



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



“Us and Them” visualises connections with former Epsom patients

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sam Jones – Reporter



See BBC coverage here:



Disability group recreates Victorian hospital images

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

Call for public ownership of asylum cemetery

Related reports in Epsom and Ewell Times:

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

Petition to reclaim Horton Cemetery from property speculator

Local community gathered at Horton Cemetery

Another Horton Cemetery Life Story

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

MP warns as 3,600 Epsom homes face fuel poverty

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

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

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

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

The Government has argued that its energy efficiency targets remain in place and that the Budget decisions reflect wider fiscal pressures. Ministers say additional measures to stabilise wholesale prices and support low-income households will continue. But campaigners and industry groups have expressed concern that cutting insulation programmes risks higher long-term costs for both consumers and the state, as poorly insulated homes require more energy to heat.

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

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

Sam Jones - Reporter



Young Surrey volunteers help shape new neuroinclusive travel app

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Aubin is free to download from app stores.

Sam Jones - Reporter





Image – Surrey County Council news

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

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

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

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

Governance of Nonsuch Park

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

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

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

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

Sam Jones – Reporter





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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sam Jones - Reporter





Surrey consults on next year's budget

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sam Jones - Reporter



Image: Surrey Budget graphic from Surrey County Council Youtube video

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

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

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

Local and national pressures

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

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

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

Prevention schemes and charity support

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

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

A wider Surrey picture

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

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

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

Sam Jones – Reporter



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British Railways' 200 year celebration train coming to Epsom

Free exhibition train to steam into Tattenham Corner

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

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

What visitors can expect

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

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

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

Tattenham Corner's royal railway history

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

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

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

A milestone for Britain's railways

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

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



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

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

Rail Minister Lord Peter Hendy called Britain "the birthplace of the modern railway" and said the touring train aims to inspire a new generation of engineers, drivers, conductors and technicians.

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

Tickets

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

Sam Jones - Reporter

