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

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Epsom banking on more women business owners

24 June 2025



Epsom Metro Bank's Local Director, Sammie Zejnuli champions the need for more women business owners

Women-owned businesses are a significant and growing force in the economy, with women entrepreneurs leading a diverse range of industries and contributing to innovation and economic growth. In 2022, the Rose Review reported that a greater number of women in the UK founded more businesses than ever before, despite immense economic uncertainty.

While over twice as many female-led businesses were founded in 2022 than in 2018, we still need to go further because female entrepreneurs represent huge economic potential for the UK: £250 billion could be added to the UK economy if women matched men in starting and scaling businesses.

The Rose Review identified four key areas that women reported they needed more support in to be successful in business: mentoring, access to funding, networking and childcare.

I have witnessed first-hand some of the issues that women face when starting up a new business – particularly around access to funding. Women-led businesses often struggle to secure funding compared to their male counterparts, facing a "funding gap" at every stage of their business journey, and women are often more reluctant than men to take on debt to start up their own business.

There are organisations which can exclusively help women starting out. Both the Women in Business – the UK's leading women in business network – and many chambers of commerce have women in business groups centred around local meetings. While the Women's Business Network hosts online meetings every fortnight. For start-up funding there is the Female Founders Fund, Innovate UK and the Enterprise Hub, but grants will be subject to criteria.

My role is all about relationship banking which is central to the customer service we offer at Metro Bank. We have local directors and local business managers in each of our stores just to support the local businesses in our communities. We are active in our local communities and offer a unique perspective – working with key business influencers to help our business customers access what they need to grow and succeed.

Personally, I have seen that women in business prefer a warm introduction. Having someone they can talk to face to face about any business concern is really appreciated by our female customers. We can help our female business customers create warmer introductions to the advisers they need – be that angel investors, accountants and solicitors, to name a few.

Here in Epsom, some of the most successful women business owners are solicitors, as well as those in tech and the beauty industry.

We regularly hold networking events in our stores for local business owners and I would encourage any woman thinking about starting up a business to come along and have a chat with the women who have made the leap and can offer help and advice at every stage of business development.

Our experience also shows us that women can prefer to deal with women. Emergent female business owners often speak of their frustration at not being understood or even believed by the men they have dealt with in trying to get their new business off the ground.

We know our focus on a more personal approach is working and our relationship banking has helped us cultivate more female business customers – one in four of our sole proprietors are women and nearly one in five of all new business current accounts were opened by women last year.

Every woman's path is different and the hard work and challenges should not be underestimated. But the chance to be financially independent, in control of your work-life balance, and the immense job satisfaction is surely worth the chance. So, if that business idea has been buzzing around your head and you are thinking about taking a leap – go for it.

Sammie Zejnuli, Local Director, Epsom Metro Bank

Gatwick Diamond authority denied

24 June 2025

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Merging Reigate and Banstead Borough Council with its neighbour Crawley has been ruled out – in a decision that has left drivers behind the move “disappointed” with the Government. This week leaders from the 11 boroughs and districts, together with the county council, were told the Government planned to survey residents over merging into either two or three mega councils.

The council was told it would not be allowed to move forward with its preferred option because it had also backed the creation of three unitaries – and the rules stated councils could only support one idea, and they had to cover all of Surrey. The government also said the plan lacked enough detail on cost savings. They had wanted to form, at £13 billion plus, the largest economy in the sub-region, and to be conjoined by the world’s busiest single runway airport in Gatwick.

The news was relayed to the councils by the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, Jim McMahon. He said: “I understand this will be disappointing; however, this consultation process allows for consultees to comment on whether the Secretary of State should implement one or other of the two proposals received, including the proposal co-signed by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council. If, in the future, there remains an interest in changing the boundary between Surrey and West Sussex, there are other mechanisms for doing so and this process does not prevent that. I also note your desire for the Gatwick Diamond economic area to be within the area of one Strategic Authority so as to best provide for economic growth. I want to make clear that the decision not to include your proposal in the consultation does not preempt devolution options for the wider area, including establishing or expanding a Strategic Authority that includes all councils making up the Gatwick Diamond.”

Leader of Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, Councillor Richard Biggs said: “We are disappointed that the Government will not be including our joint proposal with Crawley within the consultation. I am pleased that we took the opportunity to highlight to Government the important contribution that our combined area makes to the national economy, as well as its economic growth potential. While we accept the Government’s decision, we will continue to advocate for joined up economic and infrastructure planning and investment across both authorities. In terms of local government reorganisation, we are now focused on trying to secure the best available model of local government in Surrey – which we continue to strongly believe is three unitary councils. A three unitary model in Surrey will achieve the best balance of delivering value for money for our residents whilst maintaining strong local connections and identities and delivering high-quality service.”

Chris Caulfield

Epsom and Ewell Times adds:

The **Gatwick Diamond** is a term used to describe a key economic area in the South East of England, centred around **Gatwick Airport**. It includes parts of **Surrey and West Sussex**, notably towns such as **Crawley, Reigate, Redhill, Horsham, and Haywards Heath**.

Key features of the Gatwick Diamond:

- **Economic significance**: It is one of the UK’s most dynamic business regions, home to over **45,000 businesses** and supporting around **500,000 jobs**.
- **Transport hub**: Gatwick Airport, one of the UK’s busiest international airports, makes the area a major transport and logistics hub.
- **Sectors**: It hosts a mix of industries, including **aviation, engineering, financial services, professional services, and advanced manufacturing**.
- **Strategic location**: Situated between **London and the South Coast**, with excellent rail, road, and air links.

Purpose of the name:

The term is used by **local authorities, business partnerships, and regional planners** to promote regional cooperation, attract investment, and plan infrastructure in a way that supports sustainable economic growth. The **Gatwick Diamond Initiative** is a public-private partnership that actively markets the region for inward investment.

So, when Reigate and Banstead refer to the **“Gatwick Diamond economic area”**, they are aligning with this identity and economic cluster, arguing that the area’s interests may be best served by a unified strategic authority.

Additional reporting – Sam Jones.

Gatwick Airport (Credit Gatwick Airport)

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Redesigning the Surrey skyways?

24 June 2025



Quicker, Quieter Flights on the Horizon for Heathrow and Gatwick Passengers and Neighbours

Passengers at Heathrow and Gatwick are set to enjoy quicker flights and fewer delays under new government plans to redesign flight paths, aimed at modernising one of the world's busiest airspaces.

Announced on Monday (2 June), the largest overhaul of UK airspace since the 1950s will prioritise London's crowded skies, promising more efficient, direct routes for aircraft. The changes are expected to support expansion at Heathrow and growth at Gatwick, while also cutting delays and noise pollution for communities under the flight paths.

Transport officials say the new UK Airspace Design Service (UKADS) will be fully operational by the end of 2025, run by NATS (En Route) plc (NERL). With 2.7 million flights expected this year alone, the new system will help manage soaring demand more sustainably, with fewer planes circling while waiting to land.

Local residents living near Heathrow and Gatwick could benefit from quieter skies, as modernised 'skyways' will allow aircraft to climb more quickly after take-off and descend more smoothly, reducing noise and emissions.

Heathrow's expansion, including its long-discussed third runway, is expected to generate over 100,000 new jobs, while Gatwick is also poised to gain from increased passenger capacity and investment. Aviation Minister Mike Kane said the changes would "turbocharge growth in the aviation industry", with faster and more reliable journeys for holidaymakers and business travellers alike.

Local airports, airlines and residents' groups are watching closely, with officials promising that community consultation will remain central to the process. The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) will oversee the implementation, ensuring transparency and evidence-based decisions.

Rob Bishton, Chief Executive of the CAA, said: "Modernising our airspace is key to enabling growth and helping mitigate impacts like noise."

Martin Rolfe, CEO at NATS, added: "We have one of the busiest and most complex airspaces in the world. To maintain our performance as traffic grows towards 3 million flights per year, we have to modernise. UKADS is a crucial step."

Karen Dee, Chief Executive of AirportsUK, called the move "a vital step in making our airspace fit for the 21st century," while Tim Alderslade of Airlines UK said the changes were "long overdue" and would reduce delays, improve resilience, and lower carbon emissions.

The government's plans also pave the way for future air travel technologies such as drones and flying taxis, with London's airspace set to lead the way.

Local residents can expect more information as the CAA and NATS engage with communities to design the new routes, with a full consultation expected by September 2025.

The Department for Transport says it is determined to strike the right balance between economic growth and protecting communities from excessive noise and pollution.

Notes to Readers:

- UKADS will be led by NATS (En Route) plc (NERL).
- Heathrow's expansion plans, including a potential third runway, will benefit from the new airspace design.
- The initial focus is on modernising London's airspace, but future phases could benefit airports nationwide.
- A consultation on the regulatory changes will begin later this year.

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Strikes could still impact half-term Gatwick flights

24 June 2025



Gatwick Airport's largest carrier EasyJet is expecting to run its full schedule during the busy half term period despite industrial action taking place by their oil refuellers. Strike action by baggage handlers, which would have run at the same time, was suspended to allow Unite members to vote on new terms – lessening any potential disruptions.

More than 100 Red Handling workers at Gatwick Airport including baggage handling, check-in and flight dispatchers had been set to walk out over what they said were late and missing pension payments – but this has been put on hold for at least a fortnight after the union Unite received proof pension contributions had been paid. Staff at Redline Oil which fuels easyJet, Air India, Uganda Airlines, will continue taking action between Friday May 23 and Tuesday May 27 after unanimously rejecting the company's pay offer.

A London Gatwick spokesperson said: "We are aware of the proposed industrial action from Redline Oil and are working closely with them and our airlines to minimise impacts to passengers. Passengers should contact their airline directly for more information."

A spokesperson at RED Handling UK said: "We welcome Unite's decision to postpone industrial action for two weeks pending a final ballot. We are pleased to have responded positively and fully to all historical issues raised, resolving every point quickly and collaboratively. We will continue to work with Unite the Union to work towards a solution to ending the dispute. Throughout the process, we have been honest and transparent with the Union and all of our staff, keeping them fully up-to-date with progress and timescales. We committed to supporting them and have put systems in place to ensure a proactive and open dialogue with our teams in the future. We are hugely grateful for the support of the team and for their commitment and positivity, which has helped us to achieve our best performing 'on time performance' for the period in company's history."

Unite has said Red Handling also agreed to cover the loss of interest on any contributions not paid and an independent audit carried out to ensure missing pensions contributions does not happen again. Regional officer Ben Davis said: "Red Handling has returned to negotiations and made an improved offer and therefore Unite has suspended strike action to allow members to be balloted on the proposals."

The remaining day of strike action by baggage handlers on June 1 is still due to go ahead pending the outcome of the ballot.

Gatwick Airport (image Gatwick)

Surrey Uni knows the display way to San Jose

24 June 2025



A radical new approach to display screen technology could halve production costs, reduce harmful waste, and deliver brighter, more energy-efficient screens for our smartphones, smartwatches, and even certain medical devices, say researchers at the University of Surrey.

Most display screens use complex circuits made up of tiny switches called thin-film transistors (TFTs), which control when each pixel turns on or off and how bright it should be. However, building these circuits requires a lot of time, energy, water and harsh chemicals, making the manufacturing process expensive and resource-heavy.

At this year's Display Week 2025 Technical Symposium in San Jose, California (11-16 May), Dr Radu Sporea and Dr Eva Bestelink will unveil their latest research, based on a new type of electronic component called a multimodal transistor (MMT). Originally designed as a hardware AI computing element, the MMT also has the ability to simplify display circuits while improving performance and sustainability.

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Dr Radu Sporea, Associate Professor in Semiconductor Devices at the University of Surrey, said:

“Our invention challenges decades of industry practice by embracing properties usually seen as flaws. In most displays, engineers try to eliminate the energy barriers that form where metals meet semiconductors because they restrict current flow. But instead of working around them, we’ve made those barriers central to how our transistors operate.

“Using these effects deliberately, we’ve shown that the electronic circuits at the heart of display screens can be made with fewer components and processing steps – reducing waste, cutting costs and improving performance. And because it works with existing materials and tools, it’s a smarter, more sustainable upgrade for the screens we use every day. For the user, the reduced power requirements in operation will also mean significantly improved battery life.”

The MMT’s unique operation enables extremely compact, high-performance circuits that are particularly well suited to devices where size, energy use and image quality are critical – such as smartphones, tablets, smartwatches, automotive displays, and future wearable devices.

The technology is already showing promise in simulations, with real-world applications in AMOLED and microLED displays – two of the most advanced and rapidly growing areas of screen technology. It can also be integrated into current production lines with minimal disruption.

Dr Eva Bestelink, Senior Research Fellow at the University of Surrey’s Advanced Technology Institute, said:

“I’ve been working on this technology since my undergraduate days at Surrey, where I had the idea to develop a transistor based on neural behaviour, so seeing it evolve into something with real-world potential is incredibly rewarding. We’ve shown that it’s possible to rethink how displays are built without starting from scratch.

“The MMT lets us design circuits that perform better while also being cleaner and cheaper to make. That’s a win for manufacturers, a win for users and a win for the environment. Beyond displays, it could also have major applications in areas like microfluidics, imaging arrays and hardware AI. We’re still actively researching the AI potential, but the implication for revolutionising manufacturing is clear – especially if we’re to achieve Net Zero.”

Dr Bestelink and Dr Sporea will present their research on 15 and 16 May at this year’s Display Week 2025 Technical Symposium in San Jose, California. Their invention – the multimodal transistor (MMT), now granted a US patent – builds on more than two decades of pioneering research in thin-film electronics at the University of Surrey.

Image: By Redd Angelo in Technology CC0 license

McDonalds run out of Loch Fyne, Cobham

24 June 2025



Plans for a McDonald’s in Cobham have been thrown out.

McDonald’s had hoped to find a new home on the former Loch Fyne Restaurant in Portsmouth Road on the outskirts of Cobham. Members of Elmbridge Borough Council’s planning committee rejected the application by majority vote on April 24, against officer’s recommendations to approve.

Councillors were unhappy that the new McDonald’s would be within walking distance of schools and near an area of high social and economic deprivation. “McDonald’s isn’t a proper choice,” Cllr Lawrence Wells said, “most of it is ultra-processed food.”

The Liberal Democrat councillor for Cobham and Downside argued: “To young people and families who have very little access to healthy food or treats, a McDonald’s will be like the witch’s candy house to Hansel and Gretel.”

North of the potential McDonald’s site, argued Cllr Wells, there is a socially and economically deprived area between River View Gardens and Northfield Road. He claimed the 650-odd houses come in the fifth most underprivileged sub-ward in the whole of Surrey.

But Cllr Ashley Tilling accused groups of “middle class snobbery” in opposing the scheme. He said it was unlikely there would be such opposition if a Gail’s or a Megan’s decided to open there.

Councillors debated whether it was appropriate for a fast food restaurant and take away should be in walking distance from schools, parks and a children’s home. Surrey County Council had also raised concerns about the potential health impacts the new burger branch could have, being so close to areas where children congregate.

“You have a duty to protect the most vulnerable, you have the duty to protect the health and wellbeing of your constituents,” Mr Sabi said, speaking for residents against the scheme at the meeting. He argued the council was using a London yardstick for walking distance to fast food places for a Surrey borough.

Fearing the chicken nugget chain would exacerbate issues of obesity and not promote healthy living, planning members

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refused the scheme. Officers said it was a matter of judgement and there was no evidence to suggest the American burger branch would make people less healthy.

Other councillors warned “we don’t live in a totalitarian state where people are told what they must and mustn’t eat” or that it is even their role on the planning committee to “combat obesity”.

Ward councillor Katerina Lusk acknowledged the old Loch Fyne Restaurant is in “disrepair” and no other use has been found. Cllr Tilling also supported bringing the locally listed building “back to life” and re-using it in the community.

Despite the concerns, many people flagged the multi-million dollar company would bring huge financial benefits to the village, increasing visitors and supporting local business.

But Cllr Lusk highlighted the limited indoor dining options (60 covers) and proposed opening hours until midnight, which could mean it would be primarily used for takeaway. “More noise, more traffic and constant delivery movements- all spilling into an area already burdened with congestion and frequent flooding,” Cllr Lusk said.

Submitted last year, the application has been hugely contentious. Hundreds of objections flooded in from residents, including an online petition reaching over 34,000 signatures. A similar strength of feeling was also boosted from those who want to see a closer Happy Meal in Cobham.

McDonald’s has been approached for comment.

Related report:

Global fast-food giant targets Surrey village

Global fast-food giant targets Surrey village

24 June 2025



A global fast food giant could be coming to a Surrey village as a new McDonald’s restaurant and takeaway might get the go ahead. Despite being famed for its ‘Happy Meal’, some residents fear the American icon will be ‘detrimental to the health of Cobham”.

The popular burger and nugget chain is hoping to find a new home in the former Loch Fyne Restaurant on Portsmouth Road, Cobham. The fate of the application will be decided by Elmbridge Borough Council members at a planning meeting on April 24.

Planning officers have recommended McDonald’s gets the green light to transform the disused fish restaurant. Residents have railed against the scheme, with nearly 500 letters of objection sent to the council.

The village of Cobham was named as one of the most affluent communities in the county but the Northfield Estate, where the restaurant is proposed, is among Surrey’s poorest socio-economic areas.

Significant concern has been raised about the proposed distance (or lack of) to local schools and playgrounds nearby. Opponents have claimed the new branch will “encourage children to form unhealthy habits”, “exploit young people” who will eat at McDonald’s and add to the country’s obesity crisis.

People have said the new outlet will be “detrimental to the health of Cobham” and the impact “cannot be underestimated”. Lots of residents pointed out there is already an outlet at the M25 services, so they do not need another one closer to the village.

Wyndham Avenue park and Hamilton Ave play area, both managed by PA Housing, are just a four-minute walk away (321m) from the potential McDonald’s site. Felton Fleet Prep School, Cobham Free School and Cobham recreation ground are only a seven minute walk (482m) away from the fast food chain.

But planning officers said the nearest schools are not within a 400m radius walking distance to the site. The intervening A3 would be a “man-made barrier” to the fast food chain, officers reported, and the proposed restaurant is not on the main school route to Cobham Free School so children would be walking the opposite way.

Although the neighbouring petrol station has a Greggs, the proposed restaurant will not create a ‘cluster’ of takeaways. The nearest other takeaways are in Cobham’s centre some 700m away, according to the report.

Despite recognising local public health concern, officers found there is no evidence the multi-million fast food chain will have a detrimental impact on health in the neighbouring areas. National planning guidance says local authorities should refuse plans for takeaways near schools and where young people hang out. Surrey County Council’s public health team did not object to the new McDonald’s in principle.

Cobham residents launched a petition in May 2024 against the plans to open a new restaurant and takeaway. The petition, which has garnered over 34,000 signatures, calls for the site to be turned into a community hub instead. Concerns raised

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include increased traffic, litter, and potential impacts on the area's health and well-being.

Despite the concerns, many people flagged the multi-million dollar company would bring huge financial benefits to the village, increasing visitors and supporting local business. Others said the new 'Happy Meal' site could provide up to £60k a year in business rates for the council.

Supporters of the proposed McDonald's slammed the listed building as an "eyesore" and in need of "restoration". The new fast food outlet would employ around 120 people, which the company hopes to recruit from the local area, as well as offering training and career development.

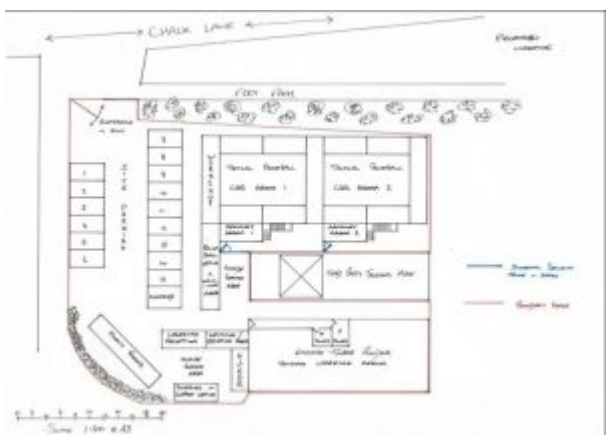
People said comments about the quality and 'wholesomeness' of the food is "irrelevant" as no one has to eat there. Those looking forward to the new branch said it would be a good place for young people to meet and socialise as well as providing more takeaway options.

According to the chain, the new restaurant would include both indoor and outdoor seating with space for 60 diners, 30 cars parking bays, two of which would be accessible and three with EV charging spaces. The American fast food branch is hoping to be open every day from 6am to 11pm.

McDonald's has been approached for further comment.

Paintball plans to entertain Epsom's youth

24 June 2025



Plans for a new paintball and laser tag centre have been put forward in a former farm building. The new play shooting centre could be launched at The Paddock on Langley Vale Road, Epsom.

The proposed play shooting range already has a name- dubbed 'PandaWarz'-and will offer Lasertag to the under 16's and Tactical Paintball to those 16 and over.

Developers claimed Epsom is a "thriving town with much to offer" but is "limited in leisure". Planning documents sent to the council read there are "minimal opportunities for young children and young adults" particularly when it comes to their "special annual celebrations", or birthdays.

Details of the scheme include changing the existing agricultural building into an indoor children's Lastertag arena. Two containers could also be installed, making closed arenas, along with a temporary roof covering for the indoor Tactical Paintball.

Planning documents said that "PandaWarz's objective is to modernise the game" by using military skills and techniques from close range to build up obstacles.

The equipment will be modernised and operating with magazines, according to the applicant. Planning documents read: "The games are tactical, not simply spraying paintballs and hoping to hit."

The two purpose play area will be made up of shipping containers, internal rooms, mazes and obstacles. Fine mesh is proposed to cover the arenas so no paintballs can be fired beyond the confines of the play area. A gantry has been designed over and around the arena with a temporary roof covering to protect both spectator and player from any weather.

Planning details read: "Twenty minutes running around a dark room filled with obstacles and UV reactive artwork shooting each other in teams. A successful way of both entertaining [children] and wearing them out!"

Noise will be reduced by containing the games within the existing building and as well as using the constructed containers and temporary roofing, the application states.

Car parking for up to 15 vehicles is included, with additional parking directed to the open, free roadside parking a short walk away on the Downs.

Locals can comment on the proposals until April 30 on the council's website. Epsom and Ewell Borough Council will decide the future of The Paddock site at a later date.

Proposed site layout. Epsom and Ewell planning documents.

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New funding to boost Surrey's businesses and economy

24 June 2025



Funding worth millions is now available from Surrey County Council for innovative ideas to drive growth across Surrey.

Businesses, employer representative groups and partner organisations are all invited to apply for investment from the new Economic Growth Fund.

Up to £7 million is available for this financial year – with grants awarded to those demonstrating how they will boost economic outcomes for the people, places and businesses of the county.

Applications for the first round are now open and due to close at the end of May **via the Business Surrey website**.

The launch comes as the Council also publishes **Surrey's Economic Growth Strategy 2025 to 2035**, which sets out the long-term focus and priorities to drive sustainable growth in the county for the next decade.

Matt Furniss, the Council's Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Economic Growth, said: *"This is a fantastic opportunity for businesses, training providers and partners to secure immediate investment in ideas to drive growth in Surrey.*

"We know that Surrey has a strong economy, contributing £50 billion a year to UK PLC. But the refreshed economic strategy highlights several challenges around start-ups, high-growth businesses, retaining talent and an increasing number of people out of work.

"The new Economic Growth Fund is one of the ways we can tackle those challenges while delivering benefits to the people, places and businesses across the county.

"Our ambition is simple: we want to position Surrey as one of the UK's leading regional economies while ensuring No One is Left Behind."

The Economic Growth Fund has been created by the Council in collaboration with employers from across the county via the One Surrey Growth Board and Business Leaders Forum.

The idea is to make it as simple and easy-as-possible for those looking to drive growth to apply for funding.

So, a range of funds, such as UK Shared Prosperity Funding from government, have been pooled together into a single application process.

The first round covers three areas:

- **Business Growth Grants** are designed to support companies scale up and create jobs. Match funding of between £10,000 and £50,000, covering 50% of project costs is available.
- The **Innovation Spaces Fund** focuses on physical infrastructure, such as training hubs, collaborative workspaces, and testing facilities. Bids of £50,000 and upwards are welcomed.
- The **Future Surrey Fund** will support a small number of high-quality innovative proposals that deliver economic impact at scale. It is open to anyone, including employer representative groups, local authorities, health bodies, research institutions and schools.

Those applying are encouraged to demonstrate how the bid delivers against the three priorities in the refreshed economic strategy – workforce and skills; business growth; and economic infrastructure in Surrey's communities.

The application process takes place across two stages, starting with an expression of interest.

Cllr Furniss added: *"As government looks to drive growth across the UK and devolve more powers to regions, it's vital that local authorities work closely with businesses to understand their demands.*

"Our aim is to ensure that Surrey is a major part of that story – and we'll work with partners to make the most of new opportunities to drive regional growth by meeting the demands of businesses.

Chris Hurren, Chair of the Surrey Business Leaders Forum, which is made up of more than 40 employers across the county, said: "*Growth in Surrey, like much of the country, has slowed in recent years. We can only tackle the challenges by working together while focusing on the needs of businesses and outcomes for our people and places.*

"The refreshed Economic Strategy, which is evidence-led and developed in partnership with businesses, employer representative groups, academia and other key stakeholders, is very much the starting point of our journey.

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"Together, we're determined to drive forward this ambitious agenda and deliver our ambition to benefit our residents, businesses and wider communities."

For full details, including criteria and closing dates, visit **www.businesssurrey.co.uk**.

Image: *Economic Growth Fund launches in Surrey – with Cabinet Member Matt Furniss, Director for Economy and Growth Dawn Redpath and Chris Hurren chair of Business Leaders Forum*

Thames Water hopes £37m investment will end record sewer flooding

24 June 2025



Thames Water has said it will spend £37m upgrading its Mole Valley network raising hopes it could spell the end of homes, gardens and rivers being flooded with sewage waste.

The private utility company came in for heavy criticism for the "damage it has inflicted" despite huge profits and shareholder payouts while its pipe network falls into disrepair during the latest scrutiny committee meeting at Mole Valley District Council.

However, it hopes investment projects in Dorking, Earslwood, and Horley will increase its ability to manage storm flows, treat more waste water, and prevent "effluent" flooding rivers and waterways.

The investment was welcomed as a step in the right direction but many at the meeting aired their disappointment with the firm for letting the situation get this bad.

Last year, Thames Water spent 13,101 hours pumping sewage into the River Mole and its tributaries according to new government data seen by the MP – an increase of 10.9 per cent despite there being less rain.

Speaking after the meeting, the Dorking and Horley MP, Chris Coghlan, described the record as "simply unacceptable" but has since had assurances from Thames Water and environmental regulators that "long overdue" upgrades were on the way

He said: "For years, the entire water industry has been poorly managed and woefully under-regulated.

"To expect hard-pressed customers to now pick up the tab for 35 years of under-investment by Thames Water, while the company continues to flood my constituents' homes and gardens with disgusting sewage is shocking.

"The Government and Ofwat have a duty to hold the water companies to account", he said, adding that the regulator needed to be replaced with a body that would "will make Thames water pay up for the damage it has inflicted."

In Dorking, Thames Water is putting £16m into new storm tanks to treat incoming sewage and reduce dumping of untreated waste.

At its Earlswood site, just outside Mole Valley, it will increase treatment volumes from 340 to 440 litres per second, helping to prevent effluent going into the river – and what does will be of a higher quality.

Horley will benefit from upgrades to improve performance in wet weather.

Councillor Stephen Cooksey, leader of Mole Valley District Council told the meeting: "The question that flows through my mind is, although you can't answer it tonight, is how as a responsible company you've allowed your infrastructure to get into such a dreadful condition?"

Thames Water's Alice Keeping described the £37m as "a substantial amount of money that we are going to invest going forward".

A Thames Water spokesperson said: "In 2024 parts of our region experienced some of the wettest months in 250 years. This overwhelmed our sewer network which resulted in diluted wastewater being released into rivers. While all storm discharges are unacceptable, the sewage systems were designed in this way to prevent sewage backing up into people's homes.

"Over the next five years we will deliver a record amount of investment across our network.

"We continue to execute our plans to upgrade over 250 of our storm overflows to reduce the number of storm discharges including at our sites in Crawley and Horley.

Esher Mill Road overflow sewage site (image Chris Caulfield)

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Epsom based Toyota raises £1/2m for MND

24 June 2025



Toyota has raised more than £500,000 to support people living with and affected by motor neurone disease (MND). It has also extended its partnership with MND Association for a further two years, into 2027.

Toyota joined forces with MND Association in 2021. The charity was chosen by the company's staff in memory of a much-loved colleague, Rachel Rollason, who suffered from MND, a terminal neurological condition that affects up to 5,000 people in the UK at any one time.

Since then, colleagues from Toyota (GB), Toyota Financial Services, Toyota Insurance Services and KINTO UK, have pushed themselves to the limits in a variety of fund-raising activities including taking part in marathons, a cycling challenge from Portsmouth to Newcastle, a Tough Mudder and a 100km walk along the River Thames which raised more than £120,000 in just two days.

Tanya Curry, MND Association's Chief Executive, said: "We are delighted that Toyota has chosen to extend its partnership with us. We are so grateful for everything they have done to support our work over the past four years, whether that's by volunteering, training to take part in an event, or fundraising. Thanks to Toyota, we have been able to provide support grants for life-changing wheelchair adaptions, while pushing forward with ground-breaking research into potential new treatments for this terrible disease. Over the next two years, the strong partnership between our organisations will continue to grow and allow us to accelerate progress in the fight against MND."

Scott Thompson, Toyota (GB) President and Managing Director, said: "I'd like to thank our staff for their efforts in helping us reach our fundraising target of £500,000. We already have plans for further fundraising, for example next month four senior team members: Jason Milton, Rob McKendrick, Carla Henson and Dariusz Mikolajczak, will take part in the London Marathon."

For more information, or to donate, visit https://donate.giveasyoulive.com/campaign/toyota-london-marathon

For more information about MND Association please visit www.mndassociation.org

Toyota GB

Image: From L to R: Charlotte Taylor, Senior Corporate Partnerships Executive, MND Association, Pete Collins, Senior Corporate Partnerships Development Executive, MND Association, Kish Laungani, Specialist Sustainability Programmes, Toyota GB, Isla Thomson, Assistant, CSR, Sustainability and ESG, Toyota GB and Rosemary Parkin, Assistant Press and PR, Toyota GB

Drowning in Debt: Epsom MP Demands Thames Water Takeover

24 June 2025



Thames Water should be put into "special administration" rather than given a £3billion bailout, Epsom and Ewell's MP said after the utility company won a major court battle to stave off nationalisation.

In February, the embattled water firm won the right to go ahead with the huge loan despite some of Thames Water's creditors opposing the costly 9.75 per cent interest rate. The decision was then challenged on appeal with the courts this

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week again finding in favour of Thames Water.

The company, which has overseen record sewage spills amid rising prices for customers – while paying out hundreds of millions of pounds in dividends to shareholders – says the £3billion loan puts them on a "more stable financial foundation". From April, bills will increase by 31 per cent.

Thames Water CEO Chris Weston said they were pleased with the court's decision "decisively refused" the appeal and allowed the loan to go through. He said: "We remain focused on putting Thames Water onto a more stable financial foundation as we seek a long-term solution to our financial resilience.

"Today's news demonstrates further progress. We continue to work closely with our creditors, enabling us to access liquidity to continue to implement our turnaround plan so we can deliver better results for our customers and the environment while seeking to attract new capital into the business.

"As we have previously stated, the Company Plan will not affect customer bills but will provide continued investment in our network to fix pipes, upgrade our sewage treatment works, and maintain high-quality drinking water. We remain of the view that a market led solution is in the best interest of customers, UK taxpayers and the wider economy."

The decision to reject Charlie Maynard, the Liberal Democrat MP for Whitney's appeal has not pleased everyone.

Helen Maguire, the Lib Dem MP for Epsom and Ewell, described the bail out as "terrible news" for people "who have been paying the price for a company that is not fit for purpose."

She said: "Thames Water is spending almost a third of my constituents' bills on servicing their mountain of debt, instead of investing in vital infrastructure and stopping gallons of sewage from being pumped into our rivers.

"It is in the Government's power to end this now. Thames Water must be put into special administration and we cannot allow failing water bosses to keep throwing good money after bad, while our regulators sit on their hands and customers' bills go through the roof."

Thames Water's cash flow was set to run dry in March before the loan deal was agreed with speculation growing that it could come under government control. The network is also in need of major repair and modernisation expected to cost in the billions.

Related reports:

Surrey's LibDem MP majority take on Thames Water

Thames Water's reputation going down the drain

Thames Water rebate

Epsom & Ewell households drowning as water bills rise?

Image credit: By NegativeSpace in Travel (logo added).

Leatherhead to get new cinema and bowling alley?

24 June 2025



A new cinema or bowling alley could "breathe new life" into Leatherhead as part of major regeneration plans aimed at "reversing the trend of brands leaving the town". Plans for the high street, Swan Centre and Bull Hill will be put on display this week with people invited to have their say on the proposals that will be among the biggest changes to the town in years. Mole Valley District Council and Kier Property are working together on the project and have said they were "excited to share" the new layouts that feature "significant updates" based on feedback from 2024.

A spokesperson for the project said: "The proposals… aim to breathe new life into the Swan Centre and Leatherhead High Street. This will be through investment in upgrades to the look and feel of the centre. We are also proposing to open up the main entrance to provide specific units to bring exciting and quality chains and independent restaurants and operators to Leatherhead." The new layout will also include what is being described as a 'cultural building' on the first floor 'to potentially include a cinema, bowling, activity centre to provide a great new entertainment offering in the town centre.

They added: "This investment will be a catalyst to improve the quality and variety of offer in both the Swan Centre and Leatherhead High Street, reversing the trend of brands leaving the town and shop closures." To take the development further, the council and Kier Property – working together as a joint venture called The Leret Partnership, is calling on residents to give their views on the updated proposals.

Among the updates and refinements are an increase in public green space and new building layout in Bull Hill with two drop-in sessions being held this week to give people the opportunity to take a closer look. Both sessions will take place in

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the former Clinton Cards site within the Swan Centre. The first will run from 2pm to 8pm on Thursday, March 13, with the second taking place on Saturday, March 15 from 10am to 4pm. They are also being hosted on the Leret Partnership's website.

Image: Swan Centre Proposal from the Leret Partnership (MVDC)

Related reports:

River Mole to attract visitors to Leatherhead?

Leatherhead town on the way up?

Box Hill keeps its pie and mash

24 June 2025



The iconic Surrey Hills will keep its classic English pie and mash shop after plans were approved for the takeaway in Box Hill. Posha's Pie and Mash Shop, in the rural Box Hill Road, Tadworth, was given the go-ahead at the second time of asking despite traffic officers again recommending its refusal. Surrey Highways said in January that the shop should be refused permission over concerns of cars reversing onto the main road, and the application was deferred to allow the owners to make the needed changes.

The new plan removed the on-site parking that had caused concern, but Surrey Highways was still unimpressed, saying cars would now park in the nearby streets, clogging roads and pavements. Councillors disagreed and thought the shop should be encouraged as it would bring trade to the area as well as much-needed food options. Councillor Paul Potter (Liberal Democrat; Brockham, Betchworth, Buckland Box Hill and Headley) said the parking and traffic issues were overstated given the generally low levels of cars using Box Hill Road. He said: "(The pie and mash) is a vital part for a lot of people up there. For a lot of residents in the mobile homes, they walk there, they don't drive – there are hundreds of mobile homes up there. It's a vital thing for the community."

Cllr Simon Bud (Conservative; Brockham, Betchworth, Buckland Box Hill and Headley) added: "It's a rural business in a rural area, that's what this is. They're trying something quite different from what you normally see, and how good that is to see in a rural area on a rural road. How refreshing to see a car-free development. I cycle here, and if more of us did, we wouldn't have this problem, would we? It's really great to see a business that's going forward and making it car-free."

The site has been used as a pie and mash takeaway with a seating area since August 2023. The application was to formally change its use from the old dog grooming parlour. The Wednesday, March 5 meeting of Mole Valley District Council heard from one speaker against the proposal. She told the meeting that Porsha's advertised on social media, which would draw in people from outside Box Hill. She said: "Cars park up on the pavement outside our house, which is the only pavement by the pie and mash. Indiscriminate parking narrows the road and interferes with the free flow of traffic and prohibits pedestrians from using the pavement. We also have a lot of teenagers who do their Duke of Edinburgh awards and walk along where the cars are parked with two wheels on the pavement. It is dangerous."

The plans were ultimately passed with the unanimous backing of the committee.

Image – Credit Google Street view May 2023 the business's food van

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Surrey services get fire e-bike removed from Amazon

24 June 2025



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A dangerous e-bike battery that caused a house fire in Surrey has been successfully removed from sale on Amazon, thanks to the proactive efforts of Surrey Fire and Rescue Service and Trading Standards.

The fire, which occurred recently in a Surrey home, was caused by an unsafe Unit Pack Power battery pack from a converted e-bike while it was being charged. This incident highlights the risks posed by substandard and unsafe lithium-ion batteries.

Following the fire investigation, Surrey Fire and Rescue Service's Fire Investigation team worked closely with Surrey Trading Standards to assess the safety of the battery pack. Their findings led to Amazon removing the product from sale, helping to prevent further incidents and protect consumers.

Matt Perry, Fire Investigation Officer at Surrey Fire and Rescue Service, said: "This fire serves as a stark reminder of the dangers associated with unsafe e-bike batteries.

"We are committed to keeping Surrey residents safe, and I am pleased that our partnership with Trading Standards has resulted in the removal of this hazardous product from the market. We strongly urge the public to be vigilant when purchasing batteries and always choose reputable retailers and manufacturers."

Surrey Trading Standards has also warned consumers about the risks of purchasing unregulated or non-compliant lithium-ion batteries online.

Amanda Poole, Assistant Director for Trading Standards at Surrey County Council, added: "Unsafe lithium-ion batteries pose a serious fire risk, and we are pleased to have taken swift action alongside Surrey Fire and Rescue Service to have this product removed from sale.

"Consumers should always check that batteries and chargers meet UK safety standards and be cautious of cheap or unbranded products sold online."

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service continues to raise awareness through its #BatteryWise campaign, which provides essential guidance on the safe use, storage, and disposal of lithium-ion batteries.

For more information on battery safety, visit Surrey Fire and Rescue Service's website and social media channels. If you have concerns about a potentially unsafe product, you can report it to Trading Standards via Citizens Advice.

Image: Credit AVD Fire – CC BY-NC 4.0 [illustration and not the case in question].

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