



Epsom & Ewell households drowning as water bills rise?

2 February 2025



Epsom & Ewell Residents Face Sharp Water Bill Hike as Regional Disparities Emerge

From April 2025, households in Epsom & Ewell will see a substantial increase in water bills, with Thames Water implementing a 31% rise. This means an additional £151 annually per household, increasing the average bill from £488 to £639. The rise places Thames Water among the highest increases across England, sparking significant concern among local residents and political representatives. Thames Water provides water and waste water services.

Local MP Slams Government's Inaction

Helen Maguire, the Liberal Democrat MP for Epsom & Ewell, has criticised the government's failure to regulate water companies more effectively. In a statement, she said:

"This is an outrageous bill rise. Instead of tackling Thames Water or taking them to task, the Government has given them free reign - and residents in Epsom & Ewell are paying the price. It's a disgrace that water companies have been able to hike our bills - a third of which goes on servicing debt - while they fail to fix leaks and pollute our rivers and streams like the River Mole and the Hogsmill."

Maguire and the Liberal Democrats have urged the government to introduce a single social tariff to support vulnerable customers struggling to meet rising water costs.

Neighbouring Areas See Water Bill Decrease

In stark contrast, Sutton and East Surrey Water (SES Water), which serves areas including east Surrey, West Sussex, west Kent, and parts of south London, will reduce water bills by 2%, bringing the average bill down from £254 to £249. The decrease raises questions about why some suppliers are able to manage costs effectively while others, like Thames Water, continue to impose steep increases.

SES Water has not provided a detailed explanation for the reduction, but such adjustments typically stem from operational efficiencies, regulatory decisions, or improved cost management. SES provides water only services.

Where Thames Water Stands in the Rankings

According to a national comparison of 22 water companies, Thames Water ranks 5th in terms of the highest increase, making it one of the worst affected companies for bill hikes. The highest increase recorded is from Southern Water, while Sutton and East Surrey Water sits at the bottom of the list with the only decrease.

Continued Concerns Over Water Pollution

The significant bill increase for Thames Water customers comes amid growing concerns about water pollution in the region. In 2024, the River Mole suffered over 2,000 additional hours of pollution compared to 2023, worsening environmental and public health risks. Critics argue that rather than prioritising investment in infrastructure improvements, Thames Water's rising bills are being used to manage corporate debt and executive pay.

Thames Water on the Brink of Collapse

The sharp rise in Thames Water bills comes as the company teeters on the edge of financial collapse. The UK's largest water supplier, responsible for 15 million customers, has been struggling under a £15 billion debt burden and recently warned it could run out of money by May 2025. In an attempt to stabilise its finances, Thames Water had sought approval from the regulator, Ofwat, to impose a 59% bill increase over the next five years, far exceeding the 31% increase ultimately permitted this coming year. Meanwhile, the government has ruled out a public takeover of the company, despite growing concerns that a full-scale collapse could lead to severe service disruptions. The situation has reignited calls for tighter regulation of the water industry, with critics arguing that customers should not be forced to foot the bill for corporate mismanagement.

What Can Residents Do?

With these price hikes looming, residents are encouraged to explore available financial assistance options. Social tariffs, designed for low-income households, may offer some relief, though the inconsistency in eligibility criteria across different water providers remains a pressing issue.

Social tariffs are discounted water rates designed to assist low-income households in managing their water bills. Thames Water offers a social tariff program called **WaterHelp**. This scheme provides up to a 50% discount on annual water bills for eligible customers. Eligibility is determined by comparing the customer's water bill to their net household income and considering the number of occupants in the property. If the water bill exceeds 5% of the household's net income, the customer may qualify for the discount.

Additionally, Thames Water participates in the **WaterSure** programme, which caps bills for metered customers who meet specific criteria. To qualify, customers must receive means-tested benefits and either have a medical condition requiring increased water use or have three or more children under 19 living at home. For the 2024/25 period, the bill is capped at £471, ensuring that eligible customers do not pay more than this amount, regardless of actual water consumption.

These programmes aim to make water services more affordable for vulnerable customers, especially in light of rising water bills. Residents are encouraged to contact Thames Water directly or visit their website to assess eligibility and apply for these support schemes.

Local campaigners continue to push for greater accountability from water companies and regulatory bodies. The debate over water affordability, pollution control, and corporate responsibility is likely to remain a key issue for Epsom & Ewell residents as the April 2025 changes approach.

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Surrey village to suffer a lot more Heathrow flights

2 February 2025



Residents could suffer "an unacceptable amount of noise" from an airport as flight directions change, meaning the number of landing planes could increase from 36 to over 300 a day in a Surrey village.

Heathrow Airport is proposing to change its flight patterns to share noise more equally to communities around the site. This involves alternating between the southern and northern runways when the airport operates flights eastwards.

Most of the time (70 per cent) the airport runs on westerly operation, meaning planes take off and land towards the west as the wind favours the west direction at Heathrow. From 7am-3pm, planes land on the northern runway and depart on the southern runway. Halfway through the airport's day, at 3pm, Heathrow switches runways to give neighbouring residents a break.

This is because of the Cranford Agreement in 1952 which restricted departures over Cranford. But the government ripped up the Cranford agreement in 2009 to bring more equal noise distribution in the residential areas around Heathrow.

As planes are now allowed to take off over Cranford (to the north-east of the airport) Heathrow is proposing to make changes to the airfield to allow for easterly operations of planes taking off and landing from the east. These include: building a noise barrier, up to seven foot high, near Longford, as well as changing the taxiways where planes turn on the runway to reduce ground noise.

The applicant states the redistribution of noise around Heathrow Airport will result in lower noise effects in some locations and higher noise effects in others, but it will enable noise from aircraft operations to be more fairly distributed around the airport than it is currently.

Despite the overall aim meant to have a more even spread of noise, Spelthorne council's noise officer has objected to the changes as it will adversely impact Spelthorne and especially Stanwell Moor.

Currently only 36 planes arrive over Stanwell Moor on an easterly operation but if plans go ahead it could skyrocket to 328 landing a day, according to council documents. Councillor Joanne Sexton (Independent Spelthorne Group/ Ashford East), leader of Spelthorne council, said it was "quite a shock" to see the dramatic increase.

Heathrow submitted a planning proposal to Hillingdon Borough in October 2024, which is now in the consultation stage. Councillors wholeheartedly voted to object to the scheme, citing unacceptable noise impacts on the borough, at an environment and sustainability council meeting on January 14. These comments will be passed on to Spelthorne's planning committee.

Only Cllr Paul Woodward (Conservative/ Ashford Town) approved Heathrow's proposal, arguing: "Landing is the quietest part of the operation until you put the airbrakes halfway down the runway."

Stanwell Moor runs directly parallel to Heathrow's southern runway which leaves residents with a "constant stream of aircraft noise" for half the day, according to council documents. But if the airport uses full easterly alternation, the noise officer said this would "significantly increase the noise and frequency of overflights and significantly affect [Stanwell Moor] residents".

Although Cllr Sexton raised concerns of Ashford becoming increasingly louder with plane noises, the noise officer said the changes would not harmfully impact Ashford or Sunbury.

Applauding the council for objecting to the project, Cllr Sue Doran (Labour/ Stanwell North) said: "It doesn't matter which way [the planes] fly, the noise is terrible all the time." Cllr Doran said she had lived in Stanwell for 15 years and said there is noise "virtually 24 hours a day".

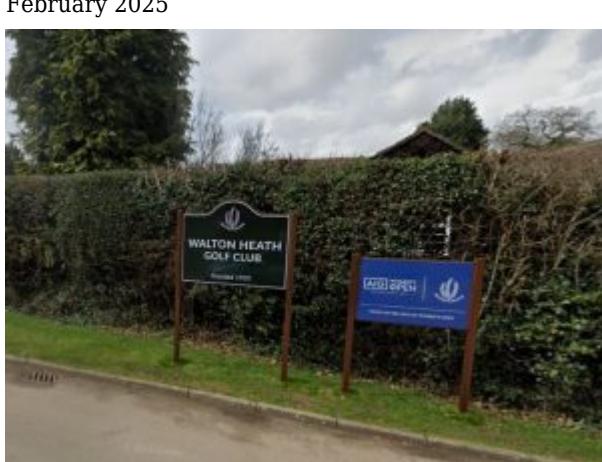
Heathrow Airport is aiming to introduce easterly runway alternation by 2028. Currently there is no proposed increase in the number of flights taking off or landing from the airport, just changes in the direction.

A Heathrow spokesperson said: "We know that noise is an important issue for local communities which is why we have published clear reduction targets in our Noise Action Plan. Our noise footprint has reduced by 41 per cent since 2006 and we expect to see further reductions. Easterly alternation is aimed at delivering predictable noise respite to more communities and is coupled with our ongoing work to install noise insulation for our nearest neighbours."

Heathrow Airport. Credit Heathrow Airports Limited.

Walton Golf Club's dismissal of one-in-hole unfair

2 February 2025



A greenkeeper who had worked at a Surrey golf course for almost 40 years has won a case for "unreasonable" dismissal after he was sacked when his digger fell into a hole. An employment tribunal found the disciplinary action taken against the 58-year-old had "snowballed" before alternative options were considered.

Michael Hayne's digger had to be hauled from a ditch at Walton Heath Golf Club, in Tadworth, after the machine had tumbled into a hole, cab-side down while the driver was not wearing a seatbelt. The deputy course manager initially dismissed the accident as minor because no harm was done, and so did not formally report it in an accident log book.

But his bosses at the golf club viewed it as a significant incident and Mr Haynes was later dismissed for gross misconduct. The managers argued it was a "serious breach" of health and safety rules that the accident was not reported, and could cause more incidents.



Mr Haynes argued that he was sure he told Mr Mann about the accident at the time and considered he did not need to write up the event in the health and safety book.

The report, published December 23, 2024, detailed that the golf course had two diggers weighing 7.5 tons and 2.5 tons. Mr Haynes had been externally trained on how to use the diggers since around 2005, and his certification was updated every five years- although his current renewal had been overdue.

During a staff training session in November 2021, the instructor reportedly told course manager at the time, Michael Mann, that Mr Haynes was "very lucky with his accident that he hadn't been seriously hurt or worse". But Mr Mann said he did not know about the digger incident.

After some initial investigation, the Surrey club launched a disciplinary hearing against Mr Haynes, accusing him of "gross misconduct" for failing to comply with health and safety standards.

In a letter before the disciplinary hearing in November 2021, Mr Haynes wrote: "I have been a faithful employee of this Club for nearly 40 years. I love this Club and have spent my life in its service. I have a clean disciplinary record.

"If I were to be dismissed, not only would I lose my livelihood but also my wife and I would lose our home. I can assure this meeting that I have learned a lesson and will never fail to report any incident again. I would welcome any additional training that is felt necessary."

Mr Haynes was dismissed without notice, and escorted off the site. The Chief Executive, Mr Woodward, had decided his explanation was "unacceptable" and the "trust and confidence placed" in him had been "completely undermined". He added further dangerous incidents could have been avoided if Mr Haynes had reported the initial accident.

In desperation, Mr Haynes appealed the dismissal twice and provided photographic and video evidence of incidents not reported by other members of staff. However, this appeal was rejected both times.

However, the employment tribunal has now found Mr Haynes' dismissal was "procedurally unfair". It said there was no real evidence that any of the decision-makers weighed up the possibility of an alternative sanction for the Claimant.

The report stated there were "flaws" with the golf club's investigation process such as "exaggerating and maximising the seriousness of the incident". For instance, inconsistencies in describing the final position of the digger as "tipping over" and "almost horizontal".

The tribunal still found Mr Haynes "culpable" for failing to report the digger incident in the accident book as he was involved. Employment Judge Leith said: "His failure to [report it] was rendered considerably starker because of his [senior] role [...] he should have known better."

Concluding the case, the tribunal ruled that Mr Haynes' compensation will be reduced by 50 per cent because of his failure to log the accident. The report did not disclose the amount.

Walton Heath Golf Club has been contacted for comment.

Special case for VAT exemption for special education needs?

2 February 2025



Private schools are "not a lifestyle choice but a necessity" for children with special educational needs (SEN), argues the headteacher of an independent school in Reigate.

Tuition fees are expected to soar from Wednesday January 1, 2025 as the government is scrapping the tax exemption on private schools across the country. The tax is expected to bring £1.7 billion a year, according to the Treasury.

But Mrs Michelle Catterson, head of Moon Hall School, a Specialist Dyslexia school, said: "If you can afford to pay, you should. But there should be exemptions for SEN kids."

Around 200 children between the ages of seven and 16 attend Moon Hall School- all of whom have been diagnosed primarily with dyslexia, a learning condition that can cause difficulty with reading, writing and spelling. Moon Hall provides a student-to-staff ratio of about 12:1 so pupils get extra support and adapt to meet their learning needs.

Mrs Catterson explained her students with SEN, 70 per cent of whom have an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP), often cannot have their needs met locally in state schools, so there is "no viable alternative" for education. The Local Authority, like Surrey County Council, will pay for specialist provision in these instances.

"We offer local authorities good value for money," Mrs Catterson claimed, with most of the school's GCSE results boasting higher than average.

The head teacher said she believed "100 per cent of the kids [at the school] have SEN" but because of long and complicated process of applying for an EHCP, many parents often "give up" on the process. Instead, around 30 per cent of students pay for the specialist education.

Fees used to start at £7,505 per term for a child in year 7, according to the school's prospectus. But now, parents could be set back £10,424. The Department for Education has said it does not expect school fees to increase by 20 per cent as schools do not pass VAT onto parents. But as tuition fees is Moon Hall's only source of income, Mrs Catterson argued that they have no choice. "Small, specialist settings like [Moon Hall] simply cannot absorb the additional costs imposed by VAT," she said.

Most Children with EHCPs have their needs met within the state sectors, according to government officials. If an EHCP assessment concludes a child can only be supported in a private school, the local authority funds that child's place and can reclaim the VAT they pay.

Despite the expensive tuition fees, the headteacher claimed Moon Hall is "not an affluent school" and the government will find "no swimming pools" on the grounds. As a charity, any extra income is put back into the school by spending on staff to help the students, according to Mrs Catterson.

Impact on the parents

"It's really short-sighted," said Mrs Catterson. The head claimed adding VAT to SEN private school fees will mean more parents will apply for an EHCP, causing further backlog and creating extra costs to the government, which will need to provide for those needs.

Alternatively, some parents take on two jobs to fund their children through private school. Mrs Catterson stressed it would be an "awful situation" if a "settled, happy child, making good progress" was moved to the state sector where their needs cannot be supported.

Chris Coghlan MP for Dorking and Horley, said: "Moon Hall provides an outstanding education for children with special educational needs in Surrey. Adding VAT to school fees will place an unbearable strain on families who already make significant sacrifices to afford them. The Government must exempt specialist schools like Moon Hall from VAT to ensure children with special needs can continue to access the support and education they deserve."



"Punish independent schools"

Built in 1863, Moon Hall is a grade II-listed building which was purchased by the founders of the dyslexic school and repurposed as an educational building some forty years ago. Although a grand historical building, repairs and maintenance costs to the site are almost constant- Mrs Catterson said the roof needs replacing which is expected to cost £1.6m, even before pricey specialist chimney repairs.

Not only is the school facing the VAT axe, Moon Hall will have to wrestle with changes in national insurance and minimum wage increases like many other charities. The head told SurreyLive she "still doesn't know what the true figure will do" to the school and where it can find the extra money. Mrs Catterson said: "It feels like the Labour government is trying to punish independent schools."

Rebuilding "confidence and trust"

A government spokesperson said: "Ending tax breaks on private schools will help raise additional funds to break down barriers to opportunity and support the 94 per cent of pupils who attend state schools to achieve and thrive including those with SEND.

"Pupils with the most acute needs will not be impacted by this policy. Work has already begun to rebuild families' confidence in and reform the broken SEND system we inherited. The Budget invested £1b extra in day-to-day provision and earlier this month £740m was directed to support local authorities in creating more specialist places in mainstream schools."

They added: "We are committed to improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools, and ensuring special schools cater to those with the most complex needs, restoring parents' trust that their child will get the support they need."

Related reports:

[Surrey Tory MPs against school fees VAT](#)

[Taxing question for Surrey's private schools](#)

[Image: Outside Moon Hall School, Reigate. \(Credit: Emily Dalton/LDRS\)](#)

Epsom business contact with the King warranted

2 February 2025



Epsom based since 2013 **Cirrus**, the leading provider of contact centre software, is proud to announce it has been granted a Royal Warrant of Appointment by His Majesty **King Charles III**. The grants were made to 386 companies previously holding a Royal Warrant of Appointment from Queen Elizabeth II, as well as 7 companies with an established and ongoing trading relationship with HM Queen Camilla.

This prestigious recognition marks a reappointment for Cirrus, building on the acknowledgement previously granted by Her late Majesty The Queen for its outstanding service to the Royal Household.

Cirrus has built a strong reputation for providing innovative, cloud-based contact centre solutions that help organisations improve customer engagement and service delivery. This Royal Warrant recognises the company's continued excellence in supporting the Royal Collection Trust.

Jason Roos, Founder and CEO of Cirrus, shared: "It's an immense honour for Cirrus to receive this recognition with a Royal Warrant. This achievement reflects the hard work and dedication of our team. We've always focused on delivering solutions that make a real impact, and this recognition from His Majesty's Household validates that effort in the most meaningful way."

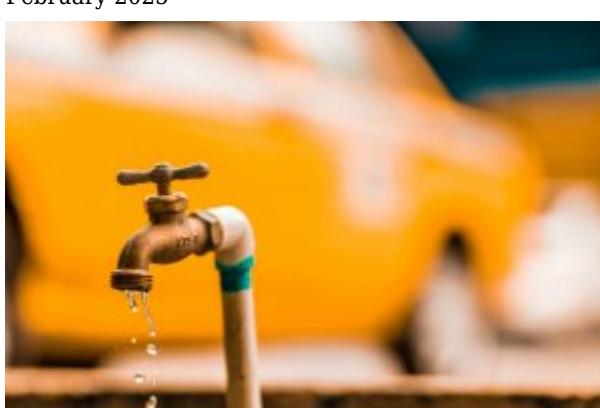
The Royal Warrant of Appointment is awarded to businesses that have supplied goods or services to the Royal Household for at least five years. This announcement also highlights Cirrus' ongoing commitment to supporting local communities, while maintaining the highest environmental standards. Cirrus joins the ranks of household names such as BT and Samsung.

"Looking back, it's incredible to see how far we've come. And looking ahead, we're more motivated than ever to keep pushing the boundaries of what we can achieve. This Royal Warrant is a recognition of our daily efforts, and we're excited to continue collaborating with fantastic partners and clients," Roos added.

In the past year, Cirrus has continued to thrive, securing new clients across sectors such as public services, healthcare, and retail. The company's solutions are trusted by organisations including Nisbets, Premium Credit, and Northern Ireland Water.

An Epsom and Ewell education in water shortage

2 February 2025



The residents of Epsom, Ewell, Stoneleigh, and surrounding areas have been grappling with a significant water supply crisis over the past 48 hours, following a major failure in the infrastructure of SES Water. The disruption, which began on Monday afternoon, has left families struggling with basic necessities, businesses hampered, and schools forced to close early for the Christmas break.

What Happened?

SES Water has attributed the disruption to the failure of a critical valve in their network. Ian Cain, Chief Executive of SES Water, stated that the issue is being addressed by teams working around the clock. While efforts are being made to restore supplies, the company has warned that normal service may take another 24 hours as water quality tests are conducted to ensure safety.



Despite these reassurances, the community has expressed frustration with what many perceive as vague and inconsistent updates from the water provider. Bottled water stations have been set up at four locations, but long queues and limited access have left some residents resorting to supermarket purchases to meet their needs.

Impact on Residents

For many, the water outage has caused significant upheaval in their daily lives. Basic tasks such as showering, cooking, and cleaning have become a challenge.

Rebecca Johnson, a mother of two from Epsom, shared her experience:

"It's been incredibly difficult. We've had to rely on bottled water for everything, even brushing our teeth. My youngest has eczema, and not being able to bathe him properly has made it worse. This isn't just an inconvenience; it's affecting our health."

Local businesses have also been hit hard. A café owner in Sutton lamented the loss of customers:

"Without water, we can't wash dishes, cook, or even make coffee. We've had to shut our doors during what should be a busy pre-Christmas period."

School Closures

One of the most striking consequences of the outage has been the early closure of Nonsuch High School for Girls. Headteacher Mrs. Williamson-Jones described the decision as unavoidable:

"With no water for toilets, heating, or cooking, it was impossible to maintain a safe environment for our students and staff. This disruption will have a lasting impact on the education of 1,500 girls."

Parents have expressed concern about the loss of learning days and the difficulties of last-minute childcare arrangements.

Political Response

Local MP Helen Maguire has taken a firm stance, labelling the situation "completely unacceptable." In her press release, she detailed her ongoing communication with SES Water, including discussions with Ian Cain, and criticised the company's lack of transparency.

"Families deserve clear and timely updates, and this has been sorely lacking," she stated. Maguire has also raised broader concerns about the resilience of the local water infrastructure and called for an investigation to prevent future crises.

A Global Perspective

While the situation in Epsom has highlighted the vulnerabilities of local water infrastructure, it also serves as a stark reminder of the global water crisis. According to the United Nations, 26% of the world's population—around 2 billion people—lack access to safe drinking water in their homes.

In countries such as Yemen, Ethiopia, and India, millions face daily struggles to secure clean water for drinking, cooking, and washing. Prolonged droughts, overextraction of groundwater, and pollution exacerbate these challenges. The World Health Organization estimates that 829,000 people die annually from diseases caused by unsafe water, sanitation, and hygiene.

The water shortage in Epsom and Ewell, while temporary, offers a glimpse into the hardships endured by billions worldwide. It underscores the importance of robust infrastructure and efficient resource management to ensure equitable water access.

Calls for Accountability

For Epsom and Ewell residents, the immediate concern is the restoration of their water supply. However, the crisis has also raised questions about SES Water's preparedness and reliability. Recent increases in water bills have further fuelled dissatisfaction, with many questioning whether they are getting value for money.

Local resident Mark Stevens voiced the concerns of many:

"We're paying more, but the service keeps getting worse. This outage has shown just how fragile our water system is. SES Water needs to be held accountable."

Helen Maguire MP has pledged to continue pressing the company for answers and solutions. She has also urged SES Water to prioritise vulnerable residents and ensure that support reaches those most in need.

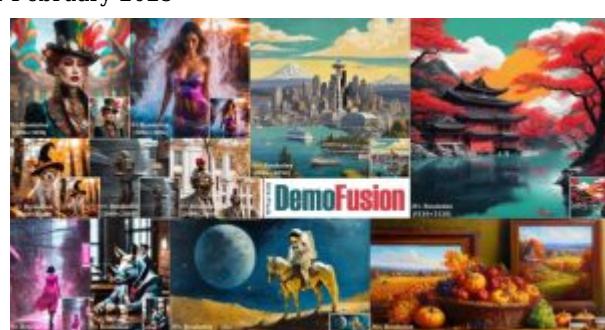
Moving Forward

As the community waits for normal service to resume, there is a growing demand for action. Residents and businesses alike are calling for a thorough review of SES Water's operations, improved communication during emergencies, and long-term investments in infrastructure.

The local water crisis has been a sobering experience for many, highlighting both local vulnerabilities and global inequalities in water access. While the immediate challenge is to restore supply, it is clear that the lessons learned must inform future planning and policy to prevent similar disruptions and ensure water security for all.

Surrey first in image AI

2 February 2025



Surrey announces world's first AI model for near-instant image creation on consumer-grade hardware

A groundbreaking AI model that creates images as the user types, using only modest and affordable hardware, has been announced by the Surrey Institute for People-Centred Artificial Intelligence (PAI) at the University of Surrey.

The model, NitroFusion, represents a world first and has been made open source by its developers - SketchX, a lab within PAI - a move that fundamentally transforms access to AI-enabled image creation models for creative professionals.

Professor Yi-Zhe SonG, Director of SketchX and Co-Director of PAI, said:

"NitroFusion represents a paradigm shift in making AI accessible to everyone, eliminating the need for large compute resources and the long waiting times between prompt and result that are common with most image generation platforms."

Typically, similar technology is available only to corporate giants with vast computing resources. However, NitroFusion runs on a single consumer-grade graphics card - marking a decisive step forward in bringing advanced AI capabilities to individual creators, small studios, and educational institutions. The almost instant creation of images allows rapid artistic iterations and greater control over the generated imagery.

Dar-Yen Chen, the PhD researcher who helped to develop the project at PAI, said:

"NitroFusion leverages a novel dynamic adversarial framework that works like a panel of specialised art critics, each evaluating different aspects of the generated image to ensure high quality in a single step. The system's flexible architecture allows users to optionally use between one to four refinement steps, providing direct control over the balance between generation speed and image quality."

Professor SonG added:



"With NitroFusion, we're not just releasing another image generation model - we're pioneering an entirely new approach which democratises AI interaction.

"Following our DemoFusion release last year, which provided a new way to upscale AI-generated images, this innovation further establishes our position at the forefront of making powerful AI technology accessible to all."

This breakthrough delivers multiple leaps for the users and industry:

- Instant image generation that responds as users type - a first in the field - enabling rapid iteration, greater control and better experimentation
- Improved sustainability through greatly reduced energy consumption
- Consumer-grade affordable hardware requirements (e.g. a single high-performance GPU) that mean individuals and small studios can create imagery affordably
- Open-source availability enables global innovation, adaptation and variations
- No cloud dependencies or subscription fees.

Professor Adrian Hilton, Director of the Institute for People-Centred AI at the University of Surrey, said:

"We believe we're the first in the world to achieve interactive image generation at this scale and efficiency. This opens up access to state-of-the-art AI for image generation and is just the beginning of our commitment to democratising creative AI tools. Our Institute will continue to develop open-source, groundbreaking technologies that put professional-grade AI capabilities into the hands of creators everywhere."

"We're particularly proud of the great work that our SketchX Lab, creating new concepts and advancing the science of generative AI. Our research is focused on ensuring that the future of creative AI technology is inclusive, responsible and accessible to all, and we're keen to continue to work with organisations that share this ethos."

The technology is available immediately through <https://chendaryen.github.io/NitroFusion.github.io/>, with comprehensive documentation and community support resources.

Small Business is my business says Epsom's MP

2 February 2025



Helen Maguire, MP for Epsom and Ewell, has announced a new survey for local businesses and will spend time working alongside staff at three local establishments in the lead-up to **Small Business Saturday** on 7th December.

Small Business Saturday is an annual campaign aimed at encouraging the public to support local businesses and raise awareness of their contributions to the community and the economy.

Ms Maguire is set to visit Fatima's Hair Boutique in Epsom, All Things Nice Café in Ewell, and Lavender Flowers in Ashtead, where she plans to engage directly with staff and customers. According to her office, these visits are intended to provide her with a better understanding of the challenges faced by small businesses in the constituency.

The MP, who has previously run a charity fundraising consultancy and a fitness business, has highlighted her personal experience as a former small business owner. She says this gives her an insight into the pressures and demands local entrepreneurs encounter.

Ms Maguire's survey, available on her website, invites business owners to share their experiences and concerns. She says the results will help her advocate for better support for small businesses in Parliament.

Speaking about her initiative, Ms Maguire said:

"Local businesses like All Things Nice and Lavender Flowers are integral to our community, providing not just services but also fostering a sense of connection and vibrancy. I look forward to working alongside them and learning more about how I can help."

The MP also criticised the government's proposed National Insurance hike, stating:

"Small businesses here in Epsom and Ewell have faced rising costs and reduced support in recent years. The planned National Insurance increase will place even more strain on them, and I'll continue to press for this to be reconsidered."

The Liberal Democrats have stated that they oppose the National Insurance rise, which they claim will adversely affect small businesses nationwide.

Ms Maguire's visits will take place tomorrow and Friday.

What is Small Business Saturday?

Small Business Saturday, now a well-established event in the UK, promotes awareness and support for independent businesses. In 2022, shoppers were estimated to have spent £1 billion at small businesses on the day. The campaign encourages consumers to shop locally and highlights the broader contributions of small enterprises to communities and economies.

Small Business Saturday is an independent initiative that runs across the UK, with more details available on its official website.

Helen Maguire's Small Business Survey can be accessed [here](#).

Surrey pharmacies need a better financial prescription

2 February 2025



Pharmacy owners in Surrey say "enough is enough" as they complain working 12-hour days and barely breaking even. One pharmacist said it has to dispense just over 6,000 prescriptions a month to just about balance the books.

Over the last decade or so, the funding community pharmacies received from the government and NHS have been cut by 40 per cent, with 1,500 closing in the last 10 years.

The government announced a £26 billion boost for the NHS and social care in the budget. A Department of Health and Social Care spokesperson said: "We are committed to working with the pharmacy sector and we will set out further details on allocation of funding for next year in due course."

Asma'a Al-hindawi has worked at her family-owned pharmacy in Horley, after graduating from university in 2010. What used to be a family passion, is now a tough grind. She said: "It's a lot of hard work. Sometimes me and my sister have to work 12-13 hours a day, six days a week, and still we're only breaking even."

Pharmacies are paid on a piecemeal basis for dispensing prescriptions issued by GPs. This makes up most of the community pharmacies' income. In 2012, the piecework fee was £2.75 per item; but now, despite inflation, the fee stands at £2.18 per prescription dispensed.

Despite her family business making a loss, Asma'a said: "I feel I have a moral obligation to work this hard to keep the pharmacy running and to help the community with their healthcare." She explained the pharmacy is a "community service" which he has stuck by despite often getting verbal abuse.

She said the NHS "doesn't catch up with the prices of the market" when the market cost of medicine increases. Sometimes items are out of stock so the pharmacy has to buy more expensive branded products, but the pharmacy still only receives the £2.18 fee.

"It's an ethical dilemma," said Asma'a, "because you can't tell a patient you cannot sell the medicine otherwise you will make a loss." Speaking to the Local Democracy Reporting Service in a bustling pharmacy, with shelves high of medicine, Asma'a said: "If the pharmacy is this busy, it should be making a profit."

Dorking & Horley MP Chris Coghlan (Liberal Democrat) said: "We really need to make sure our pharmacies are paid properly for the work they're doing so they can survive and keep helping the community."

John Bell, who runs South Street Pharmacy in Dorking, started his own mini campaign in protest against the funding situation. He turned off the lights of the pharmacy and posted a note on the window stating: "Why are the lights out in pharmacies? Find out more inside."

He started the campaign to raise awareness that 500 community pharmacies have closed across the country over the last year. "There comes a point when enough is enough," said John, explaining pharmacies can't afford to keep pouring money into a business just to keep it afloat.

The Dorking pharmacist said he makes "zero money" from the main pharmacy business and has to subsidise it with selling the extra hair accessories, sun cream and glasses on the shop floor. Already running at a "skeleton staff", John said he is dreading the increase in employers' National Insurance contributions. He said staffing costs have gone up by 50 per cent in 10 years.

Mr Coghlan has written to Wes Streeting, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, to "stop the decimation of independent pharmacies". He wrote: "It's unacceptable that pharmacies are subsidising NHS work out of their own pockets while being expected to take on more responsibilities."

In his letter, the Lib Dem MP has urged Mr Streeting to review and increase NHS reimbursement rates to reflect the "true cost" of dispensing and running a pharmacy. Mr Coghlan also asked for employers' national insurance rise to be "halted" to prevent a "further financial blow" on pharmacies and health providers.

A Department of Health and Social Care spokesperson said: "Community pharmacy has been neglected for years, but it has a vital role to play in the shift of care from hospital to the community as we reform the health service through our 10 Year Health Plan."

"We commend the hard-working pharmacists working to support their communities across England and there is never a justification for threatening behaviour."

Image: MP Chris Coghlan (left) visiting Asma'a (right) at her family-run pharmacy in Horley. (Credit: Emily Dalton/LDRS)

The Essential Guide to Maintaining Clean Carpets and Upholstery in Woking

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Sponsored article: Maintaining a clean and inviting home is a priority for every homeowner. Among the most overlooked aspects of cleanliness are carpets and upholstery, which, if left unattended, can accumulate dirt, allergens, and stains over time. For residents of Woking, finding reliable carpet and upholstery cleaning services is key to ensuring your home remains a sanctuary. In this article, we'll explore the importance of regular cleaning, practical tips, and professional solutions to help you keep your carpets and upholstery in pristine condition.

Why Regular Cleaning Matters

Your carpets and upholstery are subjected to daily wear and tear, whether from foot traffic, spills, or pet accidents. Over time, these materials can trap dust, bacteria, and allergens, which can negatively impact indoor air quality and trigger allergies or respiratory issues. Regular cleaning not only prolongs the life of these furnishings but also ensures a healthier living environment for your family.



Signs Your Carpets and Upholstery Need Professional Attention

While routine vacuuming and spot-cleaning are essential, there are clear indicators that your carpets and upholstery need expert care:

- **Persistent Stains:** Stubborn marks from coffee, wine, or ink often require specialized treatments to remove without damaging the fibers.
- **Unpleasant Odors:** Lingering smells can indicate deeply embedded dirt or mold.
- **Fading Colors:** A dull appearance is a sign of accumulated grime and wear.
- **Allergy Symptoms:** Frequent sneezing, itchy eyes, or a runny nose indoors could be caused by allergens hiding in your soft furnishings.

Professional Carpet Cleaning in Woking

For residents looking for high-quality **Carpet Cleaning Woking** services, enlisting a trusted provider is the best solution. Expert cleaners use advanced techniques like hot water extraction, dry cleaning, and stain removal to restore carpets to their original beauty. Not only do they tackle visible dirt, but they also eliminate deep-seated bacteria and allergens.

Don't Overlook Upholstery Cleaning

Your sofas, armchairs, and other upholstered furniture also deserve attention. Regular professional cleaning can preserve their texture and appearance, preventing premature wear. Companies specializing in **Sofa Cleaning Woking** and **Upholstery Cleaning Woking** offer tailored solutions for different fabric types. From delicate silk to durable microfiber, professional cleaners ensure the process is safe and effective.

DIY Tips to Maintain Cleanliness Between Professional Services

While professional cleaning provides a deep refresh, here are some DIY steps you can take to maintain cleanliness:

1. **Vacuum Regularly:** Use a vacuum with a HEPA filter to remove surface dust and debris.
2. **Address Spills Immediately:** Blot (don't rub) spills with a clean cloth and apply a gentle cleaning solution.
3. **Rotate Furniture:** Prevent uneven wear by changing the position of rugs and furniture periodically.
4. **Use Protective Covers:** For high-traffic areas, covers can shield your upholstery and carpets from dirt and stains.

Why Choose Professional Cleaning Services in Woking

Professional cleaners combine expertise with cutting-edge equipment to deliver exceptional results. Whether it's your carpets or upholstery, services in Woking provide customized solutions to suit your needs. With eco-friendly cleaning agents and meticulous attention to detail, they ensure a hassle-free experience and a fresher home environment.

Conclusion

Carpets and upholstery are significant investments that deserve regular care. By combining routine maintenance with professional services, you can enhance your home's appearance and promote a healthier living space. Don't wait for stains and odors to become a problem—schedule a professional cleaning today and enjoy the benefits of a spotless, inviting home.