

Epsom Station gets an artistic makeover

11 October 2024



In the hustle and bustle of daily life, railway stations often feel like transient spaces where passengers rush through without a second thought. However, at Epsom Station, something unique is happening. Thanks to the *Art@the Station* initiative from **The Art Society UK**, along with a group of talented young students from Epsom and Ewell's own **Nescot**, the station has become a vibrant hub of art and creativity, offering a refreshing experience to commuters.

As part of the *Art@the Station* initiative, art and design students from Nescot (North East Surrey College of Technology) have created striking artwork inspired by Epsom's most iconic landmarks. The project, designed to showcase emerging talent in public spaces, not only adds life to the station but also provides passengers with a more enriched and inspiring environment. The station's subway now serves as a gallery, featuring bold, colourful images that celebrate the town's rich heritage.

Angie Child from **The Art Society Epsom** led this creative transformation as project manager. The theme, ***Sense of Place***, invited students to capture the essence of Epsom—its famous racecourse, clock tower, and other key sites. The result is a stunning display that has already stopped passengers in their tracks, prompting them to admire and even photograph the eye-catching designs.

"I am delighted with the outcome of the wonderful images the Nescot students have created for Epsom station," said Angie. "The students went above and beyond to fulfil the brief. Even while we were still installing the artwork, passengers hurried past but stopped to admire and take photos of the beautiful, colourful pieces."

The project, supported by a grant from Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR), is not only a boost for the station's appearance but also a significant achievement for the students involved. They had the chance to showcase their work to a wider audience, gaining real-world experience in the process. Special recognition was given to Nescot's graphic design tutor, Miles Merritt, who encouraged and guided the students throughout the project, integrating it as an exciting extension of their coursework.

Out of more than twenty designs, the standout works from George Pearson, Alfie Carr, Callum Jones, and Wiktoria Sawicka won the competition. These students, all from the local area, embraced Epsom's history and reimagined it in vibrant graphic designs. Their interpretations offer a fresh perspective on the town's heritage, creating a dynamic fusion of past and present.

GTR's Community Engagement Manager, Rob Whitehead, worked closely with the students, even providing them with rail tickets to visit an art exhibition in London as part of their creative journey. "We're thrilled to support this initiative in Epsom and showcase the incredible talent of Nescot students," Rob said. "Our Station Partners Small Grant fund has helped bring this fantastic community project to life."

The *Art@the Station* project isn't limited to Epsom. Younger students from Epsom Downs School also contributed, creating a large mural titled *Rockets* at Tattenham Corner Station. The initiative will continue into 2025, with more artwork planned for display at Ewell East Station, ensuring that local creativity continues to enrich the travel experience.

This collaboration between The Art Society, Nescot, and GTR is a powerful example of the impact community-driven projects can have. By bringing art into public spaces, these initiatives not only enhance the visual appeal of stations but also provide passengers with a deeper connection to local culture. Moreover, they offer younger generations a valuable opportunity to actively participate in and be recognised within their community.

For now, as commuters pause to admire the bright, bold designs at Epsom station, one thing is clear: art has the power to transform even the most ordinary spaces into something extraordinary.

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Find out more:

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11 October 2024



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Surrey's one stop shop to save energy

11 October 2024



Surrey residents can now receive support to upgrade their homes with energy saving 'retrofit' measures including insulation, heat pumps and solar panels through an innovative Home Energy Improvement 'One-Stop Shop' pilot scheme.

Surrey County Council (SCC) is working in partnership with Furbnow, specialists in home energy improvements, to help people make the transition to a lower energy and better performing home.

The service is for households that are looking to invest in their home's energy performance but need help to get their home energy project planned, designed and installed. Eligible Surrey residents can access 60% off the cost to plan, design and manage their home energy project.

Marisa Heath, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for Environment said: *"I am delighted that we are working with Furbnow on such an innovative and important pilot to support our residents to install energy saving measures."*

"We know that cost plays a huge part in residents being able to self-fund improvements to their homes, but this could be a way for everyone to reduce their bills for the long-term."

"As well as saving money, and making your home more resilient and future proofed, residential energy use accounts for over 30% of Surrey's emissions so improving the energy performance of as many of our homes as we can makes a huge difference in achieving our goal of being Net Zero Carbon by 2050."

All Surrey residents can receive support from Furbnow's team via their website, and the first 245 homes can access a subsidised whole house assessment and Home Energy Plan, if they live in one of the 300,000 Surrey homes that have poor energy performance.

Becky Lane, CEO of Furbnow, added: *"We're thrilled to partner with Surrey County Council on this groundbreaking initiative. The Home Energy Improvement One-Stop Shop is designed to simplify the often-complex process of home energy upgrades. By providing expert guidance, quality assurance, and streamlined service from planning to installing, we're empowering Surrey residents to make their homes more energy-efficient, comfortable, and valuable."*

"This not only benefits individual homeowners through reduced energy bills and improved living conditions but also contributes significantly to Surrey's carbon reduction goals. We're excited to see the positive impact this pilot will have on the community and the environment."

All Surrey residents can receive support from Furbnow's team via their website, and the first 245 homes can access a subsidised whole house assessment and Home Energy Plan, if they live in one of the 300,000 Surrey homes that have poor energy performance.

A Home Energy Plan, after the in-person survey, outlines recommended energy efficiency improvements for a home, detailing, the benefits, estimated costs, impacts, and suggested installation order. This can reduce their energy consumption and their bills, and improve the respiratory health of their household, and perhaps even increase the value of their homes. Furbnow also manage the design and installation of any energy efficiency improvements to your home to take the hassle out of your project.

It's free to register and there is no obligation to go ahead with a Home Energy Plan or the installation of measures.

For more information about the One Stop Shop scheme, visit www.furbnow.com/surrey.

Another Epsom pub gets a major face-lift

11 October 2024



Much-loved Church Street pub, The Faraday, has reopened after an exciting six-figure investment, creating six new jobs in the local community.

Located in the town centre, the site was originally an eclectic showroom and was named after the experimental physicist Michael Faraday. Today, The Faraday has become one of the most popular bars in Surrey.

As part of Stonegate Group's commitment to position every site for success, the investment has been carefully allocated to enhance the pub's offerings while preserving its unique charm.

All renovations have been carefully crafted to aid the pub's goal of being a welcoming space for sports teams, social societies and locals looking for an unforgettable night out.

The venue's attractive new décor has revitalised the space, creating a contemporary setting that's perfect for bottomless brunch on Saturdays.

The sports experience at the pub has been enhanced with the addition of multiple HD TV screens. Whether it's Premier League football, rugby, boxing, or Formula 1, The Faraday has it all covered.

With a huge 60-inch HD TV, and now a whopping 23 HD TVs throughout the site, every seat has a view of the sporting action.

The Faraday also has multiple dartboards for Epsom locals who want to find their inner Luke Littler.

The pub has a popular beer garden, where guests can enjoy soaking up the last of the autumn sun, with the front garden also providing a relaxing spot for a lovely cold pint of premium world lager.

A popular student hub, the pub is renowned for its student deals, with the best student night in the city, offering alcoholic drinks starting at just £2.35, burgers or pizza and a drink for a generous £8 and soft drinks starting at 65p.

The Epsom pub offers a fantastic range of craft beers, world beers, cider, and cocktails, all at some of the most competitive prices in the area. It's the perfect place to enjoy a drink in front of one of the many big screens, with 2-for-1 cocktails available all day, every day.

However, those not drinking alcohol will be able to choose from an extensive range of no and low alcohol options, ensuring everyone is accommodated to.

What's more, furry friends are welcome throughout the pub, with the venue being a popular spot for dog walkers popping in for a pint.

MiXR users can unlock exclusive rewards at The Faraday by downloading the MiXR app and creating an account, including a free drink for signing up. Students can also take advantage of special discounts available exclusively through the app.

Samantha Camara, General Manager of The Faraday, said: "These renovations align with Stonegate Group's commitment to always improve and innovate, meaning we can give our guests the best possible experience at our beloved pub.

"We want the investment to position our pub as the place to be for students as well as being the premiere venue to watch sport in Epsom with a huge range of big screens and food and drink at competitive prices.

"I've been General Manager of The Faraday for six years now and my love for this venue only continues to grow. This renovation marks a new chapter for our team which we cannot wait to start!"

The venue features a jam-packed weekly deals schedule, including 2-for-1 pizzas on Mondays, Student Baskets on Tuesdays, Wing Wednesdays, and Craft & Cocktails on Thursdays. Additionally, there are food and drink deals available throughout the week, along with the popular 2-for-1 cocktail offer.

But that's not all, the beloved bar always has a reason for guests to visit with karaoke night on Thursday and Friday, and Saturday nights seeing local DJs spinning decks late into the night.

Finishing the week in style, the pub hosts a quiz night on Sundays at 7pm, where locals are invited to test their knowledge amongst the smartest in Epsom to win exciting prizes.

Related reports:

Landmark pub re-assembles Tuesday

Government Minister immerses herself in NESCOT

11 October 2024



Staff and students were delighted to host Baroness **Jacqui Smith**, the Department for Education's Minister of State for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education on her visit to **Nescot** (North East Surrey College of Technology) in **Ewell Epsom** on Tuesday, 3 September.

Nescot Principal and CEO, **Julie Kapsalis** and **Chris Muller**, Chair of Governors, welcomed the Minister and were proud to showcase the college's state-of-the-art facilities, courses, study programmes and skills provision. The Minister had a tour of the Skills Park that included meeting students, apprentices, staff and the college's employer partners.

Upon arrival, the Minister met Creative Media student, Charlie who won gold at WorldSkills UK 2023, the college's new alpacas, Dolly and Florence (from the on-site farm) and Rhubarb, the assistance dog.

The Minister was introduced to students studying on Nescot's new courses in Construction Skills for Highway Maintenance delivered in partnership with leading highway maintenance contractor, Ringway. She observed demonstrations from students who were learning to lay concrete slabs and drive virtual diggers.

Supporting the Government's ambition to grow apprenticeships, the Minister met apprentices from the construction industry, from Ridgeback, Premier Heating and Watkins Cole. She heard how Nescot has supported many of the students through progression pathways and finding employers. She was particularly interested to hear how Nescot is working to recruit more women into the construction trades through role models and working with employers including Wates.

The Minister was shown the college's new state-of-the-art immersive learning spaces with virtual reality driving simulators and a variety of artificial intelligence tools offering students an innovative learning experience. The Minister also met Pepper, the humanoid and programmable robot from The Sussex and Surrey Institute of Technology (IoT) at Nescot. The IoT offers specialist courses and apprenticeships available in digital technologies to equip learners with the relevant skills in an increasingly tech reliant world.

Julie Kapsalis, Principal and CEO along with Nescot's senior leaders had the opportunity to speak to the Minister about some of the college's challenges and successes. She said, "We are thrilled and honoured that the Minister chose to visit Nescot at the start of the academic year. The FE sector plays a critical role in not just the training and education of young people and adults, but it is at the forefront of enabling social mobility and meeting the local skills and employment needs."

Essential to Nescot's success are the college's relationships with businesses and the community. Ringway, the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, Surrey Chambers and Wates had the opportunity to meet with the Minister to talk about their skills needs and work with the college.

Lewis Bridgman, Service Director, Ringway said, "The collaboration between Ringway and Nescot is a shining example of how local partnerships can foster economic growth and community development in Surrey. By investing in the next generation of engineers, the community is setting a strong foundation for long-

term prosperity within the delivery of the Surrey Highways service. This approach not only benefits current residents but also ensures that the future workforce is well-equipped to maintain and enhance the region’s infrastructure, contributing to a robust and sustainable economy.”

Julie added, “On behalf of all our staff and students, I thank the Minister for taking the time out of her busy schedule to visit us. We hope our wonderful staff and students (and animals) have left a lasting impression. I would also like to thank our employer partners for their ongoing support and collaboration.”

The visit concluded with plastering student CJ presenting the Minister with a sculpture of a dog made by her department.

Image: Baroness Jacqui Smith, the Department for Education’s Minister of State for Skills road-testing the vehicle simulator in Nescot’s new immersive learning space.

Surrey Business Leaders Forum re-booted

11 October 2024



Businesses across Surrey now have a much greater voice in guiding the growth of the county’s economy thanks to the relaunched and revitalised Surrey Business Leaders Forum.

Just weeks after the government handed Surrey County Council greater strategic powers to support economic development across the county, steps have been taken to ensure the private sector has a stronger voice and is right at the heart of local decision-making.

The Surrey Business Leaders Forum brings together close to 40 individuals representing a diverse range of businesses – from SMEs to Surrey-based multinationals, and including businesses from Surrey’s priority sectors alongside employer representative bodies.

The Forum will be a driving force to help raise awareness of local business and economic needs and act as a local business champion to ensure businesses have a voice in decision-making that impacts the local economy. Acting as an independent advisory group, the Forum will ensure businesses can input, challenge, and guide the Council’s approach to growing the economy.

The revamped forum met for the first time in May, and this week took part in a workshop to support the development of a new economic strategy for Surrey.

Matt Furniss, the Council’s Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth, said: “*Surrey has a fantastic economic story to tell, with more than 110,000 businesses generating over £50 billion to the UK economy.*”

We know there is more that we can do to work with our private sector to deliver real benefits to our residents and communities, so we’ve taken steps to move quickly to make the most of the new powers from government, including creating Business Surrey, which provides free and accessible support to all Surrey businesses.

“Ensuring businesses are at the heart of our decision-making process can only strengthen that approach. I look forward to working with businesses to deliver on our priority to grow Surrey’s economy in a sustainable way, while ensuring no one is left behind.”

Chris Hurren, the Chair of the Business Leaders Forum and partner at RSM UK, a leading provider of audit, tax and consulting services, said: “*The Surrey Business Leaders Forum brings together an exciting and diverse group of local business leaders who want to be a driving force in shaping Surrey’s economic future and be a voice for all businesses in Surrey.*”

“Their knowledge and experiences from the private sector will play a key role in helping shape local decision-making.”

The Council took the role as Surrey’s strategic economic leader in April this year, a role that was previously held by the county’s two Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), Enterprise M3 and Coast to Capital.

The change has seen the council positioned well to lead on an enhanced, county-wide oversight and delivery role in driving sustainable economic growth across the county, a role which Surrey County Council wants to translate into actual economic benefits for residents and businesses.

It has absorbed formal responsibilities to deliver business support through the new Surrey-wide Growth Hub and deliver government-funded programmes focused on skills.

This new offer is presented via the Council’s Business Surrey service, which acts as a single gateway for all Surrey businesses to access support and advice. For access to all Business Surrey’s support and advice visit the Business Surrey website.

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Landmark pub re-assembles Tuesday

11 October 2024



The **Assembly Rooms** pub, in Epsom, is reopening at 8am on Tuesday 3 September, following an extensive refurbishment project, costing £1.375 million. The Mayor of Epsom and Ewell Councillor **Steve Bridger** (RA Stamford) will officially open the pub on the day.

The Assembly Rooms is a Grade II listed building. It was built around 1692, during a period when Epsom was renowned for its spa and as a fashionable retreat for the wealthy and aristocratic. The original purpose of the Assembly Rooms was to provide a venue for social gatherings, balls, and entertainment for those visiting the town to enjoy its spa waters.

The building is noted for its classical architectural style, which reflects the aesthetics of its time. It features a symmetrical façade and large windows, typical of

Georgian architecture, intended to create an elegant and welcoming space. Inside, the building originally boasted a grand ballroom, which would have been used for dances and social events.

The **Epsom Protection Society** was active in ensuring the survival of one of the Borough’s premier historic buildings.

With the decline in the popularity of Epsom’s spa by the mid-18th century, the Assembly Rooms underwent several changes in usage. It adapted to meet the evolving needs of the local community and continued to serve as a venue for various events, including public meetings, concerts, and theatrical performances. There followed a period of retailing uses and emptiness until 1966 when it served as the offices of the National Counties Building Society.

Now a pub, first opened as a **Wetherspoon** in April 2002, it has been completely refurbished over the Summer months. The customer area has also undergone a full refurbishment, as well as the relocation and upgrade to the bar area, including an upgrade to the drinks dispense equipment.



The pub has been fully redecorated throughout, including the installation of a bespoke new carpet and additional furniture. Customer area air conditioning has been upgraded, customer toilets repaired and redecorated, and new artwork added to the customer area. External signage and lighting have also been replaced and upgraded.

(New interior photographed)

Behind the scenes, the kitchen facilities and equipment has been upgraded, with an open gantry food hoist room, as well as new staff facilities created.

The Assembly Rooms pub will be open from 8am until 12 midnight Sunday to Thursday, and 8am until 1am Friday and Saturday. Food will be served throughout the day, from opening until 11pm every day.

The pub will be open for family dining, with children, accompanied by an adult, welcome in the pub until 9pm, throughout the week.

Pub manager **Sel Devecioglu** said: “The £1.375 million investment highlights Wetherspoon’s commitment to the pub and its staff and customers, as well as to Epsom itself. We are delighted that we have also been able to create 15 new jobs for local people. The team are looking forward to welcoming customers back into The Assembly Rooms and we’re confident that they will be impressed by the new-look, upgraded pub.”

Leatherhead town on the way up?

11 October 2024



Leatherhead could become a “destination town” with an updated shopping arcade and cinema screens, according to regeneration plans. The future project could also see a ‘new neighbourhood’ created with up to 11-storey apartment block and townhouses in Bull Hill.

The Swan Centre has been earmarked to be the “catalyst to revitalise the town” of Leatherhead. A new leisure area is set to be the “heart” of the Surrey town with four new restaurants, bars and cafes.

Plans include 14 retail units, four cinema screens for leisure and a new central market square for events. Retaining stores like Sainsbury’s, Boots, WHSmith and others is also being considered in the development proposals.

Demolishing Leret House, the former offices on Swan Street, is another key part of the proposal. Speaking at a webinar on July 30, project officers said they are looking to reuse as much of the fabric of the building as possible by retaining the concrete frame.

Locals could see apartment buildings up to 11 storeys popping up in the town centre, with houses ranging between three to four stories. Prospective plans for Bull Hill, the second part of the regeneration scheme, include apartment flats and townhouses, as well as parking facilities, offices, and a park. Officers are also looking at plans for a hotel with retail spaces on the ground floor.

Between one, two and three bedroom flats could be available in the new apartments, with the family houses being three to four bedrooms each. MVDC and Keir

Property detail a mixture of open market and affordable homes for purchase and rent could be on the offer.

Councillor Keira Vyvyan-Robinson said: “We appreciate that building heights are a sensitive matter, and this is why the sketches and layouts in the masterplan show illustrative heights only at this stage.” The Cabinet Member for Projects stressed that “nothing has been decided” as the plans were still in the pre-application phase and “are likely to evolve based on [consultation] feedback”.

A Kier Property officer said the project is “looking to get the right balance” of housing heights, so it can “sit comfortably in its environment.” Upgrading the existing park in Bull Hill is also part of the initial proposals. Project officers said they wanted to make the park more accessible to people in Leatherhead by improving the play areas.

Launched on July 8 with five consultation events, people can give feedback to the prospective plans until September 26. Leigh Thomas, Group managing director, Kier Property said the consultation events so far had given him “much food for thought”. He added the team were looking to adapt the plans “according to the needs of the local community”.

MVDC and Keir Property has announced new consultation dates, including:

- Monday 19 August, 5:30pm to 7:30pm at St Mary’s Church Hall, 10A The Ridgeway, Fetcham, Leatherhead KT22 9AZ
- Thursday 5 September, 5:30pm to 7:30pm at Ashted Peace Memorial Hall (Ralli Room), Woodfield Lane, Ashted KT21 2BE
- Wednesday 11 September, 5:30pm to 7:30pm at The Old Barn Hall Bookham (Main Hall), 55 Church Road, Great Bookham, Leatherhead KT23 3PQ

Keir Property and MVDC is looking at submitting a planning application in 2025 and, if approved, to start building by spring/summer 2026.

Artistic Impression Of The Arrival Square from North Street, south east corner. (Credit: Mole Valley District Council and Keir Property)

Hyperia’s screams have mixed local responses

11 October 2024



What’s it like being neighbours to one of the biggest theme parks in the UK? “It depends if you like screaming,” residents say. Living next to Thorpe Park has split opinion with some locals saying they like the ‘nice screams’ and others saying they struggle to sit in the garden.

The park, between Chertsey and Staines-upon-Thames in Surrey, has recently introduced its newest and biggest ride, Hyperia. Some locals said they could hear the screams and noise from the ride about a mile away on opening day, but not all of the park’s neighbours are bothered by it.

Joyce Hunt, 93, has lived next to the theme park for 40 odd years and “loves to hear” the screaming. She said: “It’s great to see young people go and enjoy it. They have a good scream there.” Joyce said the park was handy when her grandchildren were young and she could walk to the park with them.

Bricklayer Kevin Nye, 52, said it’s “great” living next to the park and hearing the “nice screams”. He moved into the street eight years ago for “peace and quiet”. Although it’s busy in the summer, Kevin said it’s calmer the rest of the year.

But one couple said Thorpe Park “encroaches on [our] daily lives” and they “don’t leave the house after 5pm”. Jackie, 55, said the traffic on the roads is so bad after the theme park closes she “doesn’t bother” leaving the house. One time, Jackie said she was stuck on the roundabout for 25 minutes, when her home was just a short walk away.

“It’s one of the reasons why we’re thinking about moving away from Surrey,” said Jackie, “Staines is too congested”. Jackie and partner Neil, 60, moved to the area 20 years ago when Thorpe was just a “small park” but now they say the number of customers is “out of proportion”.

First opened in 1979, Thorpe Park has grown from strength to strength and expanded its rides and attraction offerings. A spokesperson for Thorpe Park said it has not received any complaints from local residents next door to the park about recent issues of parking, noise or litter.

Sitting outside in the garden, the couple said it’s not so much the screams that disturb them but the click click clicking of the rides as the cars climb to the top, and the sudden whoosh that follows on its way down. With Halloween parties, late functions in the evening- the pair said it’s “never quiet”.

Other locals, like Alan, 59, said he “didn’t want to sound like an old fogey” but sometimes the PA system for the autumn functions was “too loud” and lasted until 11pm at night. But he accepted it is a theme park: “What do you expect? There are worse things to live next to.”

Thrill-seekers visiting Thorpe sometimes park down residential streets around the site to avoid paying parking fees. Although some neighbours said they “don’t blame” people for trying to save a few quid, one couple had even taken to putting bricks on the curb outside of their house to stop people parking.

Liz and Barry Taylor, 58 and 73, said people parking outside their house at the weekends can cause a lot of traffic and congestion down their quiet road. They said sometimes they struggle to get out of their drives and dodge other cars, but it has not been “too bad” since Hyperia opened. “It’s alright,” said Liz, “but I’d rather it wasn’t there.”

Not all the neighbours mind it: Johanna said it is “no problem”, adding that she is “all in favour of working people” trying to save money. She said: “When you think about the problems of the world- it’s nothing. They are youngsters.”

Neighbours raised issues of people chucking litter out of their car and onto the kerb as hometime comes around. “Lots of rubbish gets left along the road,” said Joanne Bolton, 65. She moved next door to the park three years ago to be closer to her daughter. Residents complained of fast food packaging and wrappers being thrown out of cars and “left tumbling down the street” before people drive home.

But Joanne said: “I like looking out at the green area [of trees around the park]. If that goes I’d be mad.” Although she “quite likes the screaming”, she gets more wound up about the planes that fly over her garden.

A Thorpe Park spokesperson said: “Thorpe Park is very much part of the local community we operate within and has been positively contributing to the local area for 45 years. We strive to do all we can to ensure we keep our local residents, staff and guests happy, and we pride ourselves on being an established part of the community, taking our responsibility as a good neighbour seriously. We have a long-standing positive relationship with our local residents and this is something we value and want to maintain.”

The vast majority of park guests visit for a single day. “Substantial” on-site car parking is available, along with good public transport links near Staines Train Station. The Thorpe Park Express bus transports guests directly between Staines Train Station and Thorpe Park at regular intervals during the day and during operational hours.

The spokesperson added: “Here at Thorpe Park we pride ourselves on being a significant employer of local people. Our teams work closely with our local community to ensure we are giving back to our local area and contributing towards making it a positive place to live and work on a number of levels.”

“Thorpe Park worked hard to support the residents association in working with Cllr Hulley and Surrey Highways to bring improvements to the roundabout – at our own cost – to accelerate and resolve long standing issues impacting residents.”

Some more of these initiatives include Site Conservation teams doing daily litter picking along the main road leading to Thorpe Park, in both directions, and beyond the perimeter. Teams also make regular landscaping support from our teams to ensure local green spaces are kept well maintained.

Image: Suntotooth License details

Wine tasting on the slopes of Leith Hill

11 October 2024



Wine aficionados will soon be able to sample the delights of pinot noir, chardonnay, and cabernet in their famous fermented form after a Surrey Hills vineyard was granted planning permission to build a new tasting room.

The Tanhurst Estate, on the southern slopes of Leith Hill began planting grapes in spring of 2020 as part of a growing shift away from traditional hay and dairy farming.

The family, who have been living amidst the semi-ancient woodland there for the past 40 years, decided the best way to promote their wines was to let people visit and sample the fruits of their labour. At Mole Valley District Council’s Wednesday August 7 planning committee, their efforts became a reality after members unanimously granted approval.

Speaking to the committee, the owners said: “The estate, has been in my wife’s family since 1826. The estate comprises traditional farmland and semi ancient woodlands. The estate used to have milking herds but this became unviable in the 1980s although there remains a small herd of beef cows on the estate.”

He added: “In order to keep its agricultural use we needed to find an alternative and economically viable way to farm the land so we consulted two of the most respected vineyard consultants in the country.” The land’s southern slopes make it ideal for growing grapes as it allows the berries to soak up as much sunshine as possible, while the hilly terrain helps water run off.

He said: “I believe the general public enjoy visiting vineyards and this is part of the experience of enjoying a bottle of wine that they buy. They need to see where the grapes were grown to understand the process the grapes have been through; from growing on the vine, to harvest, to fermentation in the tanks, and then bottling.

“We do all this at Birketts Farm. We are a small scale business and therefore rely on selling directly to customers and this requires interaction at the point of sale. We need to use these barns for wine tasting and other events in order to persuade customers that our wine is made totally on site, available, and worth the money they pay for English wine -once they see how much time and passion and effort goes into making it.”

The plans for the Birketts Farm, in Tanhurst Lane, Abinger, allow for the existing barns to be converted and used for wine tasting and associated sales, as well as for hosting educational classes and private events and a cafe. There will also be added onsite parking and toilet facilities.