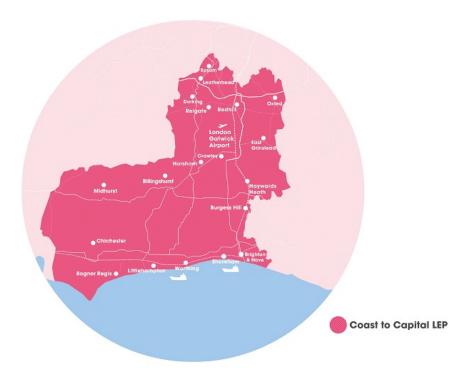
Surrey takes over enterprise partnerships

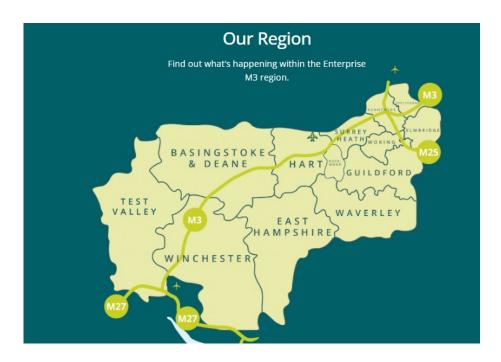
Businesses will be at the heart of Surrey's economic growth as they are set to benefit from a single strategic vision and leadership for the Surrey economy as part of the transfer of formal powers to Surrey County Council.

From April, the Council will take up the key functions currently held by the county's two Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), Enterprise M3 and Coast to Capital.

The change will see the council lead on an enhanced oversight and delivery role in driving sustainable economic growth across the county. It will absorb formal responsibilities to deliver business support through the new Surrey-wide Growth Hub and deliver government funded programmes focused on skills.

The areas covered by Coast to Capital on the left and Enterprise M3 on the right:





Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Growth at Surrey County Council said: "Surrey has a great economic story to tell. We're the UK's leading regional economy, with more than 100,000 businesses which generate more than £50 billion a year to the UK economy.

"We know there is huge potential to grow this further – through targeted support to key sectors, and through working with employers, training providers and local residents to create a high-quality skilled workforce for the future.

"I very much welcome the transfer of these powers into Surrey County Council.

"It will mean for the first time we will have one organisation who, together with a strong independent business voice, will provide a clear, coherent and comprehensive approach to developing a strong sustainable economy. This is positive for business and for residents.

"I want to thank the government for hearing our case and also to our partners in the LEPs for working with us to ensure there is a seamless transfer of service at the start of April."

Surrey has historically been divided across two LEP boundaries – Enterprise M3 operating in the west of the county and Coast to Capital in the east – which has presented challenges in terms of strategic coherence and created confusion for local businesses.

In March 2023, the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget statement announced the intention to integrate LEP functions into upper tier local authorities.

Aware of the positive impacts that could have for Surrey, the County Council took steps to engage early with partners to ensure it was ready to absorb and deliver these functions from the point of transfer.

A report discussed and agreed by the Council's Cabinet on 27th February acknowledged the move could have a range of positive benefits for local businesses and residents including:

- Setting a single economic vision for the county, ensuring Surrey-wide solutions are developed to support local economic growth.
- The development of a new Surrey business brand and website to make it easier for businesses to know where to access the right information, advice and guidance.
- The creation of a Surrey Growth Hub service to provide universal signposting support for business, as well as targeted interventions to help eligible local businesses in their journey to becoming high-growth.
- The creation of a Surrey Careers Hub (launched in September 2023), which delivers a range of activities focused on ensuring schools and colleges can help young people take their next best step.

- Improved join-up and efficiencies with existing council services and teams.
- Greater democratic accountability for decision-making related to local economic growth, that will be informed by a strong, independent, and diverse private sector voice.
- Future government funding to support local growth will now be focused on the whole of Surrey, instead of it being spread across larger regional areas.

Further announcements will be made in the coming months regarding the launch of the new Surrey business brand, website, and Surrey Growth Hub.

All things Epsom in art work

A young artist's work was unveiled for the first time on 16th February at **The Ashley Centre** in Epsom. Created in celebration of all things Epsom, the giant mural by 21-year-old Bristol University student **Ole Murphy** is being displayed in the Ashley Centre before moving to its permanent home in the pedestrian tunnel on West Hill. The local community and representatives from Epsom Business Improvement District (BID) attended the unveiling along with the artist and his family. The artwork was unveiled outside the shopping centre's flagship store which later this year will become the largest Primark in the UK outside of London.

The mural strengthens Epsom's role as Surrey's leading destination for inspirational artworks. Its bright, bold colours celebrate many elements of Epsom's history, culture and people. Ole Murphy's piece aligns beautifully with the graphic design students from the University of the Creative Arts (UCA Epsom), who created vibrant, colourful artworks for Epsom's outdoor East Street gallery and Ashley Centre windows in 2022, to celebrate the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

A year previously, the town unveiled a statue of suffragette **Emily Wilding Davison**, who died after stepping out in front of King George V's horse Anmer at the Epsom Derby in June 1913. The suffragette flag Davison was carrying when struck by the horse now hangs in the Houses of Parliament, while her statue holds a position of honour in Epsom's marketplace.

Karen Pengelly, BID Manager for Go Epsom, comments: "We are delighted to be adding Ole Murphy's vivid and colourful mural to Epsom's wealth of existing artwork, for enjoyment by all who live in and visit Epsom. Our town has such a rich history and culture, which Ole has captured beautifully in his creative and colourful design. The mural will ensure the West Hill tunnel is bursting with cheer, bringing joy to all those who walk, cycle or drive past."

Every aspect of Murphy's mural has been drawn from local life, from well-known elements such as horseracing and the discovery of Epsom Salts to more niche connections to the area.

Artist Ole Murphy comments: "I wanted the mural to represent the past and present of Epsom. Within my piece, I draw attention to the history and life that surrounds the town. Whilst Epsom is rich in historic events, I wanted to pay homage to current issues. I reference this in the sprinkling of music from the hands and the silhouetted figures that are walking down a runway. The figures represent the old and the new; their silhouettes are traditional but the red runway they are walking in foreshadows modernity in creative degrees at the university. Most importantly, I wanted my mural to be vibrant and light up the tunnel. I hope its colours run joyfully through the spirits of those who stop to observe it."

Epsom has a long history of investing in the arts – as well as a bright future. UCA Epsom announced in 2023 that it had obtained planning permission to turn two former office buildings into exciting new places for students and staff. The campus expansion speaks to how valued the role of art is in Epsom life and how intrinsically it is linked with the town's past, present and future.

Business that connects by insulating

The **Wickes Community Programme** has donated insulation products to the value of £1000 to help struggling families in the local community. This initiative is run by the Epsom based charity, **Good Company**, which also operates a network of local food banks. Since launching the Epsom & Ewell Energy Support Scheme in October 2022, Good Company has helped more than 300 families and over a thousand people in the local area.

The primary aim of the programme is to offer support to families struggling to pay energy bills by helping them make their homes more energy efficient and offering advice on how to reduce their energy use in other ways.

Tom Sefton, the Poverty Lead at Good Company, said: "The products donated by Wickes included secondary glazing film, various draught excluders and heat reflective radiator foil. These were handed out at group workshops that we have been running in Epsom, Leatherhead, and Tadworth for food bank clients and other local families most affected by the cost-of-living crisis. We wanted to show people that making small changes like this can significantly reduce your energy usage."

Feedback from participants has been extremely positive, including one client who said: "I found the workshop very helpful and really enjoyed talking to the other participants, sharing tips on how to save energy. The takeaway tips are also very informative. Thank you so much for your kindness and for giving me really useful information about the cost of energy and how to reduce usage and keep warm and safe this winter – which, like many people, has been scaring the life out of me."

Tom went on to say: "Other clients have told us they are wearing the hooded blankets we provided to stay warm and are using an air fryer instead of their oven to save energy, as well as fitting draught excluders and radiator foil to heat their homes more efficiently."

Chris Grayling MP Epsom and Ewell said: "Last year we ran an appeal in conjunction with Citizens Advice Epsom and Good Company and raised over £40,000 to support our local community. These funds were used to provide short-term help with energy bills and to offer energy-saving advice. We were delighted when Wickes agreed to support us with these products through the Wickes Community Programme. It's at times like these we need to work together with businesses like Wickes to make a difference."

Wickes Store Manager in Epsom, **Ben O'Leary** said: "Supporting our local community is really important to Wickes, especially during the current cost of living crisis. For any families interested in how they too can make their homes more energy efficient there's some great advice on the Wickes website."

The Wickes Community Programme is open to all local community groups and charities seeking help for improvement projects.

A boozy blow to Epsom's "gentrification"?

Epsom's new B&M bargains store, formerly Wilko, can sell booze from 7am-11pm despite a resident's concerns it could "attract the wrong crowd". After entering administration last summer, the former Wilko branch was purchased by B&M in September 2023 in a re-brand.

Epsom and Ewell's licensing committee unanimously granted an alcohol licence for the new B&M store, due to open 1 March, at a meeting held 12 February.

One resident, Neil Gandhi had objected stating: "[It] goes against the local plan to gentrify Epsom. A B&M bargain will attract more crime, shoplifting, litter and the wrong crowds to our beautiful town Epsom."

Another resident from Hudson House, a nearby apartment building, said they already experience problems from people who buy alcohol late at night from Tesco and Co-op. They added people proceed to drink under their car park and walkway.

A statement from Keystone Law on behalf of B&M said: "The concept of gentrification and what is 'the wrong crowd' is somewhat subjective and, in any event, is not strictly relevant to the Licensing Objectives."

The national discount retailer sells a range of products including food, electricals, homeware, furniture, DIY and a limited range of alcohol.

The committee heard the main risk of crime out of B&M is shoplifting, according to the B&M representative. This danger is mitigated by a one-way system and the alcohol aisle placed at the centre of the premises, preventing potential shoplifters from rushing in and out of the store.

The application was granted despite Cllr **Phil Neale** (RA Cuddington) raising concerns on the effect of the "early" licensing hours on "teenagers and the school run at that time in the morning".

Although the licensing hours expand between 7am-11pm seven days a week, the applicant stated the store would "generally" operate from 8am-7pm Monday to Saturday and 10:30am to 4:30pm on Sundays.

During peak trading periods, such as Christmas celebrations in December, the applicant's trading hours are extended to 11pm

closing time subject to customer demand.

While he was content with the 11pm cut-off, Cllr Neale said: "I would rather see the early hour one made a little bit tighter than 7am."

The B&M representative explained the 7am start catered towards customers who shop earlier due to shift work patterns. He added that the sale of alcohol is an important part of the store's offer because it "wants to ensure B&M is a one-stop shop."

Related report:

Another news in store for Epsom!

Image: Credit: Google street view. Former Wilko store to open as B&M bargains applies for alcohol licence

30 years' smile stamped on local Post Offices

Postmistress **Nidhi Prashar** has reached her 30 years' milestone of serving Post Office customers in Surrey. Three decades ago, Nidhi and her husband, Anil, bought Oxted Post Office and for most of that time Nidhi has served that community. Now Anil runs that branch since Nidhi became Postmistress for **Epsom** in July 2017.

Postmistress, Nidhi Prasahar, said: "I loved serving the people of Oxted, but there was suddenly an opportunity to take on a bigger, busier, branch as well at Epsom, so Anil now runs Oxted branch. First Epsom was temporarily based at Epsom & Ewell Town Hall to restore service to the town, then I opened my permanent branch and card and gift shop in the High Street in February 2018.

"I get on really well with my customers in Epsom too. Thankfully I'd just got settled before Covid struck, but that was strange as many businesses in the high street were closed, so those customers were not around. However, other people who would normally have been commuting to elsewhere, were suddenly working from home and visiting my Post Office, so there were lots of different customers to get to know. People were grateful that Anil and I were able to keep both Oxted and Epsom branches open."

Last year Nidhi was filmed at Epsom branch as part of an episode of Stacey Solomon's Sort Your Life out programme. A local family had their home de-cluttered and they came across lots of different foreign currencies, which was then converted into useful sterling at her Post Office. Many of her customers immediately recognised her from the programme.

Nidhi, said: "I love being a postmistress. It's the people that you meet that make it so great. There aren't many jobs where you have this great interaction with people. People come in regularly and you build up a relationship. Customers become like extended family.

"In Oxted there are no banks left and we meet the banking needs of the community – so it's non-stop banking customers. In Epsom there are lots of banks and building societies, but we are open longer hours than all of them, so for some customers they find it more convenient to come here."

At Oxted and Epsom customers also have the choice of DPD and Evri services in addition to Royal Mail and Parcelforce mail services.

Post Office Area Manager, **Richard Wilder**, presented Nidhi with a 30 Years' Long Service Award. He said: "I want to thank Nidhi for being a first class Postmistress in Surrey for 30 years. Nidhi and Anil provide great customer service and they really care about the people that they serve in Oxted and Epsom. Both branches look great too with the retail alongside."

The Post Office.

Another news in store for Epsom!

Following **Primark**'s announcement it is opening in **Epsom** we have a further welcome boost to the local economy, B&M are thrilled to announce the launch of its brand-new store in Epsom, Surrey. The launch of the new store will create 60 jobs for local people.

The discount retailer has taken possession of a previous Wilko store which provides a space of 26,548sqft. which will undergo a

comprehensive internal and external refurbishment programme before officially opening its doors at 8am on Friday $1^{\rm st}$ March 2024.

Customers can expect to find a wide variety of branded groceries for the best possible price including a range of food, drink and pet food. There will also be a fantastic selection of quality health and beauty products, homeware, electricals, DIY essentials, toys, games, gifts and plenty more to explore.

The store manager from B&M said: "We're feeling extremely positive about the creation of more jobs for local people, and we hope customers are going to be delighted with their new store."

"We are all really excited to get the doors open and welcome new customers through the door."

Related reports:

Primark to open in Epsom

5 Shops that could replace House of Fraser in the Ashley Centre

Primark to open in Epsom

Primark will occupy 44,000 sq ft in the former House of Fraser space in the Ashley Centre, Epsom, utilising two floors and sitting adjacent to the scheme's central square near retailers such as JD. Forming the destination's anchor tenant, the new store will feature Primark's full offer, incorporating menswear, womenswear and childrenswear, as well as accessories, beauty, home, and lifestyle. The store is expected to create around 100 jobs for the local community and is set to open in early 2025.

Louisa Butters, Head of Retail Asset Management UK at CBRE IM, commented: "Primark's signing is a milestone moment for the Ashley Centre. The opening will mark the final stage of our two-year repositioning project that underpins our long-term strategy for the revitalisation of the Ashley Centre, ensuring that it continues to serve the needs of the community in every way possible. We are looking forward to welcoming Primark early next year, and delivering an optimised and enhanced experience and environment for our visitors."

Philippa Nibbs, Director of Sales UK, London and the South East at Primark, also said: "As we continue to invest in the UK high street, we are delighted to announce our new store in Epsom that will open next year. We look forward to becoming a part of this community and playing a central role in the refurbished Ashley Centre."

Primark in Epsom will join Newbury, Berkshire, as the next locations confirmed for Primark in 2025. This follows the recent news that Primark will be investing more than £100m in its UK stores this year, as it celebrates 50 years of Primark on the Great British High Street. Local shoppers in Epsom and the surrounding areas looking to get their Primark fix in the meantime will be able to visit the nearby Sutton, Kingston or Woking stores.

In 2023, the Ashley Centre welcomed a raft of new openings such as JD, Deichmann, and GAIL's Bakery, forming a key part of the centre's leasing strategy to evolve its retail and F&B offer. The centre's £7 million refurbishment will also work in tandem, seeing the reconstruction of the East entrance and enhancements to the interior, creating a refreshed and modern look.

Related Reports:

5 Shops that could replace House of Fraser in the Ashley Centre

Dementia nurses coming closer to Epsom

Dementia UK, the specialist dementia nursing charity, in partnership with Leeds Building Society, is launching free face-to-face 'Closer to Home' clinics to provide life-changing support to families living with dementia in **Epsom**.

The clinics will be held in the **Epsom branch** of Leeds Building Society, bringing emotional and practical support closer to families with dementia through the charity's specialist dementia nurses, known as Admiral Nurses. Dementia UK's Closer to Home clinics will run on 28th and 29th of February and the 5th, 6th and 7th of March 2024.

The face-to-face clinic will offer a safe, comfortable, and private space for families to discuss any aspect of dementia and receive

the specialist support of Admiral Nurses. Between June 2021 and December 2023, over 4,000 families have been helped through Dementia UK's 'Closer to Home' clinics, and the charity has partnered with Leeds Building Society to offer in-person support across the United Kingdom since 2022.

Nationwide research conducted by Dementia UK into the impact of dementia revealed that nearly half (47%) of people in the South East of England have been affected by dementia, and 51% of people in the region are worried about how a diagnosis would affect their relationships with family and friends. Only 16% of people in the South East have heard of Dementia UK's specialist Admiral Nurses.

In April 2020, Dementia UK and Leeds Building Society announced a four-year partnership to raise £700,000 to help over 2,500 families with dementia across the UK. As part of this partnership, the innovative 'Closer to Home' project was also launched in June 2021, to improve access to dementia care and support.

The partnership's initial target of £500,000 has now been exceeded. Thanks to this, Dementia UK has been able to develop and deliver virtual appointments with specialist dementia nurses for an even larger number of families and individuals.

Hannah Gardner, Admiral Nurse at Dementia UK, said:

"We're proud to bring our Closer to Home project to Epsom to offer specialist face-to-face clinics in the area. We know the difficulties that families in Epsom and the surrounding area often experience. We know that dementia doesn't just affect the person with the diagnosis: families, friends, and carers are also impacted.

"Dementia is a huge and growing health crisis – someone in the UK develops dementia every three minutes. This means it's more important than ever for us to reach families and offer one on one support from our dementia specialist Admiral Nurses. From worries about memory problems to understanding a dementia diagnosis and how the condition progresses, we will be providing practical and emotional advice on caring for someone who lives with this progressive condition, along with giving advice on financial and legal issues."

Richard Fearon, CEO of Leeds Building Society, said:

"Dementia UK was voted as our charity partner by our members and colleagues, and we are thrilled to have raised over £700,000 for them, exceeding the £500,000 fundraising target we set ourselves at the start of this partnership."

Dementia UK's Closer to Home clinics will take place in Epsom on the 28th and 29th of February and the 5th, 6th and 7th of March 2024.

To book a confidential and in-person appointment with an Admiral Nurse, visit dementiauk.org/closer-to-home dementiauk.org

Thames Water's reputation going down the drain

Thames Water's spending on infrastructure is "woefully inadequate", its behaviour a "disgrace", and direct lines of communications to MPs "unhelpful" - a meeting into the "largest ever" water outages in "recent history" heard.

Last November tens of thousands of homes in and around Guildford and Godalming were left without water when the utility company failed to deal with the impact of Storm Ciarán. Some 20,346 homes were cut off for more than three hours, and 14,520 for 12 hours or more hours – including hospitals and schools.

So far Thames Water has paid out £1.7million pounds in compensation to those impacted.

The outage led to chaotic scenes as people became increasingly angry with the privately owned water company, with reports of staff and volunteers being verbally abused and spat at.

Addressing the Tuesday, January 31, meeting of Guildford Borough Council's overview and scrutiny committee was Thames Water's Paul Wetton. He said it was "By far the largest ever we've had to manage in recent history".

The utility company, which reported an 11 per cent increase in its underlying revenue in its interim 2023/24 accounts to £1.2 billion, needed up to 16 tankers to prop up the network in order to feed water directly to cut off hospitals during the outage. It also delivered 750,000 litres of bottled water to customers described as "priority".

Thames Water's Tess Fayers acknowledged the huge disruption and apologised for all the impacted homes, businesses and other

critical operators such as hospitals and schools that were cut off. She said: "I'm also aware that there is also a sense of heightened unease about the water supply with a number of issues being raised to us recently which can't be very helpful to the community. We are here because we are committed to putting things right. We want to make sure we do the right thing by the community and provide you with a constant supply of water."

Guildford is prone to water problems. All the water available to residents is on a closed network. So if there are problems, extra resources cannot be brought in. Most of the water that goes into the network comes from the ground with the remaining 40 per cent drawn from rivers before being treated for human use. Daily demand sits at around 50 megalitres, the equivalent of 50 million bottles of water. The system essentially runs at maximum capacity with new water being drawn in to replace what is going out. When the power at the processing plants went down during Storm Ciarán, that process stopped and the water ran dry.

People on the tops of hills were impacted first and the last to be restored. Capacity in Guildford is so tightly packed that it's difficult to find the capacity to enable the investment, the meeting heard.

Tess Fayers said: "Communications were bland, lacked technical information that we should be more bold putting forward." She added: "Not telling our customers does not help and leaves more people in the dark. Another thing we learned, in all honesty, it's sometimes unhelpful to have a line of communications running between ourselves and potentially a member of parliament – which doesn't always allow us to manage the message in the best possible way."

To improve matters, the meeting heard, an "enhanced" leadership team has been put in place and investment is being made, although capacity issues complicates the matter.

Councillor Danielle Newson (LD, Tillingbourne) said: "Your infrastructure spending is woeful completely inadequate. Telling us you can't actually tell us what you know is just disgraceful when we are paying your bills and your bonuses."

Deputy leader of the council, Cllr Tom Hunt, said: "I just wonder how many residents in Guildford or Waverley would choose Thames Water today."

Related reports:

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Thames Water among worst in country

Wasting water?

Surrey borough kicks up a stink about stink

Maintaining business standards in Surrey

Residents are encouraged to do their research and always look for reputable and recommended tradespeople before having any work done on their property.

Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards is pleased to announce a partnership with United Knowledge Ltd to provide its 'Trading Standards Approved', trader's scheme.

The collaboration marks a significant milestone in the efforts to enhance consumer protection, promote fair trading practices, and ensure businesses in both counties adhere to the highest standards of excellence. It will also enable trading standards to support residents who are scammed or targeted by rogue traders by supplying a safer choice.

UKTSA offers a list of local businesses who have each given a commitment to trading fairly.

The scheme aims to support both local businesses and consumers, providing honest traders with a way to be identified and therefore stand out from the crowd.

From February 2024, residents will be able to find a Trading Standards Approved trader, introducing an added sense of confidence with the reputable accreditation.

The scheme is able to include a diverse range of trades and businesses, whether consumers are in search of a trustworthy plumber, pest controller, landscaper, electrician, or any other contractor.

The partnership between Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards and UKTSA is aimed at creating a more transparent and trustworthy marketplace for businesses and consumers. Through the implementation of rigorous standards, and continuous monitoring, both counties will be able to identify and address any potential issues or breaches of trading regulations promptly.

Councillor Kevin Deanus, Cabinet Member for Fire and Rescue and Resilience at Surrey County Council said: "Our Trading Standards team is committed to protecting consumers and supporting legitimate business in Surrey. Honest businesses are also victims of rogue traders when their trade is linked to dishonest practices and their reputations tarnished. This collaboration will strengthen our ability to protect consumers and support businesses in our counties. Together, we can ensure fair and ethical trading practices, enhance consumer confidence, and contribute to the growth and prosperity of our local economies."

Paula Hines from United Knowledge Ltd said: "We are pleased to welcome our new partners on-board. We are looking forward to working with Buckinghamshire Council & Surrey County Council and the local business communities to make this scheme a success."

Steve Ruddy Head of Trading Standards at Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards said: "Schemes such as this offer additional protection to residents as well as clear procedures for resolving problems, which benefits both residents and businesses. Trading Standards always advises residents to get a range of quotes from reputable traders through trustworthy sources such as the new Trading Standards Approved trader's scheme. The scheme gives people access to a list of reliable traders that have been vetted and approved by to ensure that they operate in a legal, honest and fair way."

Residents who have experienced problems with tradespeople or companies to report it to the **Citizens Advice consumer helpline**. The helpline takes all enquiries on behalf of Trading Standards across England and Wales and will pass your report to the relevant Trading Standards team.

Business operators can visit the **Trading Standards Approved** website to find out more about the registration process and joining fees.

Consumers can search the register HERE on the UKTSA website