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12th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

# NHS in Surrey prescribe AI solutions to diagnoses

27 July 2026




Surrey NHS trusts are investing tens of thousands of pounds into artificial intelligence tools across clinical and administrative settings, the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) can reveal.

AI is being deployed across some of Surrey's largest health trusts amid a worldwide scramble to harness the burgeoning new tech.

Freedom of Information responses to the LDRS have shown that AI-backed diagnostic tools, transcription softwares and phone systems are in use at hospitals across the county.

Chief Clinical Information Officer Dr Andrew Carne from Royal Surrey and Ashford and St Peter's Hospitals NHS Foundation Trusts – which are among the trusts rolling out AI – told the LDRS: "We are proud to be at the forefront of implementing AI to benefit our patients, supporting our clinicians in the diagnosis of serious medical conditions such as cancer."

Among the tools used at Royal Surrey County Hospital is Annalise AI, a diagnostic software designed to help with analysis of chest X-rays. The trust is spending £21,120 per year on this technology, which has passed a "robust" evaluation process.

The trust has credited this tool with helping speed up lung cancer diagnoses, giving clinicians the chance to catch more cases as early as possible. It is used across several trusts that are part of the Surrey, Sussex and Frimley Imaging Network.

"These tools are designed to enhance, not replace, the expertise of our clinicians and are rigorously tested before being introduced into clinical practice," Dr Carne explained.

"The use of AI in any of our processes is subject to robust internal governance and oversight and is implemented in accordance with NHS England guidance and processes."

An evaluation at Royal Surrey is also ongoing for the use of OlySense, an AI tool engineered to help with gastrointestinal examinations. The trust has so far spent £93,432.96 for two OlySense.

Supplied by healthcare tech company Olympus Medical, it is intended to assist with polyp detection during colonoscopies.

But the use of AI in healthcare goes beyond clinical settings, with trusts across Surrey also using the technology for administrative purposes.

Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust – the county's main mental health provider – spends an estimated £65,000 per year on Limbic AI Chat Bot, which is designed to assist with the patient referral process.

A spokesperson for the trust said: "Like other NHS organisations, we are exploring the use of AI as part of the NHS's 'digital first' policy. We are not using any patient-facing AI at the moment, but we expect to in the coming months.

"Before deploying any new AI or other technology, we will have strong governance in place and be aligned with all national guidelines."

Several trusts also use less medically-specific AI tools, such as Microsoft CoPilot – which was found to be used in all trusts that responded to the LDRS' FOI requests.

Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust said it is using CoPilot for "clinical uses including meeting summarisation, document preparation" in its FOI response – with a pilot beginning in September 2025 and evaluation still ongoing.

Dr Deblina Bhattacharjee of the University of Bath's computer science department told the LDRS that the use of AI in healthcare comes with a balance of pros and cons, with the easing of administrative tasks being the "obvious one".

Assistance in diagnostics, such as the software used across the Surrey, Sussex and Frimley Imaging Network, is also another crucial area where AI use "has its positives", Dr Bhattacharjee added.

However, she said that "the risks come from pace outrunning governance", adding: "Clinical AI should remain a support for human decision making, with clear accountability in place before deployment rather than after."

Surrey NHS Trusts approached by the LDRS insisted that stringent evaluation criteria are in place before any AI technology is rolled out.

"From my own experience, the projects that succeed are the ones where clinicians, patients and information governance teams are involved together," Dr Bhattacharjee said.

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

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ISSN 2753-2771

# Epsom’s Love Me Love My Mind celebrates 20 years of community care

27 July 2026




An Epsom charity which has supported thousands of people affected by mental health difficulties has celebrated its 20th anniversary.

Members, volunteers, friends and supporters of Love Me Love My Mind gathered at St Barnabas Church in Temple Road on Saturday 25th July for a buffet meal, raffle, dancing and anniversary celebration. Among those attending was Epsom and Ewell MP Helen Maguire.

The evening marked two decades since the charity’s Monday Drop-In began at St Barnabas in 2006. What started as a welcoming place where people could meet, talk and share refreshments has developed into an entirely volunteer-run charity promoting better understanding of mental health throughout Epsom and Ewell.

Today, Love Me Love My Mind seeks to break down stigma, offer friendship and encouragement to people experiencing mental health difficulties and their families, and direct people towards sources of further help. Its regular Monday Drop-In attracts around 30 to 40 people each week for refreshments, activities and a home-cooked meal. The charity also runs a Men’s Pit Stop group, peer support and community activities, as well as organising the annual Epsom Mental Health Week.

The anniversary exhibition placed the charity’s work within a much longer and sometimes painful chapter of Epsom’s history. From 1896 onwards, five large psychiatric hospitals—Long Grove, Horton, West Park, St Ebba’s and The Manor—were built around the town. By 1925 the “Epsom Cluster” formed what was described as the largest psychiatric facility in the world.

The hospitals provided employment, recreation, companionship and care, but their position on the edge of the town also reflected the isolation and stigma experienced by people with mental illness. St Barnabas developed particularly close links with Long Grove Hospital, while members of its congregation were involved with the Friends of Long Grove.

When the large hospitals were gradually closed under the policy of care in the community, many former patients were discharged into group homes around Epsom, including within St Barnabas parish. Some had lost the friendships and support networks they had known inside the hospitals.

A number began attending weekday services at St Barnabas. The then vicar, the Revd Michael Preston, offered coffee afterwards and listened to the life stories of those who came. The exhibition records that from this modest act of welcome grew “a very significant mental health community support project”.

The charity’s late founder, the Revd Susan Bull, subsequently researched the relationship between churches and people experiencing mental distress. Her study, *Voices of the Voiceless: An evaluation of local church care for those in mental distress*, examined what enabled St Barnabas to provide acceptance and hospitality at a time when fear and stigma remained widespread.

The anniversary also remembered the long-standing social divide between St Barnabas parish and more affluent parts of Epsom. Separated from the town centre by the railway embankment and reached through low bridges, the neighbourhood was historically home to many lower-paid hospital workers and successive communities arriving from other parts of Britain and overseas.

Against that background, Love Me Love My Mind has spent 20 years building a place in which people can find companionship, belonging and acceptance. The charity says its work over that period has supported thousands of people, promoted positive mental health and helped create a stronger and more connected community.

Saturday’s summer party was one of several events being held during the anniversary year. The charity thanked Direct Residential, Love Your Accountants, Park View Café, St Barnabas Church and the Rotary Club of Ewell for supporting the celebration.

Further information about Love Me Love My Mind, its activities, volunteering and donations is available at www.lovemelovemymind.org.uk.

Lionel Blackman

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ISSN 2753-2771

Photo: Helen Maguire MP addresses the 20th anniversary party of LMLMM

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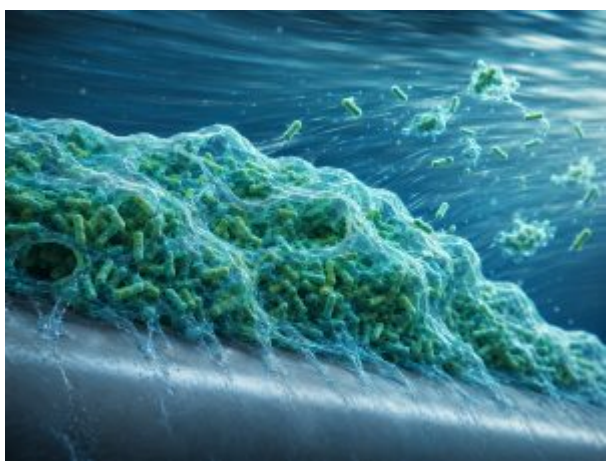
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# Surrey University leads research against anti-biotic resistance

27 July 2026



Faster and more effective ways to treat *pseudomonas aeruginosa*, a bacterium identified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as one of the most life-threatening pathogens, could be on the cards thanks to a first-of-its-kind 3D computer model developed by the University of Surrey.

The model has shown how *pseudomonas aeruginosa* grows and reshapes its protective layer and spreads to new surfaces. The WHO estimates that bacterial antimicrobial resistance – where antibiotics are no longer effective – was directly responsible for 1.27 million deaths worldwide in 2019 alone.

In a study published in npj Biofilms and Microbiomes, researchers used BioDynaMo, an open-source simulation platform developed as part of an international collaboration involving the University of Surrey and partners worldwide, to create a three-dimensional agent-based model (ABM) that recreates how *pseudomonas aeruginosa* forms biofilms.

Biofilms are communities of bacteria encased in a protective sticky layer made up of sugars, proteins and DNA that allows them to cling to surfaces and resist antibiotics. For Pseudomonas aeruginosa, these biofilms commonly form in flowing environments such as catheters and plumbing systems.

Unlike previous computer models, the Surrey-developed ABM captures how biofilms grow under constant fluid flow – similar to real-world conditions – and how the bacteria naturally break away from them to spread and colonise new surfaces. The team validated the simulation against laboratory experiments, demonstrating that it accurately reproduces the growth, structure and detachment patterns seen in real bacterial biofilms.

Ryan Bournes, postgraduate researcher at the University of Surrey and lead author of the study, said:

*"Biofilms are incredibly difficult to study because many of the important interactions happen at a microscopic level. Our model allows us to simulate these processes in a virtual environment, making it much easier to test new ideas and understand how these bacteria spread without solely relying on costly and time-consuming laboratory experiments."*

As well as helping scientists study *pseudomonas aeruginosa*, the modelling framework could be adapted to investigate other biofilm-forming bacteria and predict how factors such as fluid flow, surface design and bacterial behaviour influence the spread of infection.

Dr Roman Bauer, Senior Lecturer at the University of Surrey's Computer Science Research Centre and BioDynaMo

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ISSN 2753-2771

spokesperson, said:

*"Antimicrobial resistance is steadily rising due to the overuse and misuse of antibiotics, so finding faster and smarter ways to understand the behaviour of pathogens is essential.*

*"Using BioDynaMo, we've been able to recreate for the first time how Pseudomonas aeruginosa biofilms grow, change shape and spread under flowing conditions – biological processes that would be extremely difficult, expensive or even impossible to observe directly. This gives researchers a powerful new tool for virtual testing before moving into the laboratory."*

The research could help researchers optimise experiments, reduce laboratory costs and support the development of safer medical devices, hospital plumbing systems and other environments where harmful biofilms can form.

Surrey University

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Image: Artist's impression of Pseudomonas aeruginosa bacteria encased within a protective biofilm under flowing conditions.

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# Surrey County Council Chair opens new Sensory Services Centre in Ashtead

27 July 2026



A new centre designed to support people with sight and hearing loss across Surrey has officially opened in Ashtead, strengthening services for thousands of residents living with sensory impairments.

The centre, operated by Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey, was officially opened last week by Councillor Tim Hall MBE, Chair of Surrey County Council, alongside Christine Wilmshurst, Chair of Trustees at Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey, during a special event attended by staff, volunteers, supporters and local partners.

Located at Bridgehead House, which is owned and was refurbished by Surrey County Council, the new facility will provide an accessible and welcoming hub where residents who are blind, partially sighted, Deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind can access information, advice, specialist support and community activities.

The centre has been designed to enhance the charity's ability to deliver services across the county and meet growing demand, helping people maintain their independence, wellbeing and social connections.

**Tim Hall, Chair of Surrey County Council, said:** "It was a pleasure to officially open this fantastic new facility. Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey provides invaluable support to residents across the county, and this new centre will strengthen the charity's ability to make a positive difference in the lives of people with sensory impairments and their families.

"We are proud that Surrey County Council has supported this project through the refurbishment of Bridgehead House, creating a modern and accessible space that will benefit residents for many years to come."

**Christine Wilmshurst, Chair of Trustees at Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey, said:** "The opening of our new Ashtead centre represents an exciting new chapter for the charity. It is a truly transformational time, and we could not have done it without the leadership, passion, dedication and hard work from everyone involved in the project. We are committed to ensuring that people living with sight and hearing loss have access to the support, resources, and opportunities they need to live independently and confidently.

"This centre will be a place where people can find practical help, social connection, and a strong sense of community."

The opening reflects a shared commitment between Surrey County Council and Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey to improve accessibility, reduce isolation and empower people to live full and independent lives.

**Sinead Mooney, Surrey County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, added**: "The team at Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey do a fantastic job advocating for and supporting people who have

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ISSN 2753-2771

sensory needs.  As a valued partner delivering services, they make a real difference every day, and we were pleased to work with them to refurbish Bridgehead House and turn it into a centre that will meet the needs of the people they support for many years to come.

“This work is another example of how we are making sure Surrey is fit for the future and passing on a strong legacy of support.”

Each year, Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey supports more than 8,500 children and adults through specialist advice, rehabilitation services, assistive technology support, advocacy, social groups and wellbeing programmes.

For more information about Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey and the services available at the new Ashtead centre, visit www.sightforsurrey.org.uk

Surrey County Council

Image: Christine and Tim Hall Cutting Ribbon

# A new clinic specialising in adult ADHD has opened in Epsom & Ewell: Kiam Clinic

27 July 2026



For many adults, years of quietly struggling with focus, organisation, time management or restlessness can finally start to make sense once ADHD is recognised. Yet with NHS waiting lists for assessment now stretching to several years in many parts of the country, a growing number of people are choosing to seek answers privately.

When carried out properly, at a reputable, Care Quality Commission (CQC) registered clinic and by an experienced specialist, a private ADHD assessment can be a genuinely life-changing step. It opens the door to the right understanding, support and treatment.

A new clinic, Kiam Clinic, has opened in the heart of Epsom to bring expert, locally accessible adult ADHD care to the Epsom and Ewell community.

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EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
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12th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771




The clinic offers comprehensive adult ADHD assessments and, where clinically appropriate, ongoing treatment and medication management, all delivered in line with national clinical guidelines. Its aim is to provide a clear, thorough and compassionate route to diagnosis, helping people finally understand themselves and access the support they need to thrive at work, at home and in everyday life.

Care at Kiam Clinic is led by Dr Abbass Mohammadinasab (MRCPsych), Consultant Psychiatrist and the clinic's Founder. Alongside his work at the clinic, Dr Abbass is a Senior Clinical Lecturer at King's College Medical School and brings extensive NHS and academic experience to every assessment he carries out.

Kiam Clinic is registered with and regulated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), giving patients the reassurance of a service that is safe, professional and held to recognised national standards.

The clinic occupies a spacious, purpose-equipped premises with more than 15 consulting rooms. As well as running its own ADHD service, Kiam Clinic is helping to create a hub for healthcare in the local area: a number of its rooms are available to rent to fellow practitioners, from therapists and counsellors to other medical and wellbeing specialists, looking for high-quality, professional clinical space in Epsom.

The team says its goal is a simple one: to make expert psychiatric care more accessible to the local community, in a welcoming and professional setting, while helping to reduce the long waits that so many people currently face.

Whether you have wondered for years whether ADHD might explain your experiences, or you are a practitioner looking for a professional home for your own practice, Kiam Clinic extends a warm welcome to the Epsom and Ewell community.

To find out more about adult ADHD assessment and treatment, or about renting clinical space, visit the clinic's website.

Website: https://kiamclinic.com

Email: enquiries@kiamclinic.com

Telephone: 01372660580

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# Surrey walkers invited to tackle five peaks for young people

27 July 2026




Local charity Surrey Care Trust is calling on walkers, families, friends and businesses to take on a 13-mile – or even 26-mile – challenge across Surrey this year, helping young people overcome barriers, build confidence and create brighter futures.

Surrey Care Trust's 5 Peaks Challenge will see participants take on either a half-marathon or full-marathon distance walk, tackling the "five peaks of Surrey": St Martha's Hill, Newlands Corner, Leith Hill, Holmbury Hill and Pitch Hill.

The event aims to raise funds for the charity's work with young people across Surrey.

For many young people, the biggest obstacles are not physical. Low confidence, anxiety, a lack of skills or uncertainty about the future can make it difficult to remain connected to education, training and employment.

Surrey Care Trust provides alternative education, mentoring, confidence-building activities, skills development and practical support to help young people recognise their potential and move towards a positive future.

Through its Steps2Work programme, the charity says it has supported hundreds of young people into employment, education, training and volunteering.

"Everyone faces challenges in life, and sometimes young people need someone to help them find their way forward. The 5 Peaks Challenge is a fantastic opportunity for the Surrey community to come together, take on a personal challenge and help young people build confidence and achieve their goals," said Rachel Perez-Lofty, Fundraising and Marketing Manager.

The bespoke orienteering route offers participants the chance to challenge themselves while enjoying Surrey's countryside, whether walking alone, with friends or as part of a workplace team.

"The Surrey 5 Peaks Challenge really is an adventure not to be missed. I speak from experience. Expert organisation, stunning Surrey Hills countryside, the challenge of the five peaks, fresh air and the chance to meet other walkers all combine to make the day something very special.

"By taking part, you will be helping support vulnerable young people and families across Surrey. You really can make a difference," said Teresa, a long-time Surrey 5 Peaks walker.

Surrey Care Trust is encouraging people of all abilities to take part, whether they are experienced walkers or simply looking for a new challenge.

The event takes place on Saturday 12 September 2026, following a route from Shamley Green to Wootton and back to Shamley Green.

To register, visit:

https://www.surreycaretrust.org.uk/event/charity-challenge-event-surrey-5-peaks-challenge-2026/

Surrey Care Trust supports people across Surrey to overcome barriers, build skills and create better futures through mentoring, education, training and community support.

Surrey Care Trust

# Heart attack survivor abseils hospital with Epsom NHS daughter

27 July 2026

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A heart attack survivor has abseiled down the side of St Helier Hospital with his daughter, an occupational therapist at Epsom Hospital, to raise money for the charity supporting both hospitals.

Sutton-based Fred Mendonca, 62, and his daughter Sarah Beard, 30, took on the 125-foot drop at St Helier Hospital ahead of Father's Day weekend. The descent is roughly equivalent to the heel-to-crown height of the Statue of Liberty.

Sarah works in the Mary Seacole Unit at Epsom Hospital, part of Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust. The unit provides inpatient frailty and rehabilitation services for some of the most vulnerable patients in the local community.

The father and daughter team joined more than 70 fundraisers taking part in the second annual Abseil St Helier event, which has already raised more than £20,000 towards Epsom and St Helier Hospitals Charity's £30,000 target.

For Fred, the challenge had a deeply personal meaning. In June 2024 he was at work when he felt chest pain which he initially thought was indigestion.

"I had no idea I had an arterial clot and was flabbergasted when the consultant said I had suffered an acute myocardial infarction — commonly known as a heart attack — and heart failure," he said.

"You think you're indestructible. It doesn't feel like your heart is under attack — it's all the surrounding muscles which end up aching. I tried to self-medicate. Fortunately, my wife called an ambulance which turned up within ten minutes. They hooked me up to an electrocardiogram and I was being treated in A&E within half an hour."

Fred was treated by emergency teams at St George's Hospital before receiving cardiac rehabilitation care at St Helier.

"What a phenomenal team, from the paramedics to the emergency and ward staff," he said. "They were highly professional, efficient, friendly and informative. You know immediately that you are in good hands. The cardiac rehabilitation staff at St Helier nursed me back to full health. Now I'm focusing on keeping fit and I feel better than I have done in the last 20 years.

"I feel like I've been given a new lease of life, and I had the go-ahead for the abseil with Sarah, which means the world to me. Our whole family is grateful for the support we've received from the hospitals and I'm happy to support this important cause."

Sarah has worked in community healthcare roles across Sutton and Surrey for more than eight years and is now based at Epsom Hospital.

She said the experience of her father's illness had brought home the life-saving work of NHS colleagues across the Trust.

"Most of our family was born in St Helier Hospital and the A&E is where all our family goes when we need urgent help, so they've looked after all of us, including my grandad who used to be a chaplain there," she said.

"When my dad was poorly, it really brought home the impact of the work my colleagues do to save lives. I can never be more grateful to them for giving my dad a second chance. My dad's choir often goes to sing for the patients at St Helier at Christmas, which he's been doing for the past 40 years, so we're always keen to show our gratitude for their exceptional care."

Sarah said the abseil was the first time either of them had attempted such a challenge.

"We've never abseiled before, so this is a new adventure for us," she said.

"My dad is a huge source of inspiration for me. He looks after everyone, he's extremely resilient and I know he's always there for us. He's so giving with his time — not just to his family, but to the whole community — so I'm very proud of him and I'm very lucky to be his daughter."

Money raised through the event will support Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust, helping to enhance patient care, support staff wellbeing and improve hospital environments.

Recent charity-supported projects include part-funding a state-of-the-art surgical robot, supporting staff recognition and long-service events, and improving maternity spaces including the maternity bereavement room and early pregnancy unit.

Molly Simpson, Head of Epsom and St Helier Hospitals Charity, said: "We are incredibly grateful to everyone taking part in this year's abseil. It takes real courage to step over the edge at that height, but everyone is doing it to make a real difference for patients, families and NHS colleagues, and to support our hospitals' life-saving care.

"Events like this help bring our community together. I wish all our abseilers the very best of luck and thank them for going above and beyond for our hospitals."

Supporters can still donate to Fred, Sarah and others taking part in Epsom and St Helier Hospitals Charity's Abseil St Helier event through the charity's fundraising page.

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ISSN 2753-2771

Epsom and St Helier Hospitals Charity – Abseil St Helier

Sam Jones – Reporter



# Epsom counselling service aims to make therapy more accessible

27 July 2026



Mental health challenges can affect anyone, at any stage of life. Yet many people still struggle to access the support they need because of long waiting lists, financial pressures or uncertainty about where to turn.

One local counselling service, The Wellbeing Therapy Hut, is working to help address those barriers.

Founded by Epsom-based therapist and director Jess Farazmand, The Wellbeing Therapy Hut was created with a simple mission: to make talking therapy affordable, accessible and available to those who need it.

Since opening, the service has supported children, young people, adults, couples and families across Epsom, Ewell and the surrounding areas, offering both in-person and online counselling.

The organisation places particular emphasis on affordable options, with the aim of ensuring that financial circumstances do not prevent people from accessing support.

Jess said: “Mental health support shouldn’t be something that people only access when they reach crisis point. We believe that early intervention can make a significant difference, helping people build resilience, improve relationships and maintain positive wellbeing before difficulties become overwhelming.”

The team’s work has been recognised through several awards, including the Commitment to Community Award at the Epsom & Ewell Business Awards, along with other regional business and mental health industry accolades.

For Jess and her team, however, the greatest achievement is seeing the positive effect that counselling can have on people’s lives.

The Wellbeing Therapy Hut also works with other local wellbeing professionals and organisations, believing that strong community partnerships help create a wider network of support for residents.

By collaborating with local businesses, charities, schools and community groups, the organisation hopes to continue raising awareness of mental health and encouraging people to seek support when they need it.

Jess added: “Mental health affects every family at some point. The more we talk about it, the easier it becomes for people to reach out and access support. We are proud to be part of a community that cares about the wellbeing of its residents.”

To learn more about The Wellbeing Therapy Hut and the services available, visit www.thewellbeingtherapyhut.co.uk.

Sponsored article.

# A brand-new pregnancy scanning clinic has opened in Epsom & Ewell

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With pregnancy being one of the most special times in an expectant parent's life, many choose to make the journey even more memorable by having additional scans outside the NHS in a private setting.

When carried out safely, at a reputable Care Quality Commission (CQC) regulated clinic and by an experienced team, private pregnancy scans can be a magical experience for parents-to-be.

As technology advances, 4D ultrasound scans are becoming increasingly popular, offering parents images of what their unborn baby looks like.

A new clinic, **Hey Baby 4D in Ewell**, has opened to bring greater convenience and accessibility to the local community. It offers expectant parents reassurance, bonding and experience-led pregnancy scans, including gender and 4D scans.

The service aims to help bridge the gap between routine NHS appointments, providing additional reassurance and memorable bonding opportunities during pregnancy, particularly during the waiting periods between standard scans.

Alongside pregnancy scanning services, the clinic will also offer access to specialist testing, including Non-Invasive Prenatal Testing (NIPT), early gender blood tests and women's health blood testing, giving local families easier access to additional pregnancy and wellbeing support in one convenient location.

Owner Chelsey, who also runs Hey Baby 4D Clapham and Hey Baby 4D Sutton, has a strong passion for providing an excellent customer experience. She has now opened a brand-new pregnancy scanning clinic on Cheam Road, Ewell, after successfully establishing the Sutton and Clapham clinics.

Chelsey said she wanted to bring her experience to the Epsom and Ewell area so that more parents-to-be could enjoy the bonding experience of private pregnancy scans.

The clinic, which opened its doors this June, offers reassurance scans from six weeks, sex confirmation, wellbeing scans, NIPT blood tests and immersive 4D scans.

With gender reveal parties on the rise, the scanning room also includes "Gender Reveal Lighting", which turns the room pink if the baby is a girl and blue if the baby is a boy.

The clinic says it offers a safe and professional service, coupled with a fun experience for families to enjoy. It also has a referral system in place for continuity of care with the NHS, if needed.

Website: heybaby4d.co.uk/epsom/

Sponsored article.

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# Epsom Family Highlights "Hidden" Loneliness Among Young Adults with Mild Autism

27 July 2026



Friendship is one of life's quiet essentials. It brings variety, confidence, and a sense of belonging. Yet for a growing number of people, that connection is missing. National estimates suggest around 7% of UK adults experience chronic loneliness — a figure that runs into the millions.

For people on the autistic spectrum, the risk can be even greater.

An Epsom couple have contacted the *Epsom and Ewell Times* to share their son Jon's experience, in the hope it may resonate with others and spark a local solution. Jon, now a young adult, once enjoyed the structure and social circle of a youth group. But as his peers moved on to university, careers, and later relationships and family life, those connections gradually fell away.

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ISSN 2753-2771

What followed has been a pattern familiar to many families in similar situations. While services exist, they often do not meet the needs of those with higher functioning autism. Groups run by organisations such as the National Autistic Society tend to focus on those with more complex needs, while mainstream clubs and societies can feel overwhelming and inaccessible.

The result is a gap — one where individuals like Jon, who wish to participate in everyday social life, find themselves increasingly isolated.

There are long periods where Jon may not meet peers socially at all, spending most of his time at home with family. Yet the contrast when he does connect is striking. A simple outing — a trip to the pantomime, or even the anticipation of a game of adventure golf — can transform his mood for weeks or months, replacing low mood with excitement and purpose.

“It doesn’t take much,” his family explain. “Just a small amount of time from someone willing to meet up makes an enormous difference — not only to Jon, but to all of us.”

From this experience has come a simple idea: a local “befriender scheme” in the Epsom area.

The concept is straightforward. Volunteers — individuals or couples — perhaps of a similar age bracket – would offer a couple of hours occasionally to meet a young adult like Jon in a safe, public setting. That might mean a coffee, a meal, a cinema trip, or a game of bowling. Expenses would be covered, but the real value lies in building confidence, companionship, and mutual enjoyment.

The family stress that such a scheme would need to be properly organised, with appropriate safeguards in place. But they believe the community already has what matters most — people willing to show a little kindness.

They are now asking a simple question: is there enough interest locally to make it happen?

Anyone who feels they could offer time as a befriender, or who knows someone who might benefit, is invited to get in touch. If there is sufficient response, the idea could develop into a structured community initiative.

Contact: epsombefrienders@gmail.com and they will get back to you.

Lionel Blackman

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# Epsom man runs marathons in memory of sister who died from epilepsy

27 July 2026




Barry Ahearn, 45, is running one of the world’s most famous marathons in memory of his younger sister, Abbie, who passed away just three months before her 30th birthday in 2023. Barry is a long-term supporter of Epilepsy Action and has raised almost £23,000 for the charity so far.

Abbie passed away following an epileptic seizure that was so severe, it sent her into cardiac arrest. Last year, Barry completed a total of 27 half-marathons in memory of his sister. “The reason I chose to do 27 half-marathons is because this represents the amount of time Abbie’s brain was without oxygen, whilst paramedics tried to revive her.

“According to Epilepsy Action, around 1000 people die from epilepsy-related causes, which is about three people every day. I want to make sure Abbie is not just ‘one of the three’.”

Since his first big challenge, Barry has completed an ultra-marathon, been a finalist at the BBC Make a Difference awards, and has planned many future challenges, including the London Marathon. His efforts have been recognised by local MP Helen Maguire and the pair completed a Parkrun together last November. Helen has since been working with the charity.

Helen said: “I’m so inspired to see Barry taking on the London marathon to honour his sister Abbie and support Epilepsy Action. Having joined Barry for a recent park tun in support of Epilepsy Action, I know how powerful these efforts can be in bringing people together and raising awareness. I wish him the very best of luck and commend his incredible commitment to this cause.”

Barry is determined to continue spreading awareness of epilepsy, and highlighting how serious the condition can be. “Losing my sister has been the worst experience of my life. Abbie was kind compassionate, attentive and loyal. She was so much fun to be around, always making jokes and playing pranks. She brightened any room she walked into with her smile and is sorely missed by everyone who knew and loved her.

“Many people think epilepsy is just about ‘seizures’, when in reality there’s so much more that goes along with the

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ISSN 2753-2771

condition. Epilepsy takes away people's independence, stops them driving, can be very socially isolating and some of the medications have really bad side effects, including extreme fatigue and mood swings. Abbie had only been diagnosed with epilepsy six weeks before passing away, but this is the reality she could've been living with if she was still here, and I know she'd want me to do something about that.

"I want her passing to mean something, to help make a difference, not only by raising money to go towards research, but also to raise awareness of how serious this condition is."

"After the London Marathon, I'm already planning my next big challenge. I'm not quite set on what I want to do, but I think it might involve something like doubling the 27 halves…."

Philippa Cartwright, director of fundraising at Epilepsy Action, said: "We're honoured to have Barry as one of our 2026 London Marathon runners. The challenges he has taken on over these past couple of years have been incredible, and we're so grateful for his ongoing support.

"Barry has shown extraordinary resilience and determination since losing his sister, choosing to turn the hardest experience of his life, into something that will help so many others. The money he has raised will go directly towards helping Epilepsy Action to continually campaign for better care for people with epilepsy across the country, and funding the frontline services the charity provides including its helpline, support groups and one-to-to one support.

"Epilepsy Action would like to say a big thank you to Barry and we are wishing him and all of our runners the best of luck – we are sure his sister Abbie would be so proud."

Epilepsy affects around one in every 100 people in the UK and around 80 are diagnosed every day. Epilepsy Action is committed to improving the lives of people with epilepsy, by campaigning for better services and raising awareness of the condition. The charity provides a national network of support groups, with expert advice available on its freephone helpline 0808 800 5050 and online at www.epilepsy.org.uk.

**Epilepsy Action**

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# Lung disease death widens investigation of Epsom and St Helier Trust service

27 July 2026



### Widow still seeking accountability two years on.

A widow whose husband died aged just 48 after treatment at Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust has spoken of her continuing search for answers, as investigations continue into the care of more than 200 lung disease patients.

Laura Noakes, from Sutton, says she still does not know why her husband Daniel died from interstitial lung disease (ILD) in February 2024, despite concerns raised about his treatment before his death. Speaking on the second anniversary of his passing, she said the lack of clear information has left her feeling isolated and unable to move forward.

Her case forms part of a wider investigation involving patients treated under respiratory consultant Dr Veronica Varney, whose practice is under scrutiny. The investigation includes a review by the General Medical Council, though no outcome has yet been made public.

According to reporting by the Daily Telegraph (29th March), a letter from the Trust acknowledged that Mr Noakes had been prescribed Roflumilast for several years — a drug licensed for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease but not for ILD — and that he could have lived longer had he received treatment in line with guidelines.

Mrs Noakes said: "While nothing will bring Daniel back, finding answers is really important. It feels like I've been treated in a silo. I haven't been able to understand the wider picture, and answers have only come after I complained."

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## Concerns over treatment and oversight

Mr Noakes, who had never smoked, was first referred to respiratory services in 2018 after developing a persistent cough. The Trust later accepted that earlier scans suggesting ILD were not properly followed up, and that there was insufficient senior medical oversight during his care.

His condition deteriorated significantly from late 2023. While still alive, he was contacted by the Trust raising concerns about his treatment — something his wife describes as a “double trauma”, learning both that he was dying and that aspects of his care may have been avoidable.

She said: “We trusted we were getting top-level care. Instead, we later found there had been serious failings. We could have had many more years together.”

The Trust has apologised to the family and acknowledged that Mr Noakes’ care “fell far below” expected standards. It has also commissioned an external review by the Royal College of Physicians into more than 200 cases.

## Wider investigation and cultural concerns

Findings reported by the Telegraph indicate that internal reviews identified a culture at St Helier Hospital that discouraged junior staff from challenging senior clinicians. The Trust has since said it has strengthened safeguards and systems to prevent similar failures.

Dr Varney left the Trust in 2023. The GMC has confirmed she remains registered with conditions while its investigation continues.

An inquest into Mr Noakes’ death has yet to reach a final conclusion.

## Legal action and calls for others to come forward

Mrs Noakes is now being supported by clinical negligence specialists at Slater and Gordon.

Senior associate Nadia Saber said: “Daniel’s death was avoidable and premature, and Laura understandably has many questions. The number of cases under investigation gives cause for serious concern, and we would urge anyone worried about their care to come forward.”

Mrs Noakes added that accountability is essential not only for her family, but to ensure lessons are learned: “We need to know what happened and why — so this doesn’t happen to anyone else.”

Sam Jones – Reporter



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