



Nirvana comes to Epsom care home

Sponsored article: **Linden House Care Home in Epsom** is proud to announce a new era under its new owners, Nirvana Care Group. Established in the 1980s, the home has long served the local community, and the new leadership has already made significant investments to further elevate care standards across Surrey.

Phase 1 of a resident-led refurbishment is now complete, shaped by meaningful input from those who live at the home. Linden House has also invested in modern technologies and strengthened service partnerships to enhance safety, comfort, and wellbeing.

The transition has been warmly received by staff, with six former team members returning to support the refreshed vision. The home is also delighted to welcome back former manager Reshma Tupsy, reflecting Linden House's strong sense of community and continuity. With a dedicated multicultural team and an in-house chef, residents enjoy personalised menus tailored to cultural and faith requirements, along with fully customised activity programmes.

Following the renewed leadership, upgraded facilities, and a focus on truly personalised care a small number of vacancies remain for families seeking warm, modern, and compassionate care.

For enquiries or to arrange a visit, contact Reshma on **01372 721 447**

Surrey Uni study may show way to reverse vision loss

New computer modelling could help scientists better understand how the retina regenerates, opening the door to new treatments for vision loss, according to a study from the University of Surrey.

The first-of-its-kind model is capable of detailing how the retina – the light-sensitive layer at the back of the eye – can build its complex structure from just one type of stem cell, deepening our understanding of how sight develops and how its development could inform studies of injury or disease.

Using advanced agent-based modelling, the research team have simulated key stages of retinogenesis – the process by which identical progenitor cells diversify into the six types of neurons that make up the retina.

The model shows how simple genetic rules and subtle randomness work together to form the retina's precise layered architecture, a structure essential for how we see.

The paper was presented at IWWBIO 2025 and published in Lecture Notes in Computer Science (LNCS).

Cayla Harris, lead researcher from the University of Surrey's Nature Inspired Computing and Engineering Group, said:

"The beauty of biology is that complex structures can emerge from simple rules. Our simulations show how genetically identical cells can, through intrinsic bias and chance, self-organise into the retina's highly ordered layers – a pattern that underpins how we see the world."

Using the BioDynaMo software platform, the team modelled virtual "cells" that grow, divide and make fate decisions based on internal gene-regulation logic, mimicking biological behaviour. They tested different network designs for how genes might interact when cells decide what kind of neuron to become.

Two particular designs – called the Reentry and Multidirectional models – reproduced real biological data most accurately, suggesting that retinal cells may make their fate decisions through overlapping and flexible genetic pathways, rather than a fixed sequence.

This approach could help researchers better understand not only healthy eye development but also what happens in retinal diseases and in regenerative research exploring how stem cells might rebuild tissue.

Dr Roman Bauer, senior author on the study from the University of Surrey, added:

"Computational modelling gives us a powerful way to explore biological processes we can't easily observe in real time. By simulating every cell's decision and interaction, we can test hypotheses about how tissues like the retina form – and how to restore them when damaged."

This research is supported by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC).



Cayla Harris added:

"We think that our research is a step forward in linking genetics, computation and developmental biology to understand one of the body's most complex neural structures."

Surrey University



Sixty years of tea, chat and companionship in Epsom

A charity supporting lonely and isolated older residents in Epsom and Ewell is marking its 60th anniversary.

Re-engage volunteers run monthly free tea parties for people aged 75 and over, alongside a call-befriending service for those who live alone.

"Almost part of my family"

Lesley Renwick, who has led the local group since 2005, said they had supported "hundreds of lonely older people who often don't see or speak to anyone for long periods". She added: "Our group is very friendly and they've almost become part of my family. It's lovely seeing the older people enjoy themselves, simply having a chat and a cup of tea."

Re-engage began in London in 1965 when a young lawyer, Trevor Lyttleton, and friends set out to support isolated older people. Epsom and Ewell was one of the earliest groups to follow. Today the charity has thousands of volunteers running hundreds of tea parties, activity groups and call-befriending sessions for around 6,500 older people nationwide.

'It was worth the wait'

Phyllis, 91, has been attending the local tea parties since 2011. "I love them," she said. "The volunteers make you so welcome. We all get to know each other and have a good old chat. I like the companionship. It's nice to have someone to talk to. I had to wait two years to get into the group because it was so popular but it was well worth the wait."

Pat, 86, whose husband died 14 years ago, said the gatherings helped lift the quiet moments at home. "There are times when I feel lonely but it helps going to the Re-engage tea parties. I've made some friends there and there's always a lovely spread from the volunteers who are so kind. I get to hear everybody's news and have a lovely time."

Calls that make a difference

Jo Kearns, 48, lives in Epsom and volunteers as a Call Companion, making weekly calls to Irene, 79, who lives alone. "She gets very anxious about things. Her friends are dying so she can be a bit isolated but the phone calls seem to help. She's happier by the time we've ended our chat," she said. "I enjoy the volunteering because I like to help vulnerable people. It must be horrible to be alone and worried so I want to do whatever I can. In fact I'm thinking of taking on another older person after Christmas."

'Marvellous job'

Jenny Willott, CEO of Re-engage, said: "Our volunteers in Epsom and Ewell do a marvellous job, making sure some of our most vulnerable older people can find new friends and socialise. The fact they have been doing this for 60 years is astonishing."

Interested in helping?

Volunteer opportunities supporting older people locally and remotely can be found on the Re-engage website.



QEF to Close After 90 Years as Epsom MP Seeks Answers

The Queen Elizabeth's Foundation for Disabled People (QEF), the long-established disability charity based in Leatherhead, has announced it will enter administration after a 28-day wind-down period, bringing an end to more than nine decades of specialist support for people with disabilities in Surrey and across the country.

QEF said the decision follows "severe financial challenges" and comes after a year of exploring options to stabilise its position. The charity supports nearly 10,000 people annually through neuro-rehabilitation, mobility services and specialist residential care.

Founded in 1934 with the support of the then-Duchess of York (who became Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother), QEF has been a significant presence in the local community for generations. Its closure raises immediate questions about the future care of residents and clients who rely on its services, and about the national pressures facing the disability-care sector.

Local Epsom and Ewell MP Helen Maguire said she was "deeply saddened" by the announcement, calling QEF "a cornerstone of our community in Leatherhead" and praising the "wonderful person-centred care" provided by its staff. She said she had seen the charity's impact first-hand during a visit earlier this year.

According to QEF's own statements, the organisation has faced rising staffing costs, recruitment pressures, and funding constraints from statutory bodies. The charity reported that despite efforts to improve its financial position, "there wasn't a viable solution" to meet the scale of the challenge.

Mrs Maguire said she has been in "regular conversation" with QEF leadership in recent days to see whether a last-minute solution was possible. "It was conveyed to me that, sadly, the shutdown process is already fully in motion," she said. She confirmed she has written to the Health Secretary, Wes Streeting, seeking an urgent meeting to discuss the circumstances of the closure and the wider lessons for the sector.

Her immediate focus, she said, is "ensuring continuity of care for both patients and staff". QEF has said the 28-day wind-down period is intended to give time for residential clients to be found suitable alternative placements.

The charity's closure will leave a notable gap in specialist provision in the region. QEF employed around 250 people and operated from modern facilities in Leatherhead after a major redevelopment earlier in the decade. Its departure will add pressure to already stretched NHS and social care services that rely on external specialist providers.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Image: QEF street sign. Google street view

Surrey to get a higher level of heart care

Heart patients and the tiniest and most vulnerable babies across Surrey are set to benefit from major investment in local specialist services, following confirmation of a £3.2 million upgrade at Ashford & St Peter's Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust in Chertsey. Although the improvements are centred at St Peter's Hospital, the effects will be felt across the county, including by patients who would typically access services at Epsom.

The investment is being funded largely by Runnymede Borough Council's Community Infrastructure Levy, and will see the cardiac catheter-lab at St Peter's upgraded to deliver more complex and less invasive heart procedures at a faster rate. It will be



complemented by a £296,000 refurbishment of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, which is the only Level 3 neonatal facility in Surrey. Councillor Robert King, co-leader of Runnymede Borough Council, stated to the BBC's LDRS: "For families, the moments when a loved one needs specialist care are when the NHS matters most. That is why this investment we have championed at St Peter's Hospital is so vital."

Across Surrey, hospitals offer a range of cardiac services. Epsom provides extensive inpatient and outpatient cardiology care, including angiograms, non-complex stenting, pacemakers, complex device implants and heart-failure treatment. However, for confirmed heart attacks and the most complex interventional procedures, patients are transferred to the regional heart-attack centre at St George's in London. Other Surrey hospitals, including East Surrey Hospital and the Royal Surrey in Guildford, also run catheter labs and offer broad specialist cardiology care, though not all services are identical between sites.

The enhancements at St Peter's therefore represent a significant expansion of Surrey's own capacity to deliver more advanced, less invasive heart procedures locally, reducing pressure on London hospitals and improving access for patients across the county. In neonatal care, the upgraded Level 3 unit will strengthen Surrey's ability to care for the sickest and most premature babies, with facilities designed to improve comfort, privacy and support for families during long and emotionally demanding stays.

Ashford and St Peter's Hospitals CEO, Louise Stead, stated to the BBC's LDRS: "These improvements will strengthen our ability to deliver timely, life-saving care in modern, purpose-built environments." The funding, described as one of the most significant local healthcare investments in recent years, is expected to deliver the improvements within the next two years.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Image: St Peter's Hospital, Chertsey (Google)

Epsom Hospital braces for strikes amid winter pressures

Further strike action by resident doctors – formerly known as junior doctors – is set to add strain to NHS services just as winter illnesses begin to rise. The British Medical Association (BMA) has confirmed walkouts from 7am on Friday 14 November until 7am on Wednesday 19 November in what will be the latest round of industrial action in a long-running dispute with the Government over pay and working conditions. Hundreds of medics across St George's, Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals and Health Group could join the five-day stoppage. The Trust says services are already under pressure from rising flu cases, which have climbed earlier than expected this year. Dr Richard Jennings, Group Chief Medical Officer, warned of disruption ahead and said hospitals are "always very busy at this time of year" and are experiencing "significant pressure" due to the combined impact of seasonal illness and the upcoming walkouts. He said consultant doctors and other staff will work extra shifts "to keep patients safe", but appointments may still need to be rescheduled to safeguard care for emergency and critically ill patients.

Local impact so far

During the previous round of resident-doctor strikes in July, 144 elective procedures and 1,084 outpatient appointments were rescheduled across the Group. On an average strike day, 211 resident doctors were recorded absent across the Trust's sites. The public will be contacted directly if their appointment needs to be rearranged, and the Trust emphasises that any appointment not specifically cancelled should be attended as normal. Emergency departments remain open for life-threatening conditions.

Why doctors say they are striking

The BMA has repeatedly argued that resident-doctor pay has been eroded by more than a quarter in real terms since 2008.



Representatives say pay restoration is essential both to retain doctors within the NHS and to halt a pattern of experienced staff leaving for better-paid roles abroad. Doctors' leaders also say the dispute is about patient safety: they claim chronic understaffing means resident doctors are covering too many gaps in rotas, working excessive hours, and taking on responsibilities that stretch beyond their training. The BMA says that improving pay and working conditions would reduce burnout and stabilise the workforce, ultimately shortening waiting lists. The organisation has also expressed frustration that talks with Government have repeatedly stalled, arguing that below-inflation pay offers fall far short of resolving the dispute.

Government position

Ministers have previously said that the level of pay demanded by the BMA is unaffordable in the current economic climate and would divert funds from frontline services. The Government maintains that it has accepted independent pay review body recommendations and has urged doctors to return to negotiations without pre-conditions. Officials also argue that strike action adds further pressure to already stretched NHS services and risks longer delays for patients waiting for operations and specialist appointments.

Advice for patients this week

The Trust is urging the public to continue using NHS services responsibly. NHS 111 online should be the first port of call for non-emergencies, pharmacies can advise on minor illnesses, and GP services are unaffected by industrial action. With flu infections rising, eligible residents are being encouraged to get vaccinated without delay, and people are asked to check in on vulnerable friends and neighbours. Dr Jennings emphasised that anyone with a life-threatening condition must still attend A&E or call 999.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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Epsom and Ewell 5th least obese 10 year olds in the UK

Year six schoolchildren in Surrey have some of the lowest obesity rates in the country, with Mole Valley leading the way. The figures were published as part of the Government's National Child Measurement Programme, which covers mainstream state-maintained schools. Children in Year 6 are aged 10 to 11 and the data is based on the address of the child rather than their school.

Mole Valley, at 9.7 per cent, was the only borough in the country where fewer than one in 10 children were classed as obese. Three boroughs, Sandwell and Wolverhampton in the West Midlands and Knowlsey in the North West had rates above 30 per cent.

The complete top ten was:

- Mole Valley - 9.7 per cent
- St Albans - 12.0 per cent
- Richmond upon Thames - 12.1 per cent



- Cambridge - 12.7 per cent
- Epsom & Ewell - 12.8 per cent
- Elmbridge - 13.1 per cent
- Waverley - 13.1 per cent
- South Hams - 13.1 per cent
- Uttlesford - 13.2 per cent
- Guildford - 13.6 per cent

The remaining Surrey boroughs had the following obesity rates among year six children:

- Surrey Heath - 14.5 per cent
- Woking - 15.2 per cent
- Reigate & Banstead - 15.7 per cent
- Tandridge - 16.7 per cent
- Runnymede - 16.9 per cent
- Spelthorne - 18.2 per cent

Councillor Nick Wright, Mole Valley District Council cabinet member for leisure and community assets, said one of their priorities was to support residents to live healthy and fulfilling lives. He said: "These childhood obesity figures, which shine such a positive light on Mole Valley, are very encouraging for parents, carers and young people who live in our district. For our part in contributing towards these low obesity rates, we are proud of the work we do and the initiatives we provide which can only help participating children be healthier and more active. Examples include our popular free summer holiday activities programme, most recently run this past summer, and the wide range of indoor activities – such as the kids swim for a pound offer – available at Dorking Sports Centre and Leatherhead Leisure Centre, both run on our behalf by Better."

"Our sports club access scheme also provides up to £250 per eligible young person to cover all, or part, of a sports club membership and free taster session at that specific club. "The Mole Valley parkrun and junior parkrun initiatives that we helped to establish also continue to go from strength to strength, most recently highlighted by the junior park celebrating its sixth anniversary. "The funding opportunities we provide, for example our neighbourhood fund, are available for sports clubs or other youth projects to apply for money to help improve existing and build new facilities which young people can benefit from."

"Our commitment to improving our already impressive range of play facilities, including playgrounds and skate parks, across Mole Valley will always be a high priority for us, and a decision due to be taken by cabinet later this month could see several million pounds of Community Infrastructure Levy funding become available for a major parks and recreation ground enhancement programme."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Epsom Hospital braces for flu spike

Hospitals serving Epsom, St Helier and St George's are warning of a potentially severe flu season as national data reveals the number of deaths linked to the virus in England more than doubled last winter.

Figures from the UK Health Security Agency show 7,757 flu-related deaths were recorded in 2024-25, compared with 3,555 the previous year. Child deaths rose from 34 to 53 — a 56 per cent increase — while fewer people took up the offer of a flu vaccination.

Last winter, local hospitals faced intense pressure from flu alongside RSV, Covid and norovirus outbreaks, which closed wards and stretched Emergency Departments to capacity. With flu cases now rising again after the school half-term, health leaders fear a repeat.



Chief Nursing Officer for St George's, Epsom and St Helier hospitals, Elaine Clancy, urged residents to act now. "Last flu season was particularly nasty and we're very concerned that this year could be even worse - we're preparing for a spike of flu onto our wards," she said. "We see people dying every year from flu and sadly thousands more will likely this year. I strongly recommend booking your jab now, as it takes up to 14 days to fully kick in."

Local mother Amy Clare, from Sutton, knows how dangerous flu can be. Her five-week-old son Jonah was rushed to Epsom Hospital's Emergency Department with the virus in December 2022.

"What started as a fever quickly escalated," said Amy. "When the doctor told us we'd be spending Christmas in hospital, I was devastated. But he was in the best place to get better. The care we received from the moment we walked into A&E was fantastic - the staff immediately knew something wasn't right and were with us every step of the way."

Jonah was discharged the day after Christmas but continued to receive daily treatment until the New Year. "The care Jonah received saved his life," said Amy.

Pregnant women are strongly advised to have the flu jab at any stage of pregnancy. It protects both mother and baby, but uptake remains low - only around one in three expectant mothers in England were vaccinated last year.

Those eligible for a free NHS flu vaccination include:

- everyone aged 65 and over
- people under 65 with long-term health conditions such as diabetes or heart problems
- children aged two and three, and all primary school children
- some secondary school pupils (Years 7 to 11)
- residents in care homes
- carers and those receiving carer's allowance
- people living with someone who has a weakened immune system
- frontline health and social care workers

People can book or amend their flu vaccination appointment online: Book, change or cancel a free NHS flu vaccination at a pharmacy - NHS.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Epsom Hospital's support for bereaved mum of baby

A Tadworth mother whose baby died tragically from a rare infection aged only eight days has praised the nurses and midwives who supported her family during "the darkest time in our lives".

Jodie Picknett gave birth to baby George at Epsom Hospital in April 2023. Shortly afterwards, he returned to hospital to be treated for jaundice but became suddenly very unwell and lethargic. At just seven days old, he was admitted to the Special Care Baby Unit.

That night George deteriorated, and despite the determined efforts of the neonatal nurses, he sadly passed away. A post-mortem later revealed that he had contracted a severe enterovirus - a condition usually mild for most people but which can prove deadly for newborns.

For Jodie and her family, the care and guidance of Specialist Bereavement Midwife Lydia Baker and the Maternity Bereavement Team at Epsom Hospital were a vital source of strength. The team liaised with the coroner and post-mortem services and connected the family with funeral directors experienced in compassionate bereavement care.

Jodie, 37, said: "Lydia supported us through every step - from looking after George and making practical arrangements to simply being there when we needed her. Her compassion and understanding made the hardest moments that little bit more bearable."



Thanks to funding from Epsom and St Helier Hospitals Charity, Lydia and her team can provide detailed 3D 'memory castings' for bereaved families. The casts capture each tiny feature of a baby's hands and feet, offering parents a lasting, tangible connection. Previously, families received only basic prints, but the charity's support now enables the team to create intricate castings from the twenty-sixth week of pregnancy onwards.

Lydia said: "When a baby dies, families don't have a lifetime of memories, so creating something tangible in that moment is vital."

Jodie is now fundraising for the hospital charity so this work can continue. She is inviting people to donate ribbons that will form a memorial display at their local church, with proceeds supporting more bereaved families.

"After George died, the bereavement team helped guide us through the darkest time in our lives with empathy and respect," Jodie said. "By fundraising, we hope to help Lydia and her team continue their vital work, ensuring more families receive the same compassionate, specialist care. Our ribbon display is a small gesture, but it offers a space for others to remember their babies too. It's a way to say: your baby mattered, and they are not forgotten."

For Jodie and her husband Ben, 41, Epsom Hospital holds special meaning. Their daughter Alice was born there in August 2021 and their third child, Lucy, in May 2025.

Jodie added: "We think about our son every day - he is part of everything we do. We will never get to see George take his first steps, say his first words, or start school. That loss is felt every day. So being able to say his name and honour his memory publicly is incredibly important to us."

Molly Simpson, Head of Charity and Fundraising at Epsom and St Helier Hospitals Charity, said: "Losing a baby is devastating for any family and we are very proud to support the teams who help them through their grief. We're grateful to Jodie and her husband Ben for sharing such a personal story and know it will inspire others to give what they can - your generosity will mean our exceptional teams can continue to support bereaved parents when they need it most."

Jodie is sharing her story during Baby Loss Awareness Week, which offers a space for anyone affected by pregnancy and baby loss to share their experiences.

Donations can be made via Jodie and Ben's JustGiving page.

St George's, Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals and Health Group

Photo: George with mum Jodie and sister Alice

Surrey inequality report challenges 'leafy county' myth

The idea that Surrey is all leafy lanes, golf courses and big houses is a myth, according to a new report. Despite being a prosperous area of the country, the county still has thousands of residents struggling with inequality, isolation and poverty.

The report, *Understanding Inequality in Surrey*, lays bare the scale of the challenge. It found that residents from Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Black African, Roma and Gypsy/Traveller communities are far more likely to live in poverty, overcrowded housing and poor health. Gypsy and Irish Traveller residents experience the worst health among working-age people, and Bangladeshi-origin residents experience the worst health among over-65s.

The study also found that, while unemployment is rising more generally, racial minority groups are more than twice as likely to be unemployed compared to White British residents. Even degree-holders from minority backgrounds are still less likely to get into senior jobs or management positions than their white counterparts.

Cllr Mark Nuti, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, said: "We're in a very changing world at the moment. There is a lot going on politically in our society and people are feeling quite fragile in places. Especially when we're looking at equality, diversity and inclusion, there are people out there who are feeling very alone at the moment. We do have people that are living on the poverty line, we do have from different races [and] different ethnicities that aren't feeling part of these communities who are feeling alone - as everywhere else in the country. The most urgent action we need to do as a council, and as individuals, is to make sure that we identify where those people are and we have wraparound support for people to make sure they aren't feeling alone or feeling scared in their own home. And they do know the majority of us respect and love them, and want them to be part of our community and our county."

The fresh report comes after a 2023 peer review which praised Surrey County Council for improving its culture but also found it lacked a real understanding of how inequality shows up in local communities, prompting this study.



Cllr Robert Hughes added: "I think the image of Surrey being a county of golf courses, wealthy people and pretty villages are a small part of what Surrey is in reality."

The county boasts around 120 golf clubs - many of which are world class - alongside million-pound mansions, outstanding private schools and leafy green countryside. Yet the report exposed how 20,000 children are growing up in poverty, disabled residents are far less likely to find work, and young people with additional needs and disabilities are four times as likely to have experienced mental ill health compared to the wider population. Women are also hit harder by the cost of living, with the gender pay gap in Surrey reaching a staggering 21 per cent, well above the national average, according to the study.

Officers told a Resources and Performance Select Committee on October 2 that the study will help to alert council departments to how these disadvantages are often linked to an exacerbated socio-economic disadvantage. The new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion framework aims to bring councils, charities and communities together to make sure support actually reaches the people who need it. It looks at everything from jobs and housing to health, education and digital access.

Local groups have already started using the data to apply for funding and shape projects - a sign, councillors say, that the work is already making a difference. The data will be used to make services easier to access, tackle inequality in schools and workplaces, and build stronger communities.

Council officers admit the financial squeeze is real, but argue investing now will save money long-term. The idea is that better support means fewer people reaching crisis point and more residents able to thrive. The next stage is running focus groups with young people, disabled residents and minority communities to make sure the priorities match lived experience.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Aerial view of one of Surrey's less well of wards - Tattenham and Preston Hawe