

## Epsom snooker star on cue to help patients

4 January 2026



Epsom General Hospital is grateful for the laser-like focus of snooker legend Jimmy White. The 63-year-old star of the green baize took time out from his busy schedule recently to present a £62,000 camera to consultant ophthalmologist Akanksha Bagch at the Eye Unit, on behalf of Epsom Medical Equipment Fund (EMEF).

The Zeiss Clarus 50 is a valuable asset in diagnosis. “It’s a high-resolution, ultra-widefield fundus camera offering true colour images of the retina and optic discs among other excellent features,” says Mr Bagch, “giving a detailed view from the macula to the periphery of the retina allowing clinicians to diagnose and manage multiple eye diseases including glaucoma and retina conditions such as diabetic retinopathy.”

“With the increasing prevalence of glaucoma, this camera will play an integral role in running a diagnostic hub allowing a greater throughput of patients per clinic and reducing the already prolonged waiting times in the NHS, thus allowing for safer delivery of eye services.”

EMEF founder and organiser Bess Harding says: “I am so grateful to Jimmy — who lives locally — for coming to make the presentation. We were delighted to be able to purchase the camera which will play an important role in preventing blindness. This would not have been possible without the support of the community for our fund-raising.”

Forty-six years on from its formation and with more than £4 million already handed over, the fund’s work carries on. Other equipment is always required. If you would like to help, donations can be made to EMEF at 32 Tealing Drive, Ewell, Surrey, KT19 0JS or to NatWest Account No. 66236924 Sort Code 60-08-01.

Andrew Wills

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## From Abramovich’s frozen wealth to Epsom’s Ashley Centre - support for Ukraine continues

4 January 2026



The Government has announced that £2.5 billion from the frozen proceeds of the sale of Chelsea Football Club by sanctioned Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich is to be directed towards humanitarian aid for Ukraine, following years of political and legal delay.

The money has been held in the UK since the forced sale of the football club in 2022, after Abramovich was sanctioned in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Ministers have now confirmed that the funds will be transferred to a foundation dedicated to humanitarian support for Ukraine, with legal action threatened if the process is not completed.

Helen Maguire, Liberal Democrat MP for Epsom and Ewell, welcomed the decision, describing it as “long-overdue action” and a step towards accountability. She said billions of pounds linked to sanctioned Russian oligarchs had remained frozen while Ukrainians continued to suffer the consequences of what she described as Putin’s illegal war, and that she would continue to press the Government to ensure the money reaches Ukraine swiftly.

While £2.5 billion is a significant sum, it represents only a small proportion of the overall cost of the war’s impact on Ukraine. According to the World Bank, the United Nations, the European Commission and the Ukrainian government, the estimated cost of recovery and reconstruction in Ukraine now stands at around \$524 billion over the next decade. That figure includes widespread destruction of housing, hospitals, schools, energy infrastructure and transport networks, alongside the long-term costs of healthcare, rehabilitation, psychological trauma and landmine clearance.

Direct physical damage to infrastructure alone is estimated at more than \$170 billion, while millions of civilians have been displaced and tens of thousands injured. The long-term health consequences of the war, including treatment for complex injuries and trauma, are expected to place a continuing burden on Ukraine’s public services for many years. Against that

backdrop, the Abramovich funds amount to well under one per cent of the estimated total cost of rebuilding, though they could make a substantial difference to targeted humanitarian and medical programmes.

The announcement has renewed local focus on the role of Surrey Stands With Ukraine, a volunteer-run charity based in Epsom which has been providing humanitarian aid since the early weeks of the invasion. Operating under Harrop HR Missions Ltd, the group has sent more than 148 vanloads of aid to Ukraine and has supported both medical relief overseas and displaced Ukrainians in the UK. The charity has also been recognised in Parliament, with Helen Maguire MP praising its work in providing medical aid and rehabilitation support.

For nearly four years, Surrey Stands With Ukraine has maintained a highly visible permanent kiosk in the Ashley Centre near Waitrose, which volunteers describe as central to sustaining donations, public awareness and community engagement. The kiosk is due to close permanently on 1 January 2026 following a change in the Ashley Centre's policy on charity fundraising.

Under the new arrangements, Surrey Stands With Ukraine has been selected as one of a small number of charities allowed to operate a branded market stall inside the centre for limited periods each month. From January 2026, the charity will operate a stall near the soon to open Primark on a restricted schedule, typically four days per month. Physical donations will continue to be accepted at the charity's Ukraine Hub in Global House, accessed via the rear entrance to the Ashley Centre.

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Surrey Stands With Ukraine will operate a fundraising and information stall inside the Ashley Centre on the following dates in 2026. The stall will be located near Primark.

January: Tuesday 6, Thursday 8, 15 and 22  
February: Tuesday 3, Thursday 5, 19 and 26  
March: Tuesday 3, Thursday 5, 19 and 26  
April: Tuesday 7, Thursday 9, 16 and 30  
May: Tuesday 5, Thursday 7, 14 and 21  
June: Tuesday 2 and 16; Thursday 4 and 11  
July: Tuesday 7, Thursday 9, 16 and 30  
August: Tuesday 4, Thursday 6, 13 and 20  
September: Tuesday 1, Thursday 3, 10 and 17  
October: Tuesday 6, Thursday 8 and 15

Physical donations can also be made at the Surrey Stands With Ukraine Hub in Global House, accessed via the rear entrance of the Ashley Centre by pressing the "Ukraine Hub" buzzer.

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The loss of a permanent stand is expected to reduce income by around £30,000 a year and significantly limit the collection of physical aid. A spokesperson for SSWU stated the daily presence allowed volunteers to build relationships with regular donors and served as a constant reminder of the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Ukraine.

The Ashley Centre provides Surrey Stands With Ukraine with a suite of rooms and storage space in Global House, Ashley Avenue. The premises also are home to the Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network and is known as the "Ukraine Hub". Previously a retail unit facing the mall was used by SSWU until the unit was re-let commercially. The Ashley Centre has not responded to questions from the Epsom and Ewell Times about the decision to remove the permanent kiosk.

Surrey Stands With Ukraine thanks the Ashley Centre for its ongoing support and confirmed it will continue its work, stressing that the reduction in visibility makes public backing more important than ever. The charity says it is exploring alternative ways to maintain a visible presence in Epsom town centre and is encouraging residents to visit the new stall dates in the Ashley Centre and to continue donating through the Global House hub.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has repeatedly warned that Russia's war against Ukraine is not an isolated conflict but a direct threat to the security of the whole of Europe, arguing that Moscow's actions demonstrate a willingness to use military force to pursue imperial ambitions beyond its borders. Sustaining humanitarian support for Ukraine is essential in maintaining civilian morale, stressing that resilience among the Ukrainian population is a decisive factor in resisting aggression and deterring further expansionism by President Vladimir Putin.

The contrast between the scale of national and international funding announcements and the challenges faced by local charities has highlighted the continued reliance on community-level support to meet urgent humanitarian needs. While the release of frozen oligarch assets has been widely welcomed, organisations working on the ground say sustained public engagement remains essential as the war and its consequences continue.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Since the war began the 14th Ukraine Social and Music Evening will take place at the Epsom Methodist Church this Saturday 20th December. Helen Maguire MP will welcome guests and performers. See listing here for details.

Related reports:

Sir Ed supporting Epsom based Ukraine charities

Epsom Stands in Solidarity with Ukraine on War's Third Anniversary

Epsom MP leads cross-party delegation to Ukraine to examine impact of explosive weapons

Fire Assembly for Ukraine

2 years on Epsom to gather in solidarity with Ukraine

Image: Abramovich - licensed HERE. Credit: IAN KINGTON / AFP / picturedesk.com. Ashley Centre entrance - Google Maps

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## Young Surrey volunteers help shape new neuroinclusive travel app

4 January 2026



Young people in Surrey have helped test a new travel-planning app designed to make public transport less stressful for neurodivergent passengers. Members of ATLAS, Surrey Youth Voice's participation group for young people with additional needs and disabilities, spent three days trialling *Aubin*, a free app that takes a different approach to journey planning.

Unlike standard apps that prioritise the quickest route, *Aubin* focuses on reducing anxiety and supporting users who may find travel overwhelming. The app allows travellers to tailor their journey according to personal needs, rather than simply finding the fastest option. ATLAS members used it to plan and carry out trips across North, East and West Surrey, assessing how effectively it helped with independence and confidence.

*Aubin* functions as both a route planner and a "travel companion". Alongside directions, it offers practical tools to support users in moments of uncertainty. These include grounding exercises to help regulate emotions during difficult points in a journey; a type-to-speech feature for anyone who may struggle to speak when stressed; and an editable Autism Card that allows travellers to explain needs quickly and discreetly to staff or fellow passengers. Users can also set preferences that shape the route suggested, such as avoiding busy interchanges or long waits.

ATLAS has long advocated for more accessible, neuroinclusive transport options, arguing that navigating public transport is essential for young people to reach education, work and social opportunities. Members described the trial as a chance to influence a product that could help reduce isolation and build independence for others with similar needs.

At the end of the pilot, ATLAS met with *Aubin*'s co-founder and product manager, Corinna Smiles, to give detailed feedback. Suggestions included adding journey-sharing options so a trusted contact can follow someone's progress, communication prompts for stressful situations, and a checklist to help users prepare before leaving home. *Aubin* welcomed the recommendations and said they would incorporate them into future updates.

Ms Smiles said the pilot was a valuable example of user-led design and thanked the group for helping shape the app. ATLAS members have since given *Aubin* their "seal of approval", encouraging other neurodivergent young people to try it.

ATLAS member Emily said taking part "felt empowering" and that knowing the group's input would help autistic travellers made the experience worthwhile: "I feel honoured to have been part of shaping this app, which I'm sure will give many people the tools to travel with confidence."

*Councillor Helyn Clack*, Deputy Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning, said the collaboration showed the importance of designing tools with "the voices of the community they serve", and that the app has real potential to improve accessibility.

*Aubin* is free to download from app stores.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Image - Surrey County Council news

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# The Mayor of Epsom and Ewell meets local climate volunteers

4 January 2026



The Mayor of Epsom & Ewell, **Cllr Robert Leach**, met with members of the Epsom and Ewell Climate Action Network (EECAN) to hear about the community projects they are mobilising over the next six months, including the borough's first Library of Things. EECAN, which was marking its first anniversary, was founded by residents concerned about the environmental and social impacts of climate change and has grown steadily into an active network of volunteers leading initiatives that encourage climate-friendly actions, build resilience and support sustainable choices across the borough.

The volunteers explained that the Library of Things will allow residents to borrow items such as DIY tools, gardening equipment, sewing machines, pressure washers and even party or camping gear. For many households, the cost of purchasing these items outright can be prohibitive, and for others it simply isn't necessary when the item might only be used once or twice a year. EECAN believes the scheme could help cut waste, save families money and encourage the communal sharing of resources.

The project is currently in the planning stage, with the group sourcing donated items and recruiting volunteers ahead of a planned launch in April 2026. During the meeting, Cllr Leach expressed strong support for EECAN's work, welcomed its potential benefits for local residents, and even signed up as an early supporter while taking an interest in how the project might expand once established.

Past and ongoing EECAN initiatives include November's successful Bike Amnesty event, which collected around 70 bikes for the Surrey Bike Bank to refurbish and redistribute, and regular Climate Conversations held on the second and fourth Monday of each month. Both projects have attracted increasing interest from residents wanting to learn more about sustainable living and community-driven solutions.

EECAN founder and chair William Ward spoke about the group's longer-term ambitions, which include expanding outreach, increasing visibility across the borough and eventually achieving official charity registration. Becoming a registered charity would help them access currently unavailable funding streams and deliver larger, more stable projects. In just 12 months the group has grown from seven to 50 volunteers and from two to eight trustees, who are now preparing their application to the Charity Commission.

The meeting concluded with cake-cutting and a discussion about strengthening links between EECAN and the council. The Mayor encouraged the group to continue raising awareness of their activities and said he would share their projects with fellow councillors when appropriate. Volunteers said they hoped the meeting would lead to deeper collaboration and stronger recognition of grassroots environmental initiatives within local decision-making.

As EECAN prepares for a busy six months, the group says it remains committed to promoting practical, affordable and community-led climate action. Residents interested in getting involved or joining the paid Heat Champion team can visit <https://www.eecan.org/home> or email [eeClimateActionNetwork@gmail.com](mailto:eeClimateActionNetwork@gmail.com). Sign up for the free Home Energy Advice service here: <https://www.zerocarbondguildford.org/energy-surveys>

Written by:

Jen Din, from The Epsom Edit ([www.theepsomedit.co.uk](http://www.theepsomedit.co.uk))

Related report:

[Epsom and Ewell Climate Action Network launches with community events and initiatives](#)

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# Epsom and Ewell Climate Action Network launches with community events and initiatives

4 January 2026



A new community movement is taking shape in the borough with the launch of the Epsom and Ewell Climate Action Network (eeCAN) – a local volunteer group working to empower residents through inclusive projects that build resilience to climate change.

EECAN's mission is simple but ambitious: to help communities adapt and thrive in a changing world. Its projects focus on practical solutions, awareness-raising, and supporting climate-friendly policies. Everything the network offers at the moment is totally free and open to all, ensuring that everyone can take part in building a more sustainable, climate-resilient Epsom and Ewell. Users of the services will be given the opportunity to make any donations they feel they can afford if they want to help the charity do even more for their community.

“Epsom and Ewell Climate Action Network has grown so much in the last 12 months as a result of the energy and commitment of volunteers wanting to help their local communities reduce Climate risks while saving money” says William Ward the Chair and co-founder of the group.

### **Epsom and Ewell Library of Things**

Launching to the public in spring next year, this innovative “Library of Things” will allow residents to borrow items instead of buying them, reducing waste and promoting sharing. From carpet cleaners and wallpaper steamers to pressure washers and gazebos, residents will be able to borrow tools and equipment for free, thanks to donated items. Donations of nearly new equipment are now being sought. Those able to help are asked to contact [eeClimateActionNetwork@gmail.com](mailto:eeClimateActionNetwork@gmail.com) or visit <https://eeCANlibraryofthings.myturn.com/library>.

eeCAN is developing this initiative in partnership with Surrey County Council Library Services (for front of counter service) and with Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, in association with The Epsom Repair Café, who ensure that all electrical items are safe to use.

### **Bike Amnesty - Saturday 22 November 2025**

Got a bike you no longer use? Donate it! Between 9am and 5pm at Epsom Methodist Church, Scout Hall, Ashley Road KT18 5AQ, residents can drop off unwanted bicycles to be refurbished and passed on to people who need them.

The scheme helps promote active, low-carbon travel while supporting those who might not otherwise afford a bike. Just turn up with your spare bikes. This free service is provided in partnership with Surrey County Council's “Active Surrey” team.

Contact: [eeClimateActionNetwork@gmail.com](mailto:eeClimateActionNetwork@gmail.com)

### **Climate Conversations - every 2nd and 4th Monday of the month**

eeCAN also runs regular Climate Conversations at Birchgrove Lower Mill, Kingston Road, Ewell KT17 2DQ, from 10:30am to 12:30pm. These informal gatherings give residents a friendly space to learn, share experiences, and explore all aspects of climate change together.

One participant said, “I often feel so motivated after one of our meetings!”

The upcoming session on Monday 24 November will feature Dr Kristine Damberg, online presenting “*What can we eat for human and planetary health*”, a talk exploring how our food choices affect both personal wellbeing and the planet.

Anyone can join in using this link: <https://meet2.organise.earth/rooms/950-iug-ems-2p6/join>

### **Living Rivers Exhibition - April to May 2026**

Looking ahead, eeCAN will host a *Living Rivers Art Exhibition* at the Ebbisham Centre, Epsom KT19, in association with The Royal Marsden. Running from 22 April (Earth Day) to 22 May 2026, the free exhibition will celebrate the beauty and importance of rivers and waterways.

Inspired by writer Robert Macfarlane's question “*Is a river alive?*”, the exhibition will showcase artwork from local schools, community groups, and individuals.

Submissions (A4 max-sized drawings or paintings) are invited by 27 March 2026, with eeCAN volunteers offering to collect (and return) artworks directly from schools and art groups. Groups will be invited to see their work on display and participate in nature-themed activities.

Email [eeClimateActionNetwork@gmail.com](mailto:eeClimateActionNetwork@gmail.com) for participation details.

## A community coming together

From swapping tools and donating bikes to sharing climate ideas and artistic expression, eeCAN's initiatives reflect a spirit of cooperation, creativity, and care for the environment.

Its organisers believe that by taking small, collective steps, Epsom and Ewell can make a big difference — helping local people live more sustainably while building resilience for the future.

For more information, contact [eeClimateActionNetwork@gmail.com](mailto:eeClimateActionNetwork@gmail.com) or follow eeCAN's activities through their upcoming community channels.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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# Is there a neat solution to struggling Epsom Common Club?

4 January 2026



The long-established Epsom Common Club remains closed but not forgotten, as a handful of volunteers continue restoration work and urge fellow members to help decide whether a partnership proposal could bring the venue back to life.

Emails circulated by the Club Committee since late September set out a potential arrangement with **NEAT**, a local community organisation best known for transforming the disused bowls pavilion in Court Recreation Ground into "NEAT HQ". Founded by two former Chelsea Foundation coaches, NEAT provides wrap-around childcare, alternative schooling for pupils unable to remain in mainstream education, and a wide range of family and youth activities.

Under the plan, NEAT would rent the rear hall of the Club's premises for use during the week and contribute to finishing both the front and back halls. The Club explains that this could secure a steady income stream, remove the need to rent the front room to outside hirers, and revive the building as a "community hub". However, it would also mean losing the existing snooker room and restricting member use of part of the premises.

The Club's emails emphasise that the idea is still a proposal only. "Before it could proceed to this stage it would require members' consent and this was stressed to NEAT as non-negotiable," wrote the Club Secretary, Mr C. O'Neil, in response to Epsom & Ewell Times.

Three rounds of consultation emails have been sent to roughly 220 members—about three-quarters of the Club's recorded list—but only around seven per cent initially replied. Later reminders lifted the total response rate, producing an approximate three-to-one majority in favour of exploring talks, though still short of what organisers regard as a clear mandate.

With no formal committee now in place and the Club being managed informally by the Secretary and one assisting member, progress has been slow. The handful of volunteers who meet on Saturday mornings to carry out repairs are credited with keeping the building from dereliction. "If this idea is allowed to wither on the vine it could well be last orders for your Club," one circular warned.

Mr O'Neil told the *Times* that if members give approval, formal negotiations would follow to settle details such as rent, permitted uses, and neighbour consultation. Any final agreement would then be put to a members' meeting for ratification. Questions about parking, noise, and the possible need for planning or licensing changes would be addressed at that stage.

For now, the Club remains closed to new memberships while restoration work continues. "The work is currently being undertaken by a few valiant members and any member wishing to assist would be welcomed," said Mr O'Neil. Volunteers can make contact via the Club's email address: [clubeventsecwmc@gmail.com](mailto:clubeventsecwmc@gmail.com).

Sam Jones - Reporter



Epsom Common Club - Google Maps

## Epsom Hospital's support for bereaved mum of baby

4 January 2026



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

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## Epsom MP leads cross-party delegation to Ukraine to examine impact of explosive weapons

4 January 2026



A cross-party delegation of UK Parliamentarians has travelled to Ukraine to assess the humanitarian and environmental impact of explosive weapons and to strengthen cooperation between the two countries on mine clearance and victim support.

The visit was led by **Helen Maguire**, Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament for Epsom & Ewell and Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Explosive Weapons and Their Impact. The group also included Cameron Thomas MP for Tewkesbury and Baroness Natalie Bennett of the Green Party.

During their visit, the delegation met Minister Oleksi Sobolev, responsible for Ukraine's economy, agriculture and environment, to discuss the challenges of clearing more than 136,000 square kilometres of land now contaminated by mines and unexploded ordnance — roughly a third of Ukraine's territory. They also visited Ukraine's State Emergency Service, which has responded to over 235,000 explosive incidents since the start of the war, rescuing more than 6,500 people.

The MPs observed mine clearance operations with the HALO Trust and Mines Advisory Group (MAG), and learned about new training programmes in explosive ordnance disposal and emergency response being developed at Lviv State University of Life Safety. They also visited rehabilitation centres Superhumans and Unbroken, which provide prosthetics, surgery, and psychological support to civilians and veterans injured by explosions.

Speaking from Ukraine, Helen Maguire said: "As Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Explosive Weapons and Their Impact, it has been a privilege to visit Ukraine with cross-party colleagues to observe both the unimaginable devastation caused by explosive weapons, and the extraordinary courage of those working to clear them." She added "Ukraine faces one of the largest demining challenges in history. Witnessing the bravery of the women and men working to clear this contamination has been deeply humbling. Britain must continue to support the Ukrainian people by championing humanitarian mine action and ensuring our foreign policy reflects the real human cost of explosive weapons."

Maguire also met **Anatolii Fedoruk**, Mayor of **Bucha**, the town that became a global symbol of Russian atrocities against civilians after the withdrawal of occupying forces in 2022. Hundreds of civilians were killed there, many showing signs of execution and torture. Maguire reflected:

"Witnessing first hand the damage and loss caused by landmines has been sobering, but I've been heartened to know that the contributions from my own community — through **Surrey Stands With Ukraine's** financial support towards rehabilitation for landmine victims — will have made a tangible difference to survivors of these atrocities. I'm proud to represent a constituency whose compassion knows no borders."

Bucha holds a particular link with Epsom, as the local charity Surrey Stands With Ukraine (SSWU) — based in the town — was among the first UK groups to send aid there following the liberation of the area in 2022. Its director, Lionel Blackman, visited Bucha in July 2025, meeting the Mayor and local officials and other urban centres and aid workers to assess ongoing needs and rehabilitation projects. The charity has delivered more than £4 million worth of humanitarian and medical aid to Ukraine since the start of the full-scale invasion.

### Global context: Ukraine among the world's most landmined nations

Ukraine now ranks among the most heavily mined countries on Earth, joining the grim company of Cambodia, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Syria. The United Nations and the HALO Trust estimate that contamination across Ukraine affects an area larger than England, Wales, and Northern Ireland combined. At the current pace of clearance, it could take decades to make all affected areas safe.

Globally, Cambodia remains one of the most mine-affected nations, with around 1,000 square kilometres still contaminated despite 30 years of clearance. Vietnam and Laos continue to suffer from the legacy of the Vietnam War, where unexploded ordnance from U.S. bombing campaigns still kills or injures civilians every year. In comparison, Ukraine’s contamination has occurred over a much shorter period — highlighting the devastating intensity of Russia’s use of explosive weapons in civilian areas.

The UK’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) continues to fund demining organisations in Ukraine through its Global Mine Action Programme, which supports both the HALO Trust and MAG in their life-saving work.

You can follow the work of Surrey Stands With Ukraine and make donations [HERE](#)

Sam Jones - Reporter



Related reports:

[Epsom Stands in Solidarity with Ukraine on War’s Third Anniversary](#)

[Sir Ed supporting Epsom based Ukraine charities](#)

[Fire Assembly for Ukraine](#)

[2 years on Epsom to gather in solidarity with Ukraine](#)

[“Imagine this house is in Epsom” says our man in Ukraine.](#)

Image: Helen Maguire MP with LibDem Party leader Sir Ed Davey and Surrey Stands With Ukraine Chairman Roy Deadman at the “Ukraine Hub” in Global House (courtesy The Ashley Centre) the HQ for the charity and the Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network in November 2024.

## Handmade in Epsom and Ewell: local makers unite to support Epsom Foodbank

4 January 2026



Handmade in Epsom and Ewell (HiEE) will hold its first community event, *The Festive Makers Fair*, on Saturday 29th November 2025 from 10am to 3pm in the Youth Hall at Epsom Methodist Church, Ashley Road (KT18 5AQ).

The fair will offer an affordable platform for local artisans to showcase their handmade products while supporting a vital community cause. All proceeds from the event, apart from stallholder sales, will be donated to Epsom Foodbank.

HiEE was founded by a group of local makers keen to create a space where craftspeople from within the borough can share their work and at the same time raise funds for charity. The organisers are particularly encouraging new makers to take part, alongside some of the area’s more established names.

Visitors will find a range of handmade gifts and festive items including soaps, ceramics, upcycled furniture, art, jewellery and metalwork, all produced in Epsom and Ewell. Prices will range from pocket-money treats to larger special gifts. Twenty-two local makers are already confirmed, including Annette’s Gemstones Jewellery, Bird & Bear Soaps, Colour and Sparkle, EpsomPots, H for Handmade, Martha Moon Creations, Surrey Woodcraft and Wadey Smithing.

Adding to the festive spirit, The AMP Voices choir from Nescot College will perform in the Roots Coffee Shop at the Methodist Church, which will be open for refreshments and cakes throughout the day.

All funds raised from event profits and entrance donations will go directly to Epsom Foodbank. Entry is by a suggested £1 donation. Attendees are also invited to bring non-perishable food items for the foodbank’s Christmas drive. A list of items particularly needed can be found at [epsomewell.foodbank.org.uk/give-help/donate-food](http://epsomewell.foodbank.org.uk/give-help/donate-food).

Organiser Janice Heyes said: “We really hope the Epsom and Ewell community will support this event which is taking place right in the heart of town. Shoppers will find unique handmade Christmas gifts made with care and passion while giving something back via the Epsom Foodbank. This really is an event run by the community for the community.”

The event is being coordinated by volunteers Imogen Curran, Janice Heyes, Jo Jones and Helen Worwood, supported by

local craftspeople and small businesses. The group hopes that this first fair will be the start of an annual tradition, with future events expanding the initiative's reach and community impact.

For more information visit [www.handmadeinepsomandewell.co.uk](http://www.handmadeinepsomandewell.co.uk) or follow @Handmadeinepsomandewell on Facebook and Instagram. Enquiries can be sent to [handmadeinepsomandewell@gmail.com](mailto:handmadeinepsomandewell@gmail.com).

#### Event details

Date: Saturday 29 November 2025

Time: 10am-3pm

Venue: Epsom Methodist Church, Ashley Road, KT18 5AQ

Admission: Suggested £1 donation

Parking: Please walk, use public transport, or park in town centre car parks. Limited on-site parking for Blue Badge holders only.

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## Epsom charity backs Ukrainian wheelchair athletes in world championship

4 January 2026



*Surrey Stands with Ukraine*, the Epsom-based humanitarian charity operating under Harrop HR Missions Ltd (Registered Charity No. 1117155), is proudly sponsoring the Ukrainian Pickleball Team at the prestigious **English Open Pickleball Tournament** in Telford this summer, taking place from **6-10 August 2025**.

This powerful gesture of international solidarity comes with a particular emphasis on supporting Ukrainian **wheelchair athletes**—many of whom suffered life-changing injuries during the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war.

Founded in early 2022 by Ukrainian and British friends, Surrey Stands with Ukraine has grown to become one of the UK's most active grassroots support groups for Ukraine. To date, the charity has delivered more than **£4 million** in humanitarian aid, including over **10,000 mobility aids**, **40+ tonnes of medical supplies**, and **140 aid vehicles** to those in need across the country. It also funds Ukrainian NGOs and institutions, with a strong focus over the past 18 months on **rehabilitation from physical and psychological trauma**.

Now, that mission expands to the world of sport.

The Ukrainian Pickleball Team arriving in Telford includes several inspirational wheelchair athletes whose journey into sport has been shaped by wartime adversity. For many, pickleball has become a vital outlet for physical recovery, psychological strength, and renewed purpose. Their participation in this international tournament is seen as a powerful symbol of national resilience—and comes at a time when Ukraine's sporting community continues to suffer, having lost **487 athletes** since the full-scale Russian invasion began.

"We are honoured to sponsor the Ukrainian Pickleball Team and shine a light on these remarkable athletes," said a spokesperson for Surrey Stands with Ukraine. "Their participation in the English Open is a testament to their courage and a reminder of the human toll of the war. They represent not only Ukraine, but also the enduring spirit of all those affected."

As part of its sponsorship, Surrey Stands with Ukraine is covering travel and accessible accommodation costs to ensure that all team members, especially the wheelchair athletes, can compete on equal terms.

The **English Open Pickleball Tournament**, held annually in Telford, is one of Europe's premier events in the sport. This year's edition promises to be especially meaningful with the Ukrainian team's presence on court.

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### Event Details

- **What:** English Open Pickleball Tournament
- **When:** 6-10 August 2025
- **Where:** Telford, United Kingdom
- **Team:** Ukrainian Pickleball Team, including wheelchair athletes, sponsored by Surrey Stands with Ukraine

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### About Surrey Stands with Ukraine

Operating under Harrop HR Missions Ltd, Surrey Stands with Ukraine is a registered UK charity supporting civilians, hospitals, and trauma centres across Ukraine. Founded in February 2022, it continues to deliver aid, funding, and

solidarity from the UK to those most affected by the war.

#### Contact

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Phone: +44 7920 008048

#### Donate

Support the charity's Trauma Rehabilitation Fundraiser at

<https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/trauma-rehabilitation-pack>

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### Meet Two of the Athletes: Stories of Courage

**Oleksandr, 30, from Mykolaiv**, was serving as a frontline medic when a Russian shell strike in 2023 caused devastating injuries to both his legs. After undergoing multiple surgeries and losing mobility, Oleksandr found himself struggling with isolation and trauma. Introduced to pickleball during rehabilitation in Lviv, he quickly found strength in sport and camaraderie. "Pickleball gave me a reason to get out of bed again," he says. Now a wheelchair athlete, he's competing internationally for the first time in Telford.

**Natalia, 27, from Dnipro**, was wounded in a missile attack while volunteering at a humanitarian centre in early 2022. With long months of rehabilitation behind her, she turned to pickleball as a low-impact sport that helped her regain balance and confidence. As one of the few female wheelchair players on the Ukrainian team, she says the sport has become a symbol of her resilience. "We lost so much—but we didn't lose our spirit," she says.

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## Volunteers Tackle Plastic Waste in Epsom Town Centre

4 January 2026



Plastic waste is a global menace that often ends up closer to home than we think. According to recent studies, the average person could be consuming up to five grams of microplastic every week — equivalent to the weight of a credit card — through food and drink. With plastic present in around 70% of consumer products, and evidence of its harmful impact on marine life and ecosystems, managing our plastic footprint is becoming increasingly urgent.

On Sunday 29 June, local volunteers from ASEZ WAO UK, a community group with a focus on sustainability, staged a "Rethink Plastic" event around Epsom's Clock Tower. Around 40 volunteers, joined by members of the public, took part in a litter pick, public awareness presentations, and an upcycling workshop to highlight practical solutions to plastic waste.

Their efforts drew the support of the Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, Councillor **Robert Leach** (RA Nonsuch), who questioned the scale of modern packaging waste and praised the volunteers for helping to keep the town clean. Councillor **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley Vale) also lent his backing, commenting, "Wouldn't it be great if people just used the bins?"

In total, volunteers collected around 35 bags of rubbish from the town centre. Under a pop-up gazebo, families were invited to transform discarded plastic bottles into creative items such as phone stands, piggy banks, toy cars and flowers — demonstrating how waste materials can be given a second life. A young mother taking part with her daughter described the workshop as "really good, really fun — a great idea."

Upcycling — the process of turning unwanted materials into something of higher value — is gaining traction as one response to the growing problem of plastic pollution. However, recycling still faces challenges. For example, items such as greasy pizza boxes and disposable coffee cups often cannot be recycled through normal household collections, highlighting the importance of checking local guidelines to avoid contaminating recyclable waste streams.

Littering and plastic waste remain significant problems in the UK. The charity Keep Britain Tidy estimates that local councils spend nearly £700 million each year cleaning up litter, much of which includes plastic packaging. With plastic pollution known to damage habitats and harm wildlife, local action is seen as a vital part of tackling a wider environmental crisis.

ASEZ WAO UK says it plans to continue its local campaigns and is encouraging residents to get involved in future events. More information about their activities is available online or from volunteers active in the community.

For those inspired to act, it's a timely reminder: our throwaway habits may have far-reaching consequences — and tackling them starts on our own doorstep.

Image: Cllrs McCormick and Leach speak out against plastic waste

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## Great Get Together Got its Act together.

4 January 2026



Sunday, St Joseph's Church in Epsom was buzzing with laughter, music, and the spirit of community as residents gathered for The Great Get Together — a free, vibrant family event co-hosted by Good Company and Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network.

The event was officially opened by the Mayor of Epsom & Ewell, Councillor Robert Leach, and warmly supported by local MP Helen Maguire, whose presence reflected the significance of the day for the whole community.

From the moment the gates opened, visitors were welcomed into an afternoon packed with activities, entertainment, and delicious food — all completely free of charge. Families from across the borough came together to celebrate unity, diversity, and neighbourly spirit.

Children and adults alike were kept smiling with a variety of games and creative stations. Highlights included crazy golf, football, face painting, and colourful arts and crafts, all made possible by a team of tireless volunteers.

The entertainment line-up was a true showcase of local talent. Epsom's own Ukrainian Renaissance Choir moved the crowd with their stirring songs, while Freedom Pulse Brass brought rhythm and energy. Helin Konyar, a graduate of Laine Theatre Arts, delighted both children and adults with her joyful Disney song set.

No community celebration is complete without good food — and this one delivered. Lezzet Kitchen, Turkish cooks, served up their famous filled flatbreads, freshly made on-site, alongside Noah's pudding made by the Chickpea Project, thought to be the oldest dessert in the world.

One attendee summed up the day perfectly: "Today was truly unforgettable, filled with love, warmth, and a deep sense of safety. It was inspiring to see so many vulnerable refugee families brought together with the wonderful Epsom community."

Thanks to the dedication of countless volunteers, The Great Get Together was a heart warming success.

Image: Epsom and Ewell Mayor Cllr Robert Leach (RA) and Helen Maguire MP at Epsom's Great Get Together