

500 patients buried in Epsom's asylum cemetery no longer forgotten

11 May 2026



A team of researchers volunteering for the local charity The Friends of Horton Cemetery have reached a milestone in their quest to write the histories of 9000 patients buried in the abandoned privately owned Horton Cemetery. The cemetery, reputed to be the largest asylum cemetery in Europe, is situated at the junction of Hook Road and Horton Lane. The story of Marjorie is the 500th published on the charity's website

A discarded headstone rescued from a skip more than forty years ago led researchers to uncover the poignant story of a young woman buried at Horton Cemetery — and reconnect her memory with living family members.

Before the cemetery was sold by the NHS in 1983 to a property speculator, notices appeared in the local press informing relatives that they could reclaim the headstones of loved ones buried there. Families were warned that any memorials left behind would be destroyed.

At the time, an electrical engineer working on a project within the former Epsom hospital cluster discovered one such stone which had been thrown into a skip. Appalled at what he later described as a “blatant disregard” for somebody's final resting place, he rescued the memorial and took it home for safekeeping.

Today, the headstone remains carefully preserved, with the hope that one day it may be returned to the cemetery where it was originally intended to stand in perpetuity.

The inscription reads simply:

Marjorie Young
14th September 1948
Aged 27 years
R.I.P.

As researchers from the Friends of Horton Cemetery began investigating Marjorie's life, they were astonished to discover that a relative was still alive and able to shed light on her tragic story.

The relative, whose mother was Marjorie's first cousin, said: “Your message is a welcome bolt from the blue. I can't believe that after all these years somebody is interested in Marjorie. I didn't know her but my mother so often talked about her. My mother died in 2015 but she still had nightmares about the life Marjorie led.”

His words underline one of the central aims of the Friends of Horton Cemetery — ensuring that those buried in the former asylum cemetery are not forgotten.

Research into burial records revealed another heartbreaking detail. The cemetery register records that Marjorie was buried in grave 2892b alongside a “stillborn female child”. Marjorie was buried with a stillborn child who researchers believe belonged to an unknown patient.

Such practices were sadly not uncommon. Before changes introduced during the 1980s, hospitals frequently arranged the burial of stillborn babies with little or no consultation with grieving parents. Often, infants were buried in existing graves within institutional cemeteries.

A Family Marked by Tragedy

Marjorie's father, Charles Young, was born in 1894 to Harry Young and Ellen Fanny Young, née Chesterman. According to family recollections, Ellen gave birth to as many as 23 children, though only a handful survived infancy.

The family experienced repeated tragedy. In 1905, Charles's younger sister Minnie died after suffering an epileptic seizure during the night. An inquest heard that Minnie sometimes endured as many as thirteen fits a day. Researchers later discovered that Marjorie herself also suffered from epilepsy.

Charles married Ethel Mary Davis at St Augustine's Church in 1920.

A Childhood of Fear and Isolation

Born on 10 June 1921, Marjorie was an only child. Family testimony has painted a troubling picture of her upbringing. Her cousin recalled stories passed down by his mother: “Marjorie was very clever and wanted to study. She was an only child so welcomed the company of my mother. As time went on it became clear to my mother that Marjorie was terrified, the reason being that her parents went out every night and left her alone in the dark. Neighbours talked of Marjorie standing

at the window looking out in the dark.

“Eventually poor Marjorie had a breakdown and was admitted to hospital and my mother never saw her again.”

Public records relating to Marjorie are scarce. In the 1939 Register, compiled at the outbreak of the Second World War, she was living in Lambeth and working as a civil servant for His Majesty’s Office of Works, the government department responsible for public buildings.

The next surviving record appears nine years later.

On 14 September 1948, Marjorie died at Long Grove Hospital aged just 27. Her death certificate records broncho-pneumonia and exhaustion caused by epilepsy. She was buried at Horton Cemetery on 21 September 1948.

Someone Cared Enough to Remember

Researchers believe one detail about Marjorie’s story is especially important. She had a headstone.

At Horton Cemetery, where thousands were buried in unmarked graves, memorial stones were rare. Someone cared enough to arrange and pay for a marker. Someone completed the paperwork and ensured her resting place was acknowledged. It is also possible that family members attended her funeral.

For her surviving relative, the rediscovery of the headstone has brought comfort. “It is wonderful to hear that her gravestone survives and that has led to her being your 500th story. If only I could tell my mother. She would have been so pleased to know that somebody still cares about Marjorie.

“I think you’ve done a wonderful job and somehow righted some of the wrongs.”

Today, the rescued headstone stands not only for Marjorie Young, but symbolically for the estimated 9,000 forgotten souls buried within Horton Cemetery.

Perhaps one day it will stand there once again.

More research stories can be found on the Horton Cemetery website at Horton Cemetery

The Friends of Horton Cemetery seek to restore the cemetery to community ownership. The case for a compulsory purchase order was blocked by Epsom and Ewell Borough Council. The charity now pins its hopes on a fresh approach from the East Surrey Unitary Council. The charity has the support of Epsom and Ewell’s MP Helen Maguire, who is engaging with the Ministry of Justice on the issue.

Theresa Keneflick-Conway

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Epsom “Library of Things” Delayed by Council Stand-Off

11 May 2026



A volunteer-led scheme to open a “Library of Things” in Ewell has been delayed for months amid a stand-off between Surrey County Council (SCC) and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) over who has the authority to approve a key lease.

The project, led by the Epsom and Ewell Climate Action Network (eeCAN), aims to allow residents to borrow household tools and equipment rather than buy them—an initiative already operating successfully in other parts of Surrey. However, despite securing planning permission for an external storage unit at Bourne Hall in early April, the scheme remains unable to open to the public.

At the heart of the delay is confusion between the roles of the county and borough councils. SCC operates the library

service within Bourne Hall and has entered into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with eeCAN covering the delivery of the service. But the land and building are owned by EEBC, meaning any lease for the external storage facility must be agreed with the borough.

In correspondence seen by the Epsom and Ewell Times, a senior SCC officer states that the county council “would not be a contracting party nor is there a requirement for a formal approach from us,” adding that any lease should be agreed directly with EEBC.

However, EEBC’s Head of Property and Regeneration takes a different view. He explains that under his delegated authority he can only progress matters involving Surrey County Council, which he describes as the legal occupier of the Bourne Hall library space. He also cites legal obligations requiring any new lease to be openly marketed to ensure “Best Value,” rather than agreed directly with a single organisation.

The result is an impasse: SCC says it is not required to initiate the lease, while EEBC says it cannot proceed in the way requested. Meanwhile, the community group finds itself unable to move forward.

William Ward, Chair and Co-founder of eeCAN, describes mounting frustration. Writing to both councils, he points to months of correspondence since December and says the group now has “many local residents who have already signed up... asking why the opening has been delayed and when they can borrow the donated items they need.”

The delays have already forced the postponement of the scheme’s planned launch around Earth Day, with construction of the storage unit also on hold pending agreement of the lease.

The situation also raises questions about consistency across Surrey. Ward notes that similar “Library of Things” schemes elsewhere in the county do not appear to have encountered the same requirement for formal inter-council processes, suggesting potential differences in how local authorities interpret their responsibilities.

For observers, the episode offers a practical illustration of the challenges inherent in Surrey’s two-tier system of local government. Responsibilities for a single site are split between county and borough, with separate legal, operational and property roles. While each authority’s position may be individually justifiable, the combined effect can be delay, duplication and uncertainty for community groups trying to deliver local services.

The issue comes at a time when Surrey is preparing to replace its current structure with unitary authorities. Proponents of reform argue that merging responsibilities into a single tier could reduce exactly this kind of confusion. Critics, however, warn that large new authorities risk becoming more remote from local needs.

In the case of the Bourne Hall Library of Things, the immediate concern is more practical. Without resolution between the two councils, a project intended to promote sustainability, reduce household costs and strengthen community engagement remains on hold, it has been claimed.

Surrey County Council and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council joined forces in issuing a response to these claims. A spokesperson said:

“Surrey County Council (SCC) Libraries enables external providers to operate a “Library of Things” service across the county. Under the agreed arrangements, all “Library of Things” providers are responsible for organising off-site storage for larger items, while smaller items may be stored within library buildings where space allows.

“Ewell Library is located at Bourne Hall, which Surrey County Council leases from Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC). As both the planning authority and freeholder of Bourne Hall, EEBC is responsible for approving any external storage within the grounds.

“Epsom and Ewell Climate Action Network was advised at an early stage that planning permission and landowner agreement would be required for an external store to house larger items. Planning permission was granted earlier this year, and the proposal will be presented to the next meeting of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council’s Environment Committee which is scheduled to take place on 23 June. Committee agreement is required before volunteers can manage the store.

“Both councils look forward to welcoming a new “Library of Things” to Ewell, building on the success already seen at Dorking, Godalming, Guildford and Haslemere Libraries, supporting residents to share resources and reduce waste.”

Sam Jones – Reporter



Cleaning up crime hotspot in Epsom

11 May 2026



Last weekend, volunteers from Rotary, local residents' groups and community organisations gathered behind Epsom Centre to clean a small alleyway that has become a hotspot for litter and anti-social behaviour after dark.

The clean up may have taken place in daylight, but the focus was firmly on what happens at night.

Figures from the police crime map reveal a worrying pattern. Between January and August 2025 alone, **at least 50 crimes** of all types were reported on or near this small stretch of road, including 6 violence and sexual offences, plus vehicle crime, anti-social behaviour, drug offences and public order incidents. The exact locations are harder to detail, so this is an area on the map. The problem is not isolated. In October 2025, the area saw a spike of **9 crimes in a single month**, 3 of which were linked to violence or sexual offences. Reported crimes continue into January and February 2026, showing the issue has not gone away.

According to residents living in Oaks Square, these figures may only scratch the surface. Many of the publicly recorded cases end with the same outcome: "There is insufficient evidence to bring anyone to justice at this time. The investigation may be reopened if more information becomes available." This highlights that useful CCTV coverage is patchy, and it is hard for police to gain convictions.

"Keeping in groups, leaving no one behind, and avoiding the fenced alleys and the car parks at certain times is easy to achieve by staying in the High St and walking the extra 200 meters the cut throughs save. Peak trouble in these areas is as you might expect after dark 10:00 pm until 04:00 am in summer and 8:00 pm to 08:00 am in winter".

Clean spaces change behaviour.

Clive, Maria and Chris, speaking on behalf of Rotary, said: "We're here to tidy up an area just off the High Street. Working with Rotary and other groups, we've found all sorts. The issue here is that people throw rubbish over the fence onto the railway and it just builds up."

Sharine, from Central Epsom, said it was her first time joining, "I didn't expect this level of mess or to hear about crime linked to the area. Seeing it first-hand is surprising. It makes me want to raise awareness and look for real solutions."

Steve McCormick, (RA EEBC Woodcote and Langley Vale) Residents' Association county councillor and Rotary member, explained the wider impact: "When an area looks neglected, it attracts more problems. When it is clean and tidy, people take more pride in it. Criminals tend to stay away. If a place looks looked after, you get less anti-social behaviour."

Much of the litter appears to be carelessly thrown away, sometimes even from car windows or over fences. Organisers say this reflects a wider throwaway culture.

"It's frustrating," one volunteer said. "You clean an area and shortly after it can be messy again."

In Austria, even small waste offences can lead to fines of around £80. A minor mistake might include leaving a bin bag outside a container instead of placing it inside, or putting rubbish in the wrong bin. Dumping rubbish in public spaces or beside containers can result in fines ranging from around £630 to £31,000. The idea is simple. If you cannot keep the environment clean and safe, you pay the price. Experience shows that people learn very quickly when clear rules and consequences are in place.

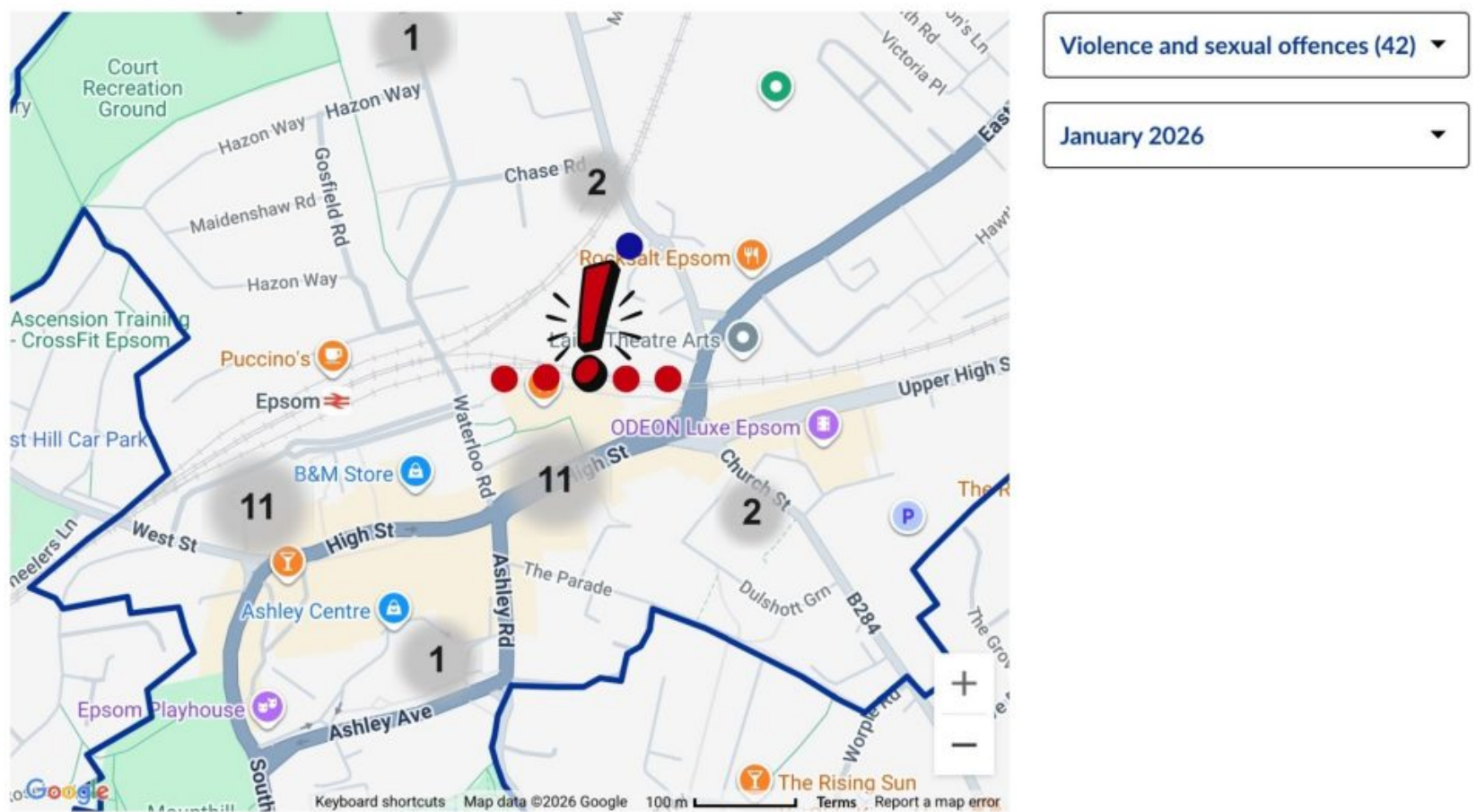
Another approach comes from Sweden, where "plogging" has become a popular trend. Plogging combines jogging or walking with picking up litter, turning exercise into a practical way to care for the environment. The term comes from the Swedish words plocka upp, meaning pick up and jogga, meaning jog, and the movement began around 2016. Founded by Erik Ahlström, plogging encourages people to stay active while helping reduce pollution.

A small effort with a bigger message: This clean-up focused on one small road behind Epsom Centre, but organisers say it is just the beginning. Future efforts will aim to tackle and highlight other areas identified on crime maps. The group completed the clean-up in less than an hour, but the aim is long-term change. "By focusing on litter in areas highlighted by crime data, especially those active at night, we hope to reduce anti-social behaviour and improve safety by letting everyone know where to avoid and when, whilst making the less well motivated people aware that we care.

Organisers say that "now Keep Epsom and Ewell Tidy has shut we do need to help each other to keep the town clean". Anyone can take part and make a difference: "It's an easy thing to do. You feel better after helping, you meet people, and together you can create change." If you would like to get involved in future clean-ups or community projects, contact your local Rotary group and help create a safer, cleaner Epsom.

Romy Sustar





150KG in Two Hours: Volunteers contribute to Epsom’s clean environment

11 May 2026



Volunteers from the World Mission Society Church of God carried out a community clean-up in Epsom on Sunday 26 April, collecting over 150kg of litter in just two hours.

41 volunteers gathered to help tidy key areas of the town. After a short briefing, they split into two teams to cover locations including the town centre, Epsom Square, Rosebery Park, Mount Hill Gardens and the car park near Lidl. The event forms part of an ongoing litter-picking initiative by the group which has been carried out for 8 years, reflecting the group’s continued commitment to the community and growing volunteer participation in recent years.

Working between 11am and 1pm, the teams focused on known litter hotspots, aiming to collect 40 bags and 150kg of waste. Residents showed their appreciation throughout the morning, encouraging volunteers and recognising the positive impact of their efforts. Alongside general litter, volunteers removed larger discarded items such as chairs, a vacuum cleaner, toys, carts and even a traffic sign. These were sorted for proper disposal and recycling. By the end of the event, 49 bags of waste had been collected, weighing a total of 150.34kg exceeding the original target.

Volunteers said the result highlighted how teamwork can make a meaningful difference to the local environment. Sarah, a first-time joiner of the clean-up campaign, shared that she was inspired by how the volunteers dedicated themselves to helping the community and expressed her willingness and intention to take part in future activities. Andrei, a frequent volunteer who has been taking part for four years, shared that it is the spirit and attitude of the volunteers that keeps him coming back. “They are always ready to help the community,” he said, adding that everyone deserves to live in a cleaner, more pleasant environment and that though our individual actions may seem small, in reality these can make a real difference.

Staff from the Epsom & Ewell Borough Council also said to the volunteers, “Thank you to you and all of the society for your continued efforts with events such as these; it is very much appreciated...”

Volunteers from the World Mission Society Church of God hope their efforts will continue to inspire others and contribute to a cleaner, safer Epsom.

World Mission Society Church of God

Glyn Hall faces uncertain future as trustees issue urgent appeal to save Ewell landmark

11 May 2026



A historic community building at the heart of Ewell is at risk of being lost permanently unless urgent support can be secured.

Glyn Hall, situated on Cheam Road in Ewell Village, has served local residents for generations as a space for education, social gatherings and community activity. The hall traces its origins back to around 1870 and was later bequeathed for the benefit of Ewell residents by local benefactor Margaret Glyn in 1946.

However, after more than a century and a half of use, the building has now reached the end of its functional life. The ageing wooden structure has been closed, leaving the future of the site in doubt.

Volunteer trustees responsible for the charity have spent recent years working to secure the hall's future. Plans have been developed to demolish the existing building and replace it with a modern facility better suited to contemporary community use. Planning permission for the redevelopment was granted in January 2024.

Fundraising efforts have already attracted strong local backing, with approximately £85,000 raised from community sources. Despite this, trustees say they have only reached around half of the funding required to deliver the project in full.

They now warn that, without additional financial support or new volunteers willing to take the project forward, the consequences could be stark. The land may have to be sold, the charity dissolved, and with it the long-standing legacy of Glyn Hall brought to an end.

Trustees are therefore issuing what they describe as a final appeal to residents, local organisations and potential benefactors to come forward.

"This is a final opportunity to save Glyn Hall for future generations," they say.

Anyone interested in supporting the project or seeking further information is invited to contact trustee Matthew Anderson at mjranderson64@gmail.com.

The future of one of Ewell's longstanding community assets now depends on whether sufficient backing can be secured in the coming months.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Image: Glyn Hall now (Google) and the plan

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Friends of Horton Cemetery influence law reform

11 May 2026



A local Epsom charity's campaign to protect a forgotten cemetery appears to have helped shape national thinking on burial law reform.

The Friends of Horton Cemetery (FoHC), based in Epsom, made a detailed submission to the Law Commission in January 2025 calling for stronger legal protections for neglected burial grounds—particularly those in private ownership.

Now, with the publication of the Law Commission's report on Burial and Cremation in March 2026, several of the group's core concerns appear to have been recognised at the highest level of policy.

Horton Cemetery, the resting place of around 9000 former psychiatric patients from the Epsom hospital cluster, has long been at the centre of FoHC's work. Since its sale into private ownership in 1983, the site has suffered decades of neglect, with no public access and minimal maintenance.

In its **submission**, FoHC argued that the law currently leaves such sites in a regulatory vacuum, with no enforceable duty on owners to maintain them and limited powers for authorities to intervene.

That argument now appears to have gained traction.

The Law Commission's report identifies private burial grounds as an area of "real gaps in protection" and, for the first time, proposes a legal duty requiring all burial grounds—including privately owned ones—to be kept in "good order". The report also envisages inspection and enforcement powers at national level.

These proposals closely mirror FoHC's central recommendation that cemetery owners should be subject to a clear, enforceable maintenance obligation reflecting the historical and emotional significance of such sites.

However, other proposals put forward by the Epsom group have not yet been taken up in full.

FoHC had called for a statutory right of access for relatives, stronger powers for local authorities to intervene, and safeguards against speculative ownership and redevelopment. While the Commission acknowledges many of these issues—particularly the importance of access to graves—it stops short of recommending firm legal rights or stronger local enforcement mechanisms.

Speaking after the report's publication, Lionel Blackman, solicitor and secretary of the Friends of Horton Cemetery and author of the legal submission said "The recognition of the problem is an important step, even if the solutions remain incomplete."

The charity's work has also fed into ongoing discussions with the Ministry of Justice. At a recent meeting, organised by Patron of the Charity and local MP Helen Maguire with trustees of the charity, Theresa Keneflick and Kevin McDonnell and junior Minister Alex Davies-Jones MP, Horton Cemetery was cited as a real-world example of the kind of site falling through gaps in the current legal framework.

The Law Commission's reforms are expected to take several years to translate into legislation, with an initial Government response anticipated within six months.

For campaigners in Epsom, the message is clear: what began as a local effort to restore dignity to a neglected burial ground is now influencing the national conversation.

And while the law may not yet have caught up fully, Horton Cemetery is no longer being overlooked.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Image: Horton Cemetery 1971

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Local community gathered at Horton Cemetery

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

11 May 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 run 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 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-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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Energy debt fears rise as Epsom’s Good Company’s support steps up

11 May 2026



Rising energy costs could push more households into debt this year, with local support services warning of growing pressure on low-income families.

Good Company (Surrey), which runs the Epsom & Ewell Foodbank, says many of the people it supports are already struggling to keep up with bills. With further increases in gas and electricity prices expected when the energy price cap is reviewed in July, concerns are mounting about the impact on vulnerable households.

Energy debt among clients is already significant, averaging around £900 per household. The charity says this is placing “enormous pressure” on families trying to manage day-to-day living costs.

To help address the issue, Good Company has expanded its programme of energy support workshops. These sessions offer practical advice on reducing energy use and costs, alongside providing items such as energy-efficient appliances and heated blankets to help people stay warm at home.

One participant described the sessions as eye-opening, saying: “So many things! Learning about radiator reflectors, energy surveys, how much a shower costs per hour. Being provided with further info to go away and look into. The £50 voucher and the appliance were a fabulous surprise. Thank you!”

For households already in arrears, the organisation is also offering access to an intensive debt relief programme, working with specialist energy advisers to help people find a sustainable path out of debt. Tom, Participation and Prevention Director at Good Company, said: “At Good Company, we can’t control global events — but we can help local families reduce their energy use, ease the burden of debt, and feel more secure at home.”

Employment support under review

Alongside energy concerns, the charity has been reviewing how well employment and skills support is working locally.

A recent event brought together advisers and senior leaders from local services to discuss findings from research into clients’ experiences. The study found that access to good quality work can make a major difference to financial resilience and wellbeing, but that support is not always reaching those who need it most.

While some people reported positive experiences and success in finding new roles, others highlighted gaps in awareness of available services. There were also concerns about continuity, with some clients losing support when advisers move on, and difficulties accessing training in specific sectors. Some felt held back by a lack of qualifications.

The findings have prompted discussions about improving promotion of employment support through community touchpoints such as GP surgeries, strengthening adviser handovers, and increasing awareness of local training opportunities. Ellie, Community Researcher, said: “This has been a great exercise for us, inspiring us to think about where we can improve our service and maybe even add in some new initiatives.”

New platform aims to join up services

In a further step to improve support, Good Company has launched ReferSurrey, a secure referral platform designed to connect people with a wider network of local services.

The system links users to advice, health and community organisations, with the aim of addressing the underlying causes of financial hardship through more coordinated support. Fifteen agencies have already joined, with a further 22 due to come on board shortly.

Call for community support

The charity is also appealing for donations, warning that demand for foodbank and advice services remains high across East Surrey despite the area's perceived affluence.

Rising living costs, accessibility barriers and ongoing inequalities are continuing to drive need, while food donations have fallen. Good Company says regular contributions, even small ones, can help ensure local people are able to access essential support.

"Every contribution, however modest, helps ensure that local people can access the help and support they need, whatever their circumstances. Together, we can build a fairer, more compassionate community where no one is left to struggle alone."

Sam Jones - Reporter



Epsom and Ewell countryside volunteers face uncertain times

11 May 2026



Epsom and Ewell's army of countryside volunteers faces uncertain times as responsibility for protecting the borough's wildlife habitats shifts next year to a new East Surrey council. The fear is that nature conservation will slide down the priority list during the upheaval of local government reform.

Dozens of local people turn out in all weathers to help nature thrive in places such as Epsom Common, Horton Country Park and on the Hogsmill, an internationally rare chalk stream where water voles were reintroduced last year. More than 40 percent of the borough is open space for the public and visitors to enjoy, or other green belt land. Their work varies widely from opening up woodland glades and removing invasive plants to tending orchards and laying woodchip footpaths. Caring for juniper bushes, which are critically declining in Britain, is an important task on the Epsom Downs.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council leads much of this conservation work, supervising the volunteers and organising contractors to carry out bigger jobs. However, it is due for abolition under a major shakeup of local government when East Surrey takes over in April 2027. Little is known about how the countryside, which provided residents with uncrowded space to exercise and enjoy nature during the Covid pandemic, will be managed in future. Work on the transfer of powers has only just begun, and where the new council will be based has yet to be decided.

Local people caring for local nature

Amid the uncertainty, volunteers are anxious to ensure that local people keep caring for local nature, and that residents retain ready access to their woods, wildflower meadows and riverbanks. "To preserve what we've got takes a lot of work, and in Epsom and Ewell it's largely done by volunteers. My concern is it continues to get done," said David Dixon, a volunteer for the past 10 years. "Volunteers are not going to travel 20 miles to do it, they want to do it locally. The worry is that it'll be subsumed into some sort of central authority who won't know the local areas, who won't really know the tasks that are needed," said Dixon, one of a roughly 10-strong group led by the Council's Countryside Team that meets every Thursday.

Volunteers in various countryside groups collectively work about 8,800 hours a year in the borough. Their task is to maintain and improve the biodiversity of local sites which are home to the likes of kingfishers, endangered great crested newts and a rare population of all five UK species of hairstreak butterfly. Native roe deer also roam, peregrine falcons visit from a nearby nest and cuckoos are once again heard, all within a stone's throw of the town centre.

Risks and opportunities

The aggregate hours figure has been collated by Dave King, who chairs the Epsom Common Association (ECA), and Geoff Delamere, a countryside volunteer since 2018. In a briefing paper they detail the risks and opportunities raised by the reform which will replace Surrey's two levels of local government with a single tier. <https://bit.ly/4bvgZnR>

At a time when council budgets are under heavy strain those 8,800 hours equate notionally to almost £112,000 worth of voluntary labour a year, based on the National Living Wage rate. Volunteer work keeps down the cost of managing the borough's two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), five Local Nature Reserves and six ancient woodlands. "We're pretty good value for money," said King. The ECA's EcoVols group works on the Common two days a month for much of the year, with 10-15 volunteers typically turning out.

Epsom and Ewell's professional countryside officers are paid from the Council budget but they amount to just three full time equivalent staff. Most of the work they lead is funded externally, largely from UK government countryside stewardship schemes. When they aren't working outdoors, Council officers may be at a computer applying for such funding or environmental grants from other sources.

A vision for nature

The modest cost of countryside management means it risks being overshadowed by much bigger budget items that East Surrey will take over. "I fear that wildlife and nature reserves may be well down the priority list," said King. "We need people who understand the site, have a vision for the site." ECA volunteers also make charcoal for sale and check the welfare of cattle that graze the Common in the summer.

A new body, East Surrey Joint Committee, is overseeing the transition and aims to ensure all services move smoothly into the new arrangement. It met for the first time only in January and will work until voters elect East Surrey councillors on May 7. East Surrey will then act as a shadow authority until April 1 next year when it takes over, with the borough continuing to run services in the meantime. Ultimately, decisions about how countryside management, including volunteering, are funded and run will be made by the East Surrey Council.

Countryside management is not the only thing surrounded by uncertainty. Arrangements have to be made for the wide range of services currently provided by Surrey's 11 borough and district councils, all of which will be subsumed into either West or East Surrey.

Knowledge and expertise

Epsom and Ewell has a large body of other volunteers working in everything from litterpicking to helping run Bourne Hall Museum. Council leader Hannah Dalton, who sits on the East Surrey Joint Committee, did not respond to a request for comment. However, Residents' Association councillor Liz Frost, chair of the borough's Environment Committee, expressed gratitude for countryside volunteers. "Their essential work, local knowledge and expertise help ensure that our residents and visitors can enjoy easy access to nature and open spaces across the borough," she said in a statement.

Such work relies on council leadership and support. The Thursday group attended by Dixon and Delamere is run directly by the Epsom and Ewell Countryside Team, which draws up a work programme, provides equipment and supervises the volunteers. The group typically cuts back undergrowth to allow veteran trees - some more than 300 years old - space to flourish. In the spring they erect electric fencing so that cattle, including the gentle "Belties" - Belted Galloways marked by broad white stripes around their bellies - can graze and help maintain habitats.

Feargal Sharkey support

At other times volunteers uproot Himalayan balsam, a colourful but highly invasive Victorian import which chokes native vegetation along many of Britain's rivers, including the Hogsmill. Volunteers also control ragwort in Nonsuch Park, allowing grassland to be mown for hay, which must be free of the plant as it is harmful to horses. The park has its own volunteer team, the Nonsuch Voles.

Such work is hard but rewarding. "It's the most enjoyable 'job' I've had," said Delamere. "It's outdoors and good exercise, as well as being useful for the environment and biodiversity." He added that companionship and learning new skills are key benefits, along with positive comments from passers-by. "Long may this mix of professionals and volunteers continue."

On Epsom Common, the Council Countryside Team agrees a conservation programme for the independently-run EcoVols

to carry out. "They do a lot for us," said King, noting work such as scrub clearance and chainsaw operations. "We cost about a pound per volunteer hour," he added.

Skylarks and kestrels

Other groups operate across wider areas including Epsom and Ewell. The Lower Mole Partnership works throughout northeast Surrey and neighbouring Kingston, while the Surrey Wildlife Trust manages Priest Hill where skylarks and kestrels are commonly seen. The Woodland Trust owns Langley Vale Wood, and the South East Rivers Trust is active on the Hogsmill. Local volunteer groups also include the Epsom and Ewell Tree Advisory Board and the Friends of Horton Country Park.

Much of this work is not discretionary. Environmental legislation requires biodiversity to be enhanced, so these efforts must continue into the future. "Volunteers are going to have to work locally," said Dixon. "And the people who decide what has to be done are going to have to have a good local knowledge."

David Stamp is a member of the Epsom and Ewell Borough Council countryside volunteers group.

Photo: A volunteer clears undergrowth in Horton Country Park

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Epsom and Ewell's four year commitment to Ukraine

11 May 2026



4 Years of War in Ukraine, 4 Years of Heart Ache, Support and Immense Pride in this Community

By Roy Deadman, Chairman and Co-Founder, Surrey Stands With Ukraine

Four years ago, we woke to news that changed Europe overnight. Ukraine had been invaded. I remember sitting in shock, watching the images unfold, feeling an overwhelming mix of disbelief and anger. I was incredibly angry that Russia had invaded Ukraine. What mattered to me in that moment was not politics, but people. A proud European nation was under attack, and I wanted to do all I could to defend it.

On day one of the war, I called my Ukrainian friend Natalia Irvine, who lives here in Epsom. I asked her a simple question: "What do you need?" I made her a promise that I would support her and her country in any way I could, for as long as it took. At that point, I thought in terms of weeks, perhaps months. I could never have imagined we would still be here four years later.

Together, Natalia and I reached out to our local community. We asked for help and the response was overwhelming. Donations flooded in almost immediately. People wanted to stand with Ukraine. They wanted to do something tangible in the face of such horror.

Within hours, it became clear that we needed space. The generosity of the Ashley Centre was extraordinary. On day one, they offered us 6,000 square feet of retail space. Even though it was rent-free, I had to take a personal risk and sign a lease that made me liable for the business rates, as we were not yet a registered charity. It was a leap of faith, but it was the start of what we proudly called "The Hub."

By the end of that first week, 180 volunteers had registered with us. We had raised close to £20,000 and sent two truckloads of humanitarian aid, donated by this incredible community. It was breathtaking how quickly everything moved.

Those early days were intense. Some people spent up to 20 hours at a time sorting and packing boxes. We worked through exhaustion fuelled by tea, determination and a shared sense of purpose. The emotional rollercoaster was constant, heartbreak at what we were seeing unfold in Ukraine, and immense pride at how Epsom and Ewell pulled together.

We quickly realised this could not be chaotic goodwill alone. We had to run it like a small business operation. Every item had to be sorted, categorised, packed and properly manifested before being loaded onto whichever truck was available. Transport offers poured in, with drivers volunteering to take aid directly into Ukraine. It was inspiring, and it required careful coordination.

In that first week, we formed a core team. Some volunteers stepped forward to create a committee to help make difficult

decisions about what we could send and where it should go. These were not easy choices. Demand was enormous, and resources, though generous, were not infinite.

Natalia, based here in Epsom, worked tirelessly alongside us. Her sister Anya, coordinating from inside Ukraine, helped guide where our aid would have the greatest impact. Between Epsom and Ukraine, somehow, we made it work. It was teamwork across borders, built on trust and shared determination.

Very quickly, we understood that we needed to become part of a registered charity. One reason was practical, the burden of business rates. The other was credibility, and the invaluable ability to claim Gift Aid on donations. I was introduced to Lionel Blackman, who ran a charity called Harrop HR Missions. After a coffee and a conversation about our mission, Lionel generously agreed to let us operate under his charity's structure.

From there, Surrey Stands With Ukraine became the fully formed charity we know today: Surrey Stands With Ukraine. As we reach the four-year mark, we have shipped £5 million worth of aid. We have sent 153 trucks, a fire engine, over 50,000 mobility aids and 650 winter family survival packs, and so much more besides.

Today, our charity is based at Global House, where we share space with the totally amazing Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network. EERN provides local support for Ukrainian families who have made Epsom and Ewell their temporary home. It has been a privilege to work alongside such a dedicated team and to witness their daily commitment.

One unexpected gift from these four years has been friendship. What began as an emergency response has grown into a powerful community bond. I have made lifelong friends through this work. We meet for quiz nights, coffee mornings, beers, lunches and parties. That human connection is not a side note, it is central to our resilience.

This work is emotionally hard. While we do not face the same unimaginable horror that Ukrainians endure, we are closer to it than most. We receive constant requests for help. We watch videos from the ground. We hear heartbreaking stories of families torn apart. We cry. We carry it with us.

That friendship network sustains us. There is always someone ready with a hug, someone to make you smile, someone to pick you up when you are exhausted. This is what being part of this charity and this community truly means.

Every single one of us is a volunteer. No one is paid a wage. We are there because we care deeply and because we want to do something meaningful on behalf of the Ukrainian people. That purity of purpose has shaped everything we do.

Over these four years, I have learned so much about Ukraine and its people. The obvious lesson is their extraordinary courage. But that courage is not confined to the front lines. It runs through all Ukrainians, young and old, men and women. Their commitment to preserving their culture, history and identity in the face of attempts to erase it is profoundly inspiring.

When I made that promise on day one, I thought this would be short term. I do believe Western governments have not done enough, or not quickly enough. This is a war in Europe, on our doorstep. History teaches us hard lessons, yet we so often seem slow to act.

If we are not careful, we may look back five or ten years from now at a Europe that has changed for the worse. It feels at times as though we have moved from a post-war world into a pre-war one. The longer this conflict continues without decisive resolution, the more lives are lost.

And yet, despite the geopolitical uncertainty, I find hope here at home. I find it in every donated sleeping bag, every cheque written, every volunteer shift completed. I find it in schoolchildren raising funds and pensioners knitting winter hats.

When people come together with kindness in their hearts, extraordinary things can happen. A community can unite behind people from another country simply because it is the right thing to do. That gives me hope.

I am immensely proud of what Epsom and Ewell has done over these four years. Proud to live here. Proud to raise my family here. Proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with all of you.

Four years of war. Four years of heartbreak. Four years of unwavering support. And four years of immense pride in this remarkable community.

Roy Deadman - Chair Surrey Stands With Ukraine

There will be a commemoration today at 5pm in The Ashley Centre, marking the 4th anniversary of the war and the Mayor of Epsom and Ewell Cllr Robert Leach will be in attendance. All are welcome.

Image: Roy Deadman with SSWU's latest appeal for negative pressure wound dressings

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"Imagine this house is in Epsom" says our man in Ukraine.

Epsom and Ewell pledges to end poverty

11 May 2026



Following the 2024 lead of Surrey County Council, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council also has formally adopted the End Poverty Pledge, committing itself to pay the Real Living Wage, review accessibility of key public venues, and embed poverty considerations into future policy decisions. The pledge was endorsed at Full Council on 10th February 2026 as part of the same meeting that approved the council's final budget before local government reorganisation, following earlier approval by the Community and Wellbeing Committee on 13th January, and forms part of a wider Surrey initiative led by the Epsom-based charity Good Company.

Under the pledge, the council has committed to pay the Real Living Wage to all council staff from April 2026, provide training to staff to improve understanding of poverty, review accessibility of community venues such as Bourne Hall, and include poverty considerations in Equality Impact Assessments for all future policies. Council leader **Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) said: "As a council, we are committed to supporting all our residents, including ensuring that those facing financial pressures are not left behind. The End Poverty Pledge helps sharpen our focus on understanding the barriers some of our residents face and working with our partners to remove them, so that Epsom & Ewell is a place where everyone feels supported and included. We also recognise the wellbeing of our workforce as an important part of that commitment. By adopting the Real Living Wage, we aim to help staff more reliably meet living costs, contributing to a better quality of life for those who deliver our services every day."

Community and Wellbeing Committee chair **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) said: "We know that rising costs continue to affect many individuals and families across the borough. At Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, we have a long history of supporting vulnerable residents. Our Health & Wellbeing Strategy continues to deliver a range of initiatives aimed at improving mental and emotional wellbeing, alongside community services and support for key voluntary organisations including Age Concern and the Citizens Advice Bureau. We want every resident to feel included, and the pledge ensures that compassion, awareness and practical support remain embedded in everything we deliver for our community."

The council will work alongside Good Company, which operates food banks and led the borough's recent Poverty Truth Commission. Its founder **Jonathan Lees** said: "Good Company started its operations in Epsom & Ewell nearly 14 years ago; sadly, there is still a real need here. It's fantastic that the council has officially committed and signed up to work with us and other partners to address poverty in our community."

Although Epsom & Ewell is widely seen as prosperous, council data shows stark inequalities, including a seven-year difference in life expectancy between wards, with Ruxley, Court and Town wards performing worst, and significant numbers of residents relying on food banks or subsidised food schemes. Socio-economic factors account for about 40% of health outcomes, underlining the impact of income on wellbeing even in an affluent borough.

The Real Living Wage, which the council has pledged to adopt, is independently calculated each year by the Living Wage Foundation based on the actual cost of living and currently stands at £12.00 per hour nationally compared with the statutory National Living Wage, set by government, which is lower and forecast to reach £11.89 per hour from April 2026. The Real Living Wage is voluntary and intended to reflect what workers need to meet everyday living costs rather than the legal minimum employers must pay.

It remains unclear how many, if any, EEBC staff are currently paid below the Real Living Wage, as most council employees fall within nationally negotiated salary scales that already exceed that level. The pledge may therefore have limited direct financial impact on many existing staff, although it could affect lower-graded roles, casual workers or future contracted staff depending on procurement decisions.

Some of the pledge's commitments focus on awareness and culture rather than direct financial support, including training staff to recognise poverty issues and reviewing how welcoming Bourne Hall is to residents facing hardship. The council will also ensure poverty is explicitly considered when developing future policies through Equality Impact Assessments, which could influence decisions on service delivery and access.

The pledge was adopted during the same meeting that approved a 2.98% council tax increase, the maximum allowed without a referendum, raising questions about whether such increases could worsen financial pressure for some

residents. In practice, many of the poorest households receive Council Tax Support, which reduces or eliminates their bill, meaning they may be shielded from the increase, but residents on modest incomes who do not qualify for support may still feel the impact.

The End Poverty Pledge reflects growing recognition that poverty exists alongside affluence in Epsom & Ewell, and while its commitments may influence how the council operates and makes decisions, its real significance will depend on whether those commitments lead to measurable improvements for residents facing hardship. As Jonathan Lees observed, there remains “a real need here,” and whether the pledge marks a turning point or remains primarily a statement of intent will become clearer as the council approaches its replacement by the new East Surrey unitary authority in 2027.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Image: Mart Production

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Epsom advice centre training advice first-aiders

11 May 2026



Citizens Advice Epsom & Ewell (CAEE) is inviting frontline workers and volunteers from other charities and organisations to train as **Advice First Aiders**, equipping them with the skills to identify people in need and direct them to CAEE and other vital advice services.

Advice First Aiders do not provide advice themselves. Instead, by asking the right questions, they are able to identify relevant issues, signpost people to appropriate organisations, and recognise when more urgent or complex cases should be referred to CAEE's qualified advisers and caseworkers.

The programme places a strong emphasis on identifying marginalised or vulnerable groups who may be less likely to seek advice when they need it. These include young people and people with learning difficulties, carers, LGBTQIA+ individuals, ethnic minorities, displaced people, and older or socially isolated residents.

The free training session lasts around two hours, is delivered in person, and is designed to be a lively and interactive experience. Local organisations that have already taken part and trained Advice First Aiders include **Epsom & Ewell Family Centre**, **Fox Grove School** (part of The Howard Partnership Trust), the Home Improvement Agency Team at Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, **Sunnybank Trust**, **Epsom Hub**, and **Epsom Baptist Church**.

Feedback from participants has been positive, with one attendee saying: “I am now more aware and perceptive of people's needs which may not at first be obvious,” while another commented that “the course covered a wide range of possible scenarios troubling most clients”.

Lisa Davis, chief executive of CAEE, said: “Advice First Aiders serve as a critical link, connecting people in our community with advice and the essential support services necessary to improve their situations.”

Beyond immediate advice and crisis intervention, the Advice First Aid programme also helps CAEE to identify and address the underlying causes of problems affecting residents across the Epsom & Ewell borough, informing its wider policy and advocacy work.

Organisations interested in taking part can find more information and sign up via the Citizens Advice Epsom & Ewell website.

CAEE release