

Teacher banned after fake war-zone stories to Epsom and Ewell pupils

2 May 2026



A former Epsom and Ewell High School maths teacher has been banned from teaching after a professional conduct panel found she fabricated stories to pupils about being in the army, going to war zones and suffering serious combat injuries.

The Teaching Regulation Agency report, published by GOV.UK, says Alexandra Slay began work as a maths teacher at Epsom and Ewell High School in December 2016 and became Head of Year on 26 May 2023. Concerns were raised in August 2023 about her communications with a pupil, leading to referrals to the Local Authority Designated Officer and police. The police informed the school on 18 September 2023 that they would not be continuing their investigation. Miss Slay resigned on 9 November 2023 and was referred to the TRA in December 2023.

The panel found proved that, between 2019 and 2023, Miss Slay gave her personal mobile number or personal email address to one or more pupils, sent inappropriate or over-familiar messages, shared details of her personal life, and fabricated stories about “being in a conflict and/or war zone and/or sustaining injuries”.

The official report says Miss Slay “appeared to have fabricated a narrative to pupils which involved her having a role in the army, where she would often take trips to war zones, undertake training and/or be involved in conflict.” In her disciplinary interview, when asked about the messages, she said they were “all fabricated” and added: “I made up the lie to feel that I belong, was a part of the world.”

The Times reported that Miss Slay had falsely claimed to have served in the Australian army and had sent one pupil more than 2,500 emails and other messages. It also reported that messages from an invented “Lieutenant Danny Blackburn” described her supposed combat injuries.

The TRA decision records that messages said to be from “Lt. Danny Blackburn” included claims that “Cpt Slay’s body is at a weak stage” and that she was being put on oxygen. Other messages referred to gunshot wounds, “severe amounts of blood”, cardiac arrest and having “flatlined”. The panel found the fabricated injury messages had the potential to cause stress and alarm to pupils.

The panel also found Miss Slay had failed to maintain appropriate teacher-pupil relationships and had instead developed relationships “more akin to friendships”. It found she had breached the Teachers’ Standards, including the requirements to observe proper professional boundaries and safeguard pupils’ wellbeing.

In deciding sanction, the panel said prohibition was “both proportionate and appropriate”, noting that Miss Slay had developed inappropriate relationships with a number of children through “highly inappropriate and unprofessional communications” and had failed to report multiple safeguarding concerns. The Secretary of State’s decision-maker imposed a prohibition order.

The order prevents Miss Slay from teaching indefinitely in any school, sixth-form college, relevant youth accommodation or children’s home in England. She may apply for it to be set aside, but not until 21 April 2028.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Epsom and Ewell High School - Google street view

Saturday 9 May is Surrey Day - and this year, we’re digging deeper

2 May 2026



Now in its eighth year, Surrey Day is about bringing communities together to celebrate everything that makes this county so special. In 2026, the theme is Going Underground, and it's an invitation to see Surrey as you've never seen it before. Forget what you think you know about this beautiful county. Beneath the rolling hills and the familiar high streets of its market towns lies a world of hidden treasures just waiting to be unearthed.

Whether you fancy venturing into the literal underground or uncovering something altogether more unexpected, Surrey Day 2026 has something to spark the curiosity of all the family. Enjoy hands-on activities, torchlit tours, guided walks, unseen histories, a disco in a tunnel and stories in caves, re-enactments in shelters, castles to explore, fossils galore - and so much more!

While there will be events and activities countywide, this year, Epsom is taking centre stage as a key host town for the very first time. BBC Radio Surrey will be broadcasting live from Epsom from 12-3pm so keep your ears open - or better still, get down there and join in! The headline act is the extraordinary Ashley Road Deep Level Air Raid Shelter - a grid of brick-lined tunnels constructed 50 feet underground to shelter 1,500 people from the Blitz. Now hidden in woodland on the edge of town, there will be torchlit guided tours, but book early as these will sell out.

Many Surrey museums will also have Going Underground events such as Bourne Hall Museum in Ewell with an exciting full day of discovery, including an archaeological walk-and-talk, coin identification drop-ins and the remarkable story of the Epsom Aurochs which was a 3,500-year-old giant prehistoric animal unearthed locally in 2023. Or nearby in Dorking, there are castle and cave tours, guided history walks, and a chance to get hands-on with fascinating old inventions at Dorking Museum & Heritage Centre. A particular highlight is an impressively large-scale reconstruction of the very first Baronyx fossil discovery. On the other side of the county, Guildford Museum has fun hands-on fossil handling sessions, while Surrey History Centre presents a day of talks celebrating some of Surrey's lesser-known artists. At Brookwood, you can be taken on a guided tour of the American Military Cemetery or if you head out further towards Tilford, you can get involved in 2 thrilling days of re-enactments at the open-air Rural Life Living Museum, finding out what daily life was like amid rationing and air-raids. If you've never visited, this is an experience you won't forget in a hurry!

Find out more and plan your Surrey Day at visitsurrey.com/surrey-day and if you like a podcast, the BBC Secret Surrey series is a great companion to the day's events.

Surrey County Council



Cleaning up crime hotspot in Epsom

2 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.

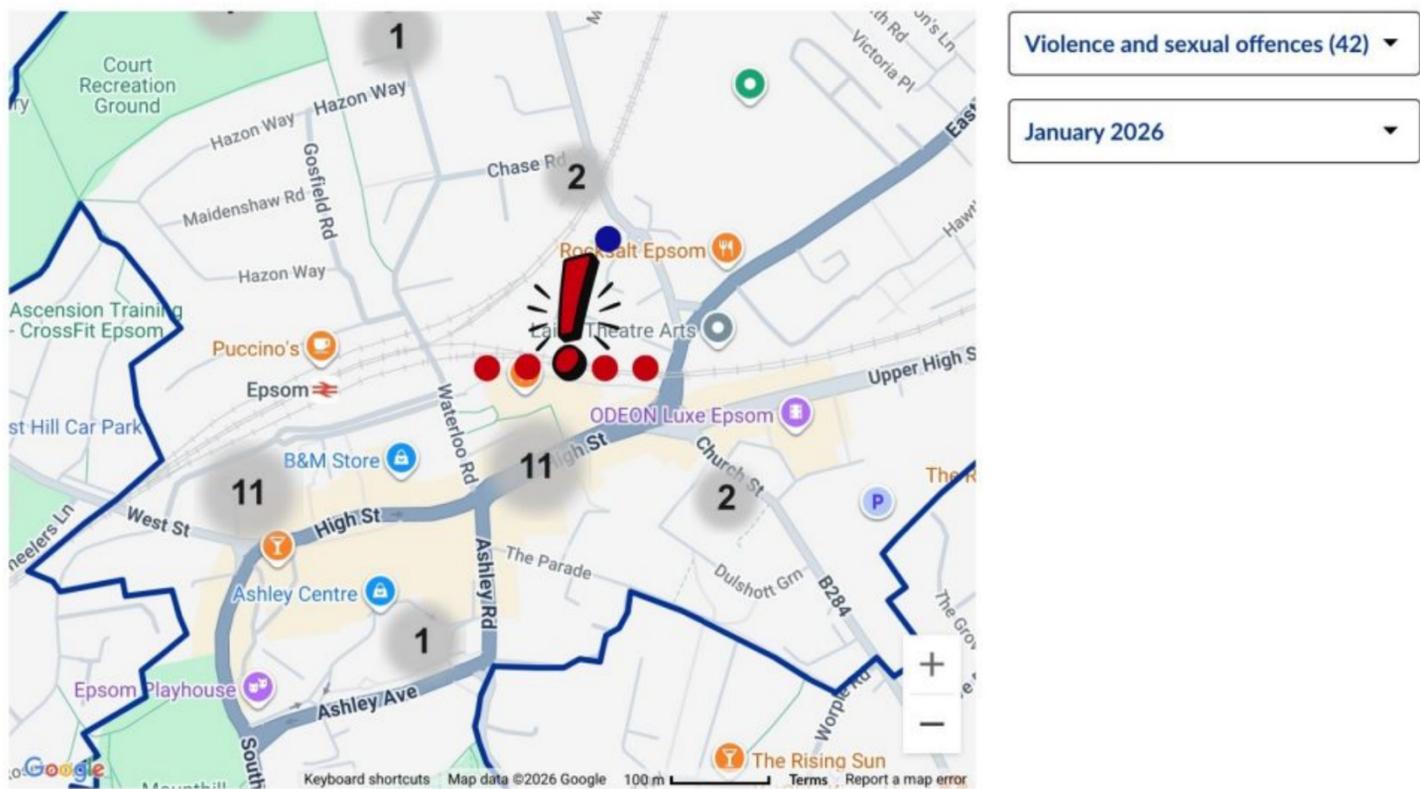
Another approach comes from Sweden, where "plogging" has become a popular trend. Plogging combines jogging or walking with picking up litter, turning exercise into a practical way to care for the environment. The term comes from the Swedish words plocka upp, meaning pick up and jogga, meaning jog, and 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

2 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

Epsom Family Highlights “Hidden” Loneliness Among Young Adults with Mild Autism

2 May 2026



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lionel Blackman

Epsom Oddballs Bring Back the 2000 Perch as Beloved Local Race Returns

2 May 2026



Epsom Oddballs Running Club is bringing back a much-loved local race this summer, as the 2000 Perch returns to Epsom Downs after years away from the Surrey running calendar.

Set for Friday 26 June 2026, with a 7pm evening start at Epsom Downs Racecourse, the revived event aims to capture the spirit of the original Perch races while introducing a refreshed format suited to today’s runners. Open to all levels, the race will cover a 10km single-lap route across the Downs, combining scenic views with a gently challenging profile.

The “Perch” takes its name from an old English unit of measurement—2000 perch equates to just over six miles—reflecting the distance of earlier editions that were popular throughout the 2000s. Those races, held on Epsom Downs and in Nonsuch Park, built a loyal following among local runners.

In its 2026 return, the race has been extended to 10km, but organisers say the essence remains the same. The focus is still on accessibility, community, and showcasing the natural beauty of the area.

The race begins and ends inside Epsom Racecourse near Tattenham Corner, taking runners on a loop that is approximately 70% off-road. After heading west along the racecourse railings, participants join Chalk Lane and Grandstand Road before moving into open downland.

The route passes through bridleways towards Langley Vale, dips slightly, then climbs steadily through the village edge and into the peaceful Langley Vale Centenary Wood. From there, runners loop back north, tackling a longer incline near Epsom Lane North before returning across the Downs. A final downhill stretch brings competitors back into the racecourse for the finish.

Organisers describe the route as “undulating but very runnable,” making it suitable for both seasoned athletes and newcomers to mixed-terrain racing.

The return of the 2000 Perch is as much about community as it is about competition. The club is currently working with local businesses and organisations to support the event through sponsorship, prizes and race-day assistance.

Organisers say they are keen to involve as many local partners as possible, helping to re-establish the Perch as a key fixture in the area’s sporting and social calendar.

Early bird entry is open until 30 April 2026, priced at £22 for affiliated runners and £24 for unaffiliated runners. Standard race rules apply.

Book here: <https://register.enthuse.com/ps/event/EpsomOddballs2000Perch2026>

Get Involved with Epsom Oddballs: Try before you join, everyone is welcome to attend a couple of free, coached training sessions with no commitment. For more information, prospective members can contact the Membership Secretary at membershipsecretary@epsomoddballs.org

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

2 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

Related report:

[Campaign to save Ewell Village's Glyn Hall](#)



Surrey environmental group gets global recognition

2 May 2026



A Surrey-based grassroots campaign that reshaped national climate law has received one of the world's most prestigious environmental honours, in a development that will resonate locally given the long-running controversy over oil drilling at Horse Hill.

Climate campaigner Sarah Finch, who led the legal challenge on behalf of the Weald Action Group, has been named one of six global winners of the Goldman Environmental Prize for 2026. The annual award recognises grassroots activists from each continent who have made significant contributions to environmental protection.

The recognition follows Finch's landmark victory in the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom in June 2024, in a case brought against Surrey County Council over oil drilling at Horse Hill. As previously reported by Epsom and Ewell Times, the case became a focal point for national debate on fossil fuel extraction and planning law.

The court's ruling—now widely referred to as the “Finch judgment”—established that planning authorities must take into account the downstream climate impact of burning extracted fossil fuels when considering applications. This marked a significant shift in legal interpretation, extending environmental assessment beyond the immediate site of extraction.

Campaigners say the implications have already been far-reaching. The judgment has influenced decisions affecting fossil fuel projects across the UK, including developments in Cumbria and the North Sea, and has been cited in wider planning and legal contexts such as aviation and intensive farming. Courts in other jurisdictions, including Norway, Guyana and Australia, have also drawn on similar reasoning.

Finch said she was “honoured” to accept the award on behalf of the Weald Action Group and communities campaigning against fossil fuel expansion. She described the ruling as evidence that “ordinary people organising together can win big victories,” adding that the scientific consensus leaves “no room for any more extraction and burning of coal, oil or gas” if climate targets are to be met.

The legal challenge was supported by Friends of the Earth, whose senior lawyer Katie de Kauwe described the ruling as “one of the most significant legal breakthroughs this century” in addressing the climate crisis. She said it had “fundamentally changed the rule book” by requiring developers to account for the full climate consequences of their projects.

Local campaigners involved in the Horse Hill dispute also welcomed the recognition. Lorraine Inglis of the Weald Action Group said the award reflected years of sustained community effort in Surrey and highlighted the role of grassroots activism in shaping national policy.

The Goldman Environmental Prize, established in 1989, has honoured 239 winners from 98 countries. This year's cohort is notable as the first made up entirely of women, with other winners including climate activists from Colombia and South Korea who have led successful campaigns against fracking and for legally binding emissions targets.

For Surrey residents, the award brings renewed attention to a campaign that has already left a lasting imprint on the local landscape and on national law. As Epsom and Ewell Times has previously reported, the Horse Hill case demonstrated how a dispute rooted in a single planning decision can evolve into a defining legal precedent with international consequences.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Photo: Sarah Finch and Weald Action Group at London's High Court

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Church service following sex attack in Epsom

2 May 2026



A service held at Epsom Methodist Church has brought together faith leaders, politicians and residents in a symbolic call for unity following recent events that have unsettled the town.

The “Hope for Epsom” gathering, led by Superintendent Minister Reverend Catherine Hutton, was attended by community figures including Deputy Mayor Lucie McIntyre and Epsom and Ewell MP Helen Maguire, alongside members of the local congregation.

At the heart of the service was a simple but powerful act. Attendees were invited to build a “future of hope” by placing stones one by one, each contribution representing collective strength and resilience. Reverend Hutton urged those present to see the community as something shaped by every individual, with unity and compassion at its core.

She concluded by quoting Dr Martin Luther King Jr: “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

The gathering comes in the immediate aftermath of a serious sexual assault investigation and subsequent protests in the town centre, which saw a significant police presence and disruption to local life.

As reported by Surrey Live, Epsom’s MP Helen Maguire said she supported peaceful protest but warned that “those who are turning to disruption and intimidation cannot be allowed to do so.” She added that individuals coming from outside the area “to spread division and cause disruption” should “take it elsewhere.”

Police have confirmed that the victim is being supported by specialist officers, while urging the public not to speculate as investigations continue. East Surrey Chief Superintendent Mark Chapman said the case is complex and that officers are working to gather evidence and bring those responsible to justice.

Despite the message of hope inside the church, a sense of unease remains more widely. With national media attention and visible policing in the town centre, many residents are looking for reassurance that the incident is isolated and that Epsom remains a safe community.

The church service captured both strands of the town’s current mood: a determination to stand together, and a quiet but pressing call for answers.

Sam Jones and Romy Sustar

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You Are Not Alone, Epsom Stands Against Rape

2 May 2026



It’s a sunny Wednesday afternoon in Epsom, and it feels as though spring has finally arrived. People have gathered on the streets, perhaps 1,200 or more, women and men, brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, friends, young and old, from all walks of life.

They are here because of what happened last Saturday. By now, everyone knows: a woman in her 20s was followed after leaving Labyrinth nightclub and attacked outside Epsom Methodist Church in the early hours of the morning. The story has reached national headlines, BBC, *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian*: **Woman in Her 20s Gang-Raped in Front of a Church with CCTV Cameras.**

I ask one of the people in the crowd what's going on: "We are here today because a young girl was raped on Saturday night, and the police are not telling us who was responsible. There is a perception that it could be immigrants, but the police need to tell us who has done it. Without that, speculation grows, and it could be one of our own. I don't want to protest against people who haven't done anything wrong, but we have to come together as a community because nobody is telling us what is going on. That's why we are here."

I speak to a mother and her daughter, I want to know what they feel about the assault: "Our feeling is that the police need to be transparent about who is responsible, so that women and girls can feel safer, so that we know who we are dealing with. We haven't been told. We need descriptions. The police say that information available is limited. No arrests have been made. It is reported that four men attacked a young woman for two hours. If cameras are everywhere, why have there been no arrests? Why is there said to be no information, when people believe suspects may still be walking freely in Epsom?"

Some believe the police have accused the gathering of disorder in a public space. Many here ask: "What about the victim? Isn't rape a disorder?"

More police officers arrive. Eggs are thrown. Emotions are high. People care. Voices rise: "Who raped her?" The crowd chants in support of the victim, while the young police woman responds to my questions with a single phrase: "no comment."

Meanwhile a voice of authority repeats familiar words: "*My heart goes out to the young woman at the centre of this deeply distressing incident.*" It is a statement many here feel they have heard too many times to truly believe.

The Methodist Church will hold a service today, April 16th at 12.30pm. All are welcome. *Epsom and Ewell Times* will be there.

Epsom and Ewell Times is also launching a weekly series, **Epsom Safety Brief**. If you would like to be involved and share your concerns, please get in touch at: romana.epsomandewelltimes@gmail.com.

To the young woman at the centre of this: the whole town stands with you. You are not alone. Stay strong.

Coming soon:

Epsom Safety Brief is a community-driven series committed to clear, balanced reporting on crime, safety, and accountability. It seeks to highlight what is happening, ask necessary questions, and assess whether meaningful action is being taken to protect residents.

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Kirby Fans Pack the Kerb in Epsom

2 May 2026



Children's author Katie Kirby drew crowds to Waterstones Epsom today Friday 10th, as families queued more than 100 metres along the High Street for a book signing on the final day of the Easter school holidays.

In bright spring sunshine, parents and excited children waited patiently for their chance to meet the bestselling writer, whose hugely popular *Lottie Brooks* series has become a staple for young readers across the UK. Staff at the store reported a steady flow throughout the day, with the queue stretching well beyond the shop frontage at its peak.

Kirby, a former primary school teacher turned full-time author and illustrator, has built a devoted following with her humorous and relatable books aimed at middle-grade readers. Her breakout success, *The Extremely Embarrassing Life of Lottie Brooks*, was shortlisted for major children's book awards and has sold in significant numbers, with subsequent titles cementing her reputation as one of the UK's leading voices in children's fiction.



Epsom school student Ellie with her mother and the author



Epsom school student Rosie Gordon with the author

Her stories, told in diary format, capture the awkwardness and comedy of growing up, striking a chord particularly with readers aged 8 to 12. The blend of cartoon-style illustrations and accessible writing has helped drive strong sales both in bookshops and through school reading programmes.

Today's event reflected that popularity. Children clutching copies of Kirby's books chatted animatedly in the queue, while parents described the visit as a highlight of the holidays. Inside, Kirby signed books and spoke briefly with readers, creating what one attendee described as "a really special moment" for young fans.

Booksellers say such events have become increasingly important in encouraging children to read for pleasure. The turnout in Epsom suggests that, despite digital distractions, the appeal of meeting a favourite author—and taking home a signed copy—remains as strong as ever.

Lionel Blackman

Friends of Horton Cemetery influence law reform

2 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

Stable Visit Opens Doors on Epsom Downs

2 May 2026



Residents were given a rare glimpse behind the scenes of one of Epsom's most picturesque racing yards as a community visit brought locals face-to-face with the daily life of a professional training stable.

Around 30 racing enthusiasts gathered on Epsom Downs for an exclusive morning at the yard of trainer George Baker, with the early mist still hanging over the gallops as the visit began. The event was organised by Councillor Steven McCormick, Chair of the Epsom Downs Conservators, with support from fellow Conservator Councillor Kim Spickett.

Guests were welcomed inside the stable gates for a guided tour led by Candida Baker, who offered an engaging insight into the routines, challenges and traditions of the yard. The visit revealed not only the meticulous care given to each horse but also the individual personalities that make up a working stable.

The highlight of the morning came as the group moved out to the fibre sand gallop, where they watched horses thunder past at full speed. Standing trackside, visitors experienced first-hand the power and elegance that define training on the Downs.

The visit also served as a reminder of the deep historical roots of horse racing in Epsom. Councillor Kim Spickett said the morning demonstrated how local traditions continue to be preserved in active use, describing the stables as "living museums" connecting the present to centuries of heritage.

Councillor McCormick added that events like this are about bringing the community closer to what makes Epsom unique, highlighting the importance of maintaining a connection between residents and the Downs.

Further visits are already planned, with the next taking place at Michael Attwater's yard on April 11th. Spaces are limited and expected to fill quickly, with booking available via Eventbrite. A subsequent visit to Craig Benton's yard is scheduled for April 18th

Attwater Racing

- Date: April 11th
- Location: Attwater Racing, Epsom
- Host: Organised by Cllr Steven McCormick & Cllr Kim Spickett

How to Book:

Spaces are strictly limited and fill up fast. To secure your place for the April 11th visit

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/1986793626219?aff=oddtcreator>

Craig Benton - April 18th

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/1986793958212?aff=oddtcreator>

Contact: Councillor Steven McCormick stevenjmccormick@yahoo.co.uk

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

2 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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Getting to the bottom of Epsom's Ashley Centre seating

2 May 2026



Shoppers in Epsom have voiced concern after seating in the Ashley Centre was removed and replaced as part of what management describes as an ongoing improvement programme.

One resident contacted the Epsom and Ewell Times to highlight the impact of the changes, particularly on older visitors and those with mobility difficulties who rely on regular rest points while shopping.

The resident said the removal of existing seating was "totally unexpected" and had caused "great concern", adding that the centre is not only a retail space but also a social hub for many: "It is especially important for the older generation who visit the centre both to shop and to meet friends."

Concerns were also raised about the suitability of the replacement seating. The resident described the new arrangements as inadequate in number and design, claiming that current provision allows seating for "only twelve people", which they said was "totally unacceptable for such a busy shopping mall", particularly following the arrival of a major new store increasing footfall.

The complaint further suggested that the materials used in the new seating may present practical issues: "The upholstery is unhygienic and it will easily get dirty in very little time," the resident said.

In response, a spokesperson for the Ashley Centre said the changes were part of a planned upgrade and sought to reassure visitors that further improvements are imminent.

The spokesperson said: "We remain committed to providing a welcoming and accessible environment for all visitors and appreciate feedback from the local community. Recent seating changes form part of a planned improvement programme, with additional new seating due to be installed later this month to enhance comfort and accessibility for shoppers."

The issue is likely to resonate with many regular users of the town centre, particularly those who depend on accessible facilities. Whether the promised additional seating will address residents' concerns remains to be seen.

Sam Jones - Reporter

