

## Local Councillors react to hospital merger idea

29 March 2026



From Councillors Eber Kington (RA) and Steven McCormick (RA)

Dear Editor,

Your article of 26<sup>th</sup> March exposing the plans by Epsom and St Helier University Hospital Trust to merge with St George's Hospital Trust is most welcome. However, the fact that the decision was taken behind closed doors three weeks ago, without public comment, with no reference on the ESHUHT website, and clearly no intention to engage with residents, is quite alarming.

The stated position, that the Trusts "have not agreed to merge" but will "submit a strategic case for merger to NHS England, asking them to approve developing a full business case" is hard to believe. Of course there is nothing fully worked up, but even a strategic case will have been developed by reviewing and testing options for cost savings such as merging services in single sites or in just two rather than three.

And the fact that patients and residents generally were the last to know of these plans, and only through the press, does not augur well if NHS England does agree that the Trusts can develop a full business case. But if that is what is to happen, the ESHUHT Board must be open from the start about what is within scope of any plan and what is not.

We also note that our own MP was aware of the developing proposal yet also decided not let residents know. She suggests that her priority is to ensure that residents in the Trust area "continue to receive the high-quality healthcare they deserve." However, we believe that most residents in Epsom and Ewell will also want reassurance that those key services are not stripped out of Epsom Hospital and located at St Helier and far away St George's Hospital.

Clearly, the state of the Hospitals' finances is behind this decision, as Epsom, St Helier and St George's Hospitals have all been set targets to clear debts, and Government support is due to be withdrawn over the next three years. However, the need to find ways to deliver current and new services in a more efficient way does not have to be done in secret. It can, and must, be an open process that encourages patients, members of staff, and residents to be part of the work that shapes their hospital services for years to come. And our residents need to know right now, that greater openness will be the case.

Yours

**County Councillor Eber Kington and County Councillor Steven McCormick**

Related report:

Epsom Hospital to "merge" with St Georges in Tooting?

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## Appeal to twin Epsom with Bucha in Ukraine

29 March 2026



From the committees of Surrey Stands With Ukraine and the Bucha-Epsom Association to all Councillors of the Borough of Epsom and Ewell.

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**Re: Motion to Support Twinning with Bucha, Ukraine - Full Council, 10 February 2026**

Dear Councillors,

We write to you as a residents of Epsom and citizens of Ukraine resident in Epsom who believe we should

stand shoulder to shoulder with Ukraine. Surrey Stands With Ukraine was founded in Epsom — a grassroots, volunteer-run charity formed at the outset of Russia’s full-scale invasion in 2022.

Since then, our community has come together in ways few could have imagined. Epsom and Ewell has sent over **£5 million worth of humanitarian aid** to Ukraine. Through initiatives by *Surrey Stands With Ukraine*, *Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network*, local schools, churches, and dozens of individual volunteers and host families, we have built bonds of solidarity, compassion, and friendship with Ukraine — and especially with **the people of Bucha**.

This is why we urge you to support the motion at Full Council on 10th February to **endorse a twinning arrangement between Epsom and the town of Bucha**.

Now is the time:

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to do something meaningful — not just symbolic — that reflects the values our Borough has shown in abundance since 2022.

**The hand of friendship has been extended to us by Bucha**, a town now known around the world for both the suffering it endured and the resilience it has shown. Its Mayor, Anatolii Fedoruk, has held office for 28 years and has personally asked that Epsom become its **first UK twin**. That offer may not remain open forever. Delay may see it pass to another town.

This is not a political issue. Nor should it be subject to any “party line”. We appeal to you all to treat this matter as a *free vote of conscience*, guided by your role as civic leaders, not party representatives.

This twinning initiative has nothing to do with sending aid or diverting council resources. **No funding or council officer time is required**. As with our Town’s twinning with Chantilly, the operational side will be entirely run by a dedicated **Bucha-Epsom Association** — a volunteer-led, self-financing group which will invite councillors and community leaders on to its committee and work closely with the Chantilly association to avoid duplication.

What is needed from the Council is a **symbolic yet vital endorsement** of the principle of twinning — the first step to recognising what our community has already built, and what it can go on to achieve.

Twinning with Bucha now — *during the war*, not after — carries a deeper meaning. True friendship is shown in hard times as well as good. Kindness should always be forefront of our minds in all our actions. That is the kind of friendship Bucha seeks, and one we should be proud to offer.

Imagine the future educational and cultural benefits:

- Our children participating in moderated online exchanges with students from Bucha.
- English-learning Ukrainian youth paired with Epsom school pupils for real-life conversation.
- Artists, musicians, sportspeople, and teachers collaborating across borders.
- Civic resilience and peace building projects that our Borough could help shape.

At a time when war continues and local government reorganisation looms, it may feel tempting to delay. But we urge you not to let that be an excuse. If anything, the imminent changes make it *more compelling* that **Epsom and Ewell makes this decision now**, while it still exists as a borough council with a distinct identity. Let our legacy be something enduring, generous, and globally visible.

This proposal brings no burden, only benefit. It requires no budget, only goodwill. It demands no partisanship, only perspective.

We ask each of you, as elected representatives of our community, to do what Epsom and Ewell has done again and again since 2022: **extend your hand, open your hearts, and lead with humanity**.

With hope and determination,

Alan Avis

Tetyana Bilyk

Lionel Blackman

Roy Deadman

Galyna Donstova

Denise Faulkner

Vladimir Nakonechniyi

Lisa Stewart

Pierre-Michel Tarrant

Surrey Stands With Ukraine

Bucha-Epsom Association

# 100 years campaigning to keep Surrey Green

29 March 2026



Dear Surrey,

The countryside is your greatest achievement. A beautiful masterpiece built by centuries of collaboration between people and nature. From meadows and woodlands to rivers, coasts, and the green spaces that bind us together, the countryside connects and sustains us all.

For a century, the Campaign to Protect Rural England has been its guardian. Despite the relentless, growing pressure on our landscapes, we've stood up for the countryside and helped give the people who love it a voice. That will never change.

Many of the pressures facing our countryside today were familiar to our founders - not least the challenge of providing homes, infrastructure and prosperity on a small island. But new pressures have emerged with more catastrophic impacts on the land we love. Nature is in freefall and climate change threatens to alter our landscapes for good.

Now more than ever, decisions about how we use our land are leading to the needless loss of landscapes and everything they support. Without drastic action, much of what makes our countryside unique and beautiful will be lost.

Wherever we live, we rely on the countryside for clean air, home grown food, thriving wildlife and resilience in the face of climate change. Yet these foundations are being chipped away. Too often decisions are shaped by profit, not what's needed most - and the countryside pays the price.

Here in Surrey, we have even been faced with a series of major housing developments, access roads, 'solar farms' and 'battery energy storage systems', in Green Belt countryside. Many of these sites are on the edge of the Surrey Hills National Landscape itself.

Now, as 2026 dawns we are now battling a growing number of planning applications which rely on councils downgrading Green Belt land to so-called 'grey belt', as well as excessive and unsustainable housebuilding targets imposed on local communities.

Our centenary vision is for a countryside that's greener, more resilient and protected for future generations. There is a better way - one we're calling for, and one everyone can be part of:

- Stop the loss of countryside. Let's protect what we love and do everything we can to make sure green fields and woodlands aren't needlessly lost.
- Improve the quality of the countryside for future generations. That means thriving communities, clean rivers, healthy food and resilient landscapes rich in nature.
- Inspire more people to care for the countryside. A countryside for all where more people take action to enjoy and protect it.

Across the country, people are already showing what's possible - restoring hedgerows, rethinking development and sustainable farming, and making space for nature.

As we begin our centenary year, we're sending this message to everyone: love your countryside and be part of its future. This is just the beginning - and we all have a part to play in shaping what comes next. If you share this vision, join the movement today, add your name to this letter and stand with us.

Yours faithfully,

Andy Smith

Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (Surrey)

Photo: Surrey Hills Credit Aleksey Maksimov CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 DEED

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## A Decision Not Fully Bourne Out?

29 March 2026



From Councillor Alex Coley.

Dear Editor,

I read Emily Dalton's article *Ewell's "UFO" shaped Bourne Hall to take off anew* in the *Epsom & Ewell Times* with great interest, for a number of reasons.

I took part in the LGA Cultural Peer Challenge which looked at options for the future of Bourne Hall Museum in August last year. At that time, I was the lead Independent councillor in England for sector-led improvement, which is the local government policy area under which LGA peer challenges take place.

The peer challenge was notable for two things: firstly, the short notice and brevity of information provided; and secondly, the non-attendance of all but one Residents' Association councillor (a former employee of Bourne Hall) at the group session where we met with the peer team. Seven RA councillors were invited, including the Leader of the Council. All four leaders of the opposition political groups were in attendance.

In October, I wrote to the Council's Chief Executive asking when the report would be published, as is expected in all LGA peer challenges. I was told it would form part of the Community & Wellbeing Committee papers on 13 January 2026. When I noticed that the report was not included in the committee papers, I wrote again to the Chief Executive asking why not, and was told this would be sorted out, with the admission that she had thought it would be included. Yet it was never published or shown to members at the committee.

The day after members voted on the decision, I received a further email from the Chief Executive explaining that it had been decided to incorporate a high-level executive summary of the peer challenge report instead, as this was felt to better fit with the focus of the committee report. I was told this decision was taken in conjunction with the committee chair, Cllr Clive Woodbridge. The peer challenge report has still not been made public and, as such, I have submitted a Freedom of Information request to obtain it.

Internally, I understand that the report contains findings by the LGA peer team which are not favourable to Epsom & Ewell Borough Council. These reportedly include:

- General confusion and mixed messages about the museum's closure
- A decision to exclude stewardship and governance questions from the scope of the museum's future
- Failure to complete work recommended in a 2023 review of Bourne Hall
- Disproportionate recharge costs which do not reflect the true running costs of the museum
- Frustration on the part of the peer team at being unable to access more detailed income and expenditure information relating to Bourne Hall
- Fragmented staffing structures which may be contributing to gaps in communication, information-sharing and missed opportunities

Should I infer that the reason the report has not been made public is embarrassment to the Council, rather than a genuine desire for a high-level summary to better fit the focus of the committee report?

Cllr Clive Woodbridge, Chair of the Community & Wellbeing Committee, accepted that, *"in hindsight"*, the LGA report should have been included in the committee papers, after being challenged by Cllr Bernie Muir and Cllr Rob Geleit during the meeting. And yet, at the time of writing, it has still not been shared with the public.

Will it be made public before the Strategy & Resources Committee considers the £359,000 requested spending?

Yours faithfully,

Cllr Alex Coley

Independent - Ruxley

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Related reports:

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## More erudition on local government reorganisation in Epsom and Ewell

29 March 2026



Dear Editor,

In his letter of 13 January Trevor Burt makes a number of good points, including rightly calling out the determination of the ruling Residents Association (RA) clique to impose parish councils on the residents they claim to represent without giving them the opportunity to express support for an alternative “community governance” model.

He is also correct that Epsom and Ewell residents will have proportionately more influence in the smaller council of East Surrey than in the bigger pond of Surrey County Council.

But the RA’s determination to force through the creation of parish councils that have little support in the borough is explained by a simpler mathematical calculation. Even in the unlikely event that the political party that claims not to be a political party were to win all the seats available in our current borough, it would still be in a minority on the new council.

As I and others have said, parish councils are about preserving the relevance of a clique that is used to seeing Epsom and Ewell as its fiefdom.

In the meantime, the RA will continue to mismanage the council, as the latest fiasco over the Rainbow Leisure Centre shows, as it wastes the valuable time of council tax payer-funded officers on the pursuit of the RA councillors’ vanity project.

The Rainbow Centre fiasco also shows how determined the RA are to keep the truth of their incompetence from residents. It may interest your readers to know that I have written to the administration to seek confirmation that the decision to keep the huge repairs bill secret included an assessment of what the public interest required.

Yours faithfully,

Cllr Chris Ames (Labour - Court Ward)

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Dear Editor,

Sadly, in his support and criticism of my stance on both SCC’s Neighbourhood Councils and the Town Council alternative, Trevor Burt (Letters to the Editor 13/01/26) seems to miss my point.

As I state in my penultimate paragraph, the engagement of residents in determining the outcomes of policies and spending in their area does not necessarily require replacement frameworks, large expenditure and more elections. It can be undertaken by devolving funds to Unitary Authority Councillors individually or jointly to spend on local priorities, more local consultations, the co-designing of local services with residents, regular pulse surveys, as well as transferring local assets to communities. These opportunities provide for real localism and for all residents, if they choose, to have their say.

Yours faithfully,

Eber Kington

Residents Association County Councillor

Ewell Court, Auriol and Cuddington

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Related letters:

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Long serving Epsom Councillor blasts LGR and NACs

# Is Epsom and Ewell getting “proportional representation” under Council shake-up?

29 March 2026



Dear Editor,

I was heartened to read Cllr Eber Kington’s letter of 9th January. For once, a Resident Association councillor has broken ranks with the ruling Residents’ Association line by publicly disavowing the party’s own sponsored option of creating two community councils to replace Epsom and Ewell Borough Council following Local Government Reorganisation. That departure is to be applauded.

However, I must respectfully challenge the assertion that the current options before us truly trust residents — “the people most qualified to decide what is best for the borough,” as Cllr Kington rightly characterises them — with a meaningful say. In reality, EEBC hasn’t offered residents any choice beyond:

- \* Two community councils (effectively parish/town councils with a precept), or
- \* No community councils at all.

If Cllr Kington has alternative proposals for how local democratic accountability and community decision-making can supplement ten councillors representing East Surrey on the new unitary authority, he has left it far too late for such alternatives to be prepared, costed, and properly considered before EEBC’s much-awaited March 2026 meeting.

It is worth putting the democratic and financial context in sharper focus. At present, EEBC has 36 councillors servicing a modest borough budget of around £10.27 million for 2025/26. In contrast, Surrey County Council’s budget of £1.2641 billion including responsibilities, covering education, highways, social care and more, account for roughly 76 % of the total council tax bill paid by residents, with EEBC receiving only about 10 %.

Under the new arrangements for two unitary authorities— as confirmed by government decision — the Epsom and Ewell area will be represented by 10 councillors on the East Surrey Council, dealing with the vast majority of public services currently under County control. Crude though it is, this means that for the major service budgets now handled at county level, Epsom and Ewell will have significantly greater relative influence than before. Currently, just five county councillors represent the borough’s interests on a much larger Surrey budget; in future, ten unitary councillors will cover roughly half of the former Surrey population’s budget responsibilities.

Yes, it is true that we lose some of the micro-representation previously afforded by a larger cohort of borough councillors on planning and routine community matters — though even now many planning decisions are subject to Government inspectors overruling local decisions on appeal. But on the biggest pots of public spending — education, adult social care, highways, children’s services — residents will likely be better represented proportionately than under the old two-tier county/district system.

So when debating the merits of Neighbourhood Area Committees versus community councils, let us be clear about the alternatives on the table. Both NACs and community councils have limitations and cost implications, and both are artificially constrained by the narrow set of options EEBC has chosen to present. The real democratic choice for residents should be wider than simply more or fewer tiers of parish councils.

If Cllr Kington truly believes, as he claims, that residents should decide how council tax is spent and how their communities are governed, then let us see a credible alternative framework— with transparent proposals, budget implications, and democratic accountability — ahead of March. Otherwise, the debate will continue to swirl around consultancy-driven options that neither trust nor empower the people they purport to serve.

Yours faithfully,

Trevor Burt

Related letters and reports:

[Long serving Epsom Councillor blasts LGR and NACs](#)

[Parish power, democratic ideals — and the Residents’ Association dilemma](#)

[Have your say on the future of local representation in Epsom and Ewell](#)

[Epsom and Ewell’s Local Democracy Debate: What’s at Stake as Consultation Enters Phase Two](#)

[Letters from local Councillors on Epsom and Ewell parishes](#)

# Long serving Epsom Councillor blasts LGR and NACs

29 March 2026



Dear Editor

I am not sure where your Editorial writer of 6<sup>th</sup> January 2026 gets their information on SCC's pilot project Neighbourhood Area Committees (Parish power, democratic ideals — and the Residents' Association dilemma), but NAC's are certainly not the answer to the proposed LGR centralisation of local government and are far away from the concept of local democracy.

But before I address that, let's just step back a bit and see how we got here. The Government had no electoral mandate to abolish SCC and Surrey's Districts and Boroughs. And even if a vague manifesto reference to the reform of local governments counts as legitimate, the Leader of SCC had no mandate to use his Executive power to drag all of Surrey's local authorities into a rushed and centralising new local government structure.

The Government and Tim Oliver also cancelled the May 2025 local County Council election, denying residents themselves of the chance to express their view on this change, via the ballot box. That said, residents used a different mechanism to say what they thought. The results of the Government's own public consultation on the Unitary Options, published in October, showed that 51% of respondents expressed support for the three Unitary Option and only 19% favoured SCC's two Unitary option, with 56% strongly opposed to it. Yet the Government decided it knows better.

The outcome is that we won't have the devolution of power as promised under LGR but, instead, the centralisation of local government upwards and into two Unitary Authorities covering populations over ½ million. And in my Division, covering Ewell Court, Auriol, and Cuddington, just two Unitary councillors will replace the current eight local councillors with the expectation (I suppose) that this is sufficient to ensure that our residents needs and expectations will still be adequately met.

And this is where the Government's concept of Neighbourhood Area Committees comes into play. How ironic that, having realised Unitary Authorities will have nothing "local" about them, the Government decides (fully supported by the ruling party at SCC) that they will also impose what will fill that void.

Your Editorial seems quite keen on these. They write "*These advisory bodies bring together local councillors, police, NHS, voluntary sector leaders and community stakeholders — arguably, the very people most qualified to inform decisions on community priorities.*"

However - and given that I am a Residents' Association councillor you probably won't be surprised at this - I think the people most qualified to determine local priorities and what their council tax should be spent on, are residents and council taxpayers themselves. Not an unelected quango with a small minority of residents working to an agenda determined by the Unitary Authority. Neighbourhood Area Committees therefore do not pass the tests of democratic local government, representation of the people, nor the ability for local people and communities to influence local outcomes.

Your Editorial also states that NACs come "*at minimal administrative cost.*" I am not sure that's a given if it's only based on SCC piloting four NACs. If introduced by the East Surrey Unitary there could be 36 or more of them. And how long will it take before the Police, NHS, and Fire Service, for example, realise that that simply cannot resource every NAC and every meeting in Surrey.

So, I do not support the NAC option. It is not local, it is not democratic, and it excludes the voice of most residents. But neither do I support the Town Council and precept model which will add a further tax burden on residents alongside any new elected Mayor's annual precept, in order to run allotments and not much else.

We need to look at options such as providing Unitary Councillors, individually or jointly in their localities, with funding to allocate locally. We need more local engagement and consultations on the introduction of school streets, speed limits and no verge parking zones and more. We should increase opportunities for community asset transfers enabling communities take over council assets that are better run by those who will use them. And we should undertake more co-designing with residents and users of local services and facilities, to better reflect their needs and aspirations.

So, going forward, if I get the chance to influence the local arrangements, it won't be to install a quango of unelected public servants and self-selected individuals, but it will be introducing localised structures and financial decision making to ensure that our residents are able to influence the important local choices and funding allocations that affect their lives.

Yours faithfully,

Cllr Eber Kington - (RA Surrey County Councillor Ewell Court, Auriol and Cuddington and former RA Epsom and Ewell Borough Councillor)

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Editor's note: Epsom and Ewell Times received its published information about Neighbour Area Committees and the cost of running 16 meetings of pilots direct from Surrey County Council's communications team.

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Related letters and editorial

Parish power, democratic ideals — and the Residents' Association dilemma

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Letters from local Councillors on Epsom and Ewell parishes

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## Letters from local Councillors on Epsom and Ewell parishes

29 March 2026



Posted in the order of receipt.

### From Cllr Alex Coley (Independent Ruxley)

Dear Editor,

It is disingenuous to go to residents with a consultation that shows a band D precept of £43.52 (rounded up to £44), when this could be more than six times higher. The Council's own figures add up to a Band D precept of £296.62 for Epsom Parish Council, when certain key community assets are transferred. This is due to the enormous burden of running costs (£73.10) and building repairs (£180).

You will hear that this consultation is simply for the creation of new parish councils dedicated to representing residents' voices and the statutory provision of allotments. That is a Trojan Horse. Seeking a view from residents on a lower figure and then multiplying it several times later is deeply misleading. These additional costs are very likely to be even higher than shown as they are based on out-of-date running costs reported in February 2024 and building repair costs from July 2019.

Residents who worry about their area being left behind will discover that creating a new parish council opens up the opportunity for the forthcoming unitary councils to offload costly buildings. With an uncapped precept, residents can be made to pay for these offloaded buildings — whatever they cost. This can happen at ANY time AFTER the new parish council is created. The one thing that definitely won't be left behind is your money. I am seeking further analysis to calculate itemised costs for all the many buildings, parks and open spaces which could be transferred in future years, adding to the parish precept even further.

Using figures in the Council report from 9th December, these are the expected Parish Tax bands for Epsom when the three key community assets are included after the consultation has closed.

Band A — £197.75  
Band B — £230.70  
Band C — £263.66  
Band D — £296.62  
Band E — £362.53  
Band F — £428.45  
Band G — £494.36  
Band H — £593.24

Residents are being treated like Turkeys. Not just voting for Christmas, but paying for Christmas too!

Yours faithfully,

Alex Coley (Independent - Ruxley)

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**From Cllr James Lawrence (Liberal Democrat, College Ward)**

Dear Editor,

I would like to remind readers that this consultation is to set up two parish councils, that will only manage allotments. That is the only service proposed to be provided to residents. Of the 11 allotment sites in the borough, the council currently runs only 7. Some wards for which councillors are proposed don't even have any allotments in them. Before addressing the clear ambition to further expand responsibilities and costs, as indicated by "could work with East Surrey Council in the future to undertake any services which it is agreed may be better run at a local level, such as parks, open spaces and community buildings etc." I will first focus specifically on the proposals as written.

The consultation document (appendix 4 of 9 Dec 2025 Full Council papers item 11) on pg 8 states that "the budget essentially covers" two key things: "Parish Council Administration" and "Allotments". What is not explained anywhere in that document is the fact that of the total collective cost of £1.52mil, only £0.02mil is required for the management of the 7 allotment sites. This is the only part of the precept (the new tax) that may possibly relate to the suggested ambition to "improve community engagement, local democracy, and service delivery" (pg 2 of appendix 4), and even then only for the few hundred council allotment holders. At only 1% of the proposed cost, the "local democracy" part of the extra tax is at best a rounding error on the amount you will pay.

As has been indicated, in reality it is highly unlikely that the parish precept will remain at ~£45. What is the future projection of this additional tax? We will receive no discount on our unitary council tax rates. The council's own papers (appendix 7) predict significant rises to the tune of ~£220 above the £45 for a Band D property if the three big community assets of Bourne Hall, Epsom Playhouse and the Community & Wellbeing Centre are included. Why are none of these future expectations and cost breakdowns not included in the consultation document? I will leave the reader to decide.

Yours faithfully,

Cllr James Lawrence (LibDem College)

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**From Cllr Bernie Muir (Conservative, Horton Ward)**

Dear Editor,

The white elephant of parish councils is an exercise in self-indulgence and self-interest at vast expense to the Borough's residents.

"The proposal adds an extra, unnecessary layer of cost and local bureaucracy with little, if any, benefit, especially given that all areas WILL be represented by new Neighbourhood Area Committees comprising of your Councillors, health, police and a tailored list of local groups or individuals that serve your community — a fact not mentioned in the Consultation."

Without having determined what the Parish Councils would do, other than manage allotments thus what it would cost, other than 'considerably higher' than the initial charge, they are asking residents their view on setting up two costly councils based on effectively no, or missing, information.

The maths reveal that lack of value — The council quotes an additional cost of £44-£46 for the first year (for a Band D property) to cover the cost of maintaining allotments, despite this costing only 60p per household with the rest of the precept, some 99% of the first-year charge, going on administrative costs.

The average cost per property would actually be almost 20% higher at £53 in the first year, exceeding the figures quoted in the consultation (around £45). That is because the average property in Epsom and Ewell is Band E, not the quoted Band D figure. The actual cost in the first year would vary between £30 (Band A) and over £90 (Band H).

However, that is only the tip of the iceberg.

The council has ambitions to take on much, much greater costs, all of which would be charged to residents as an additional council tax 'precept' in future years. The first three assets being considered for transfer to the new parish councils would alone increase the average additional precept cost per property in Epsom to around £350, with costs for Epsom households varying from £198 (Band A) to over £590 (Band H, Epsom) based on the council's figures.

The council's own public report pack goes on to state 'If other community assets (e.g. country parks etc) were to be transferred, the costs would be considerably higher'. Even £590 per year could go considerably higher! All this is on top of the standard council tax charge. Whilst borough council tax rises were capped at 3% each year, there is no cap at all on parish council precepts.

Before responding to the consultation, I encourage residents to ask themselves what, specifically, the proposed parish councils are going to provide, and whether it is worth the large, increasing and uncapped costs.

Yours faithfully,

Cllr Bernie Muir (Conservative Horton)  
Vice-Chairman Surrey County Council  
Surrey County Councillor — Epsom West Division

Epsom & Ewell Borough Councillor — Horton Ward

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## **From Cllr Hannah Dalton (RA Stoneleigh) leader of the ruling Residents Associations Group on Epsom and Ewell Borough Council**

Dear Editor,

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is not alone in making the decision that, as a result of Surrey local government reorganisation, there is an urgent need to review or establish Community Councils (also known as Parish or Town Councils). This work is also being undertaken by Guildford Borough Council, Mole Valley District Council, Reigate & Banstead Borough Council, Runnymede Borough Council and Surrey Heath Borough Council.

From July to October 2025, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council conducted the first resident consultation on the proposal to establish Community Councils, and 67% of respondents were supportive of the proposal. As a result of the consultation, and listening to our residents, further work has been carried out and the Council is undertaking a second and final resident consultation from December 2025 to February 2026.

It is disappointing that the Labour, Liberal Democrat, Conservative and Independent groups are seeking to derail this work and, in doing so, deny the residents of Epsom and Ewell the second consultation to make an informed decision on whether to proceed with establishing two Community Councils. To my mind, this is another example of political parties denying residents their democratic voice — which we have already seen through the cancellation of the Surrey local elections due to take place in May 2025, and more recently, through not listening to the resident voice in the consultation on Surrey local government reorganisation, where residents were vehemently opposed to the establishment of two Unitary Councils.

The case for establishing a Community Council becomes stronger when you consider what the new East Surrey Unitary Council — which will represent a population of 551,000 — will mean for democratic representation for the residents of Epsom and Ewell.

Currently, the residents of Epsom and Ewell have 35 Borough Councillors and 5 County Councillors. Following the establishment of the East Surrey Unitary Council, this will reduce to 10 Councillors for a population of 81,000; that is a 75% decrease in democratic representation. If ever there were a compelling reason to explore introducing a local Community Council, it is this.

The key areas the second consultation is seeking residents' views on are:

- to establish two Community Councils — one for Epsom and one for Ewell
- to maintain the 14 individual wards that currently make up the Borough of Epsom and Ewell
- to propose 2 Community Councillors for each ward, elected as usual, who would all be volunteers and receive no remuneration for representing residents at a local level
- a proposed precept of around £45 a year (approximately £3.75 a month or 12p a day)

The precept would cover the new Community Councils' administration — such as employment costs, office supplies and equipment, website and IT, insurances — but more importantly, services such as planning, because the Community Council would be a statutory consultee.

This is a pragmatic approach to the proposed introduction of Community Councils, as currently we do not know how the new East Surrey Unitary Council will function.

However, it is worth noting that evidence from areas which have already undergone local government reorganisation shows that there is a critical role for Community Councils, and that the 'Neighbourhood Area Committees' being proposed by Surrey County Council, in practice, do not have the requisite powers or representation to deliver for the residents they represent.

This Epsom and Ewell Community Governance Review consultation will close at 11.59pm on Sunday 1 February 2026 and can be accessed online at:

<https://eebc.inconsult.uk/CGRproposal/consultationHome>

Paper copies of the consultation can be found at:

The Town Hall  
Bourne Hall  
Stoneleigh Library  
Epsom Library  
Ewell Court Library  
Community and Wellbeing Centre

Yours faithfully,

Cllr Hannah Dalton

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**From Cllr Kate Chinn (Labour Court Ward)**

Dear Editor

I do not believe there is a need for community councils and they will cause additional costs for residents. There are far too many unknowns. The new unitary council is only obliged to pass on management of allotments which, if the Residents Association councillors get their way, would be two costly administration systems set up for a minimal service.

Alternatively, all the borough's costly and heavily subsidised venues including the Playhouse and Bourne Hall could be transferred. Both need continued costly refurbishment. Costs that would be passed on to residents.

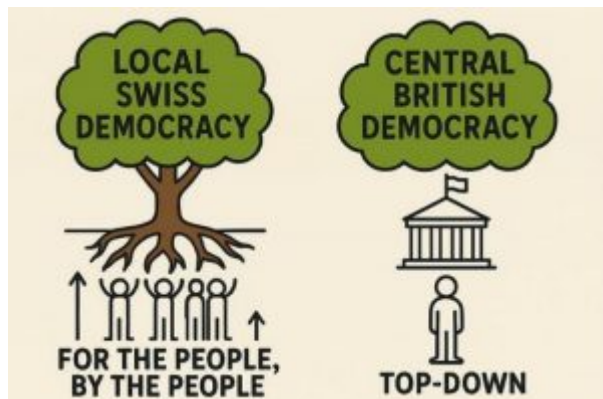
The RA-led council are clearly pushing for two parish/community councils - one for Epsom and one for Ewell. An increase of administration from the two currently representing the borough.

Yours faithfully,

Cllr Kate Chinn

## Top-Down Power, Bottom-Up Pain: How Central Control is Killing Local Communities

29 March 2026



When I was a child growing up in rural Surrey, I could never imagine why anyone wouldn't want to preserve the wondrous landscapes of Britain, only to replace them with concrete and tarmac for roads, houses, and airports. As I've gotten older, this disbelief has only grown stronger.

Take Ashted, for example — a small town not far from where I live. The local council wants to build 270 new homes on green belt land, despite furious local opposition. Even the council themselves are divided on the issue, pushing it through due to fear of top-down reprisal. In nearby Langley Vale Village, there's talk of potentially 110 homes being developed on equally green agricultural land that has been part of the local farming area for generations.

These are just two examples of dozens from my area alone. These plans are unpopular and have sparked fierce backlash and debate in the community. People wonder: Why do we have so little say in decisions that transform our neighbourhoods? Why do we often feel powerless against developers and top-down mandates?

Now, as I did then, I believe that Britain is still (at least for now) a beautiful country. However, my view of our island has matured to balance what I feel we have lost alongside what we've gained.

At 29 years old, many assume my generation is full of pro-modernist, latte-sipping, avocado toast-eating, Netflix-bingeing apathetics who don't value the past and would bulldoze anything if it meant lowering house prices. This stereotype is not just wrong — it's dangerous. Many of us care about more than just house prices; we care about landscape, beauty, nature and history. We want to preserve what was, and we think seriously about what is to come.

Many young people hear the mood of the nation and agree that things are broken. But I don't believe that a centralised, managerial approach with top-down policies is the way to fix this or make the country happier.

A big reason why Brits feel broken is that they have no control over their futures. Stagnant wages, rising living costs, and soaring house prices force many to delay milestones like having children, marriage, or retirement. But I believe the problem runs deeper. This apathy — and misery — comes from a lack of local agency, community, and belonging. Money is necessary, but the soul of a community comes from local decision-making, not cash.

Nowhere is this absence of local control clearer than in the planning system. Central London Starmerites (and many others before them) claim that communities, especially in the Home Counties, are just NIMBYs blocking progress to boost the economy. But it's far more complicated than this.

Today's planning process is little more than a tick-box exercise. Communities are asked for input, then routinely ignored. When a local council rejects a development, it's often overturned on appeal by higher authorities. Councillors face political backlash but have little real power to protect their communities. What looks like democracy is, in practice, centralisation.

This suppression of local democracy breeds apathy and resentment. People feel decisions are imposed on them, not made for them.

So here's an alternative — one I doubt either major national party would support, but let's dream.

In Switzerland, local communities decide their fate through direct democracy, sometimes gathering in town squares to vote on local issues. Local infrastructure, zoning, education, and some taxation are set at the local level. The central government only plays a guiding role in essential services and national taxes.

You might ask: won't richer areas just set tax rates low to outcompete poorer ones, increasing inequality? Two mechanisms prevent this. First, Swiss local tax rates operate within regulated bands, maintaining rough parity. Second, a redistributive model transfers wealth from richer to poorer areas, ensuring local empowerment without worsening inequality.

I would love to see this model brought to Britain. It would shake up the old, sclerotic national parties and restore real power to local people. Local councillors represent diverse parties and interests but are currently toothless. A Swiss-style local democracy would change that.

"But what if they don't build enough houses? What if businesses move to areas with better tax rates?" Then communities will respond accordingly. Challenges would remain, but at least people would be deciding their own trade-offs and paths forward.

Unfortunately, the UK is moving away from local democracy. Surrey provides a stark example. Our 11 boroughs are slated to merge into 2 or 3 "super authorities," with a directly elected mayor gaining sweeping powers over the county. How is this real devolution? It centralises power into a system locals had no say in creating — allowing the government to push through top-down housing targets, often against local wishes.

In a Swiss or similar system, we'd live in a country truly made for the people, by the people — with agency, dignity, and hope for the future. I believe that Brits are capable of running their own communities, and it is patronising to suggest otherwise.

I wait with bated breath to see the fallout that is yet to come from this government's drive towards centralisation, continuing a tradition in this country that has hollowed out local communities for decades.

I can only hope we the people see the light before it's too late.

**Matthew P. Dunn**

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## Who will pay for Epsom's leisure centre "better deal"?

29 March 2026



**Dear Editor,**

Your excellent article on the Council's decision to appoint a new operator for the Rainbow Leisure Centre raises important questions about what residents can expect. One crucial point not yet disclosed by the Council is that prices for residents are likely to rise — because the new provider, Places Leisure, has agreed to pay the Council more for the right to operate the Centre, and this additional cost will almost certainly be passed on to users.

The decision-making process, described by the ruling Residents' Association as "transparent", was anything but. It began with a now-familiar request for councillors to enter confidential session, shutting the public out of a decision that affects thousands of local families.

At consecutive meetings of the Community and Wellbeing Committee — on which I sit — and then the Strategy and Resources Committee, councillors were asked to approve the administration's preferred supplier, Places Leisure, over the incumbent GLL/Better and another bidder. We were told that failure to agree would result in the Centre's closure from 1 October. This ultimatum was presented as a matter of legal necessity under procurement law, but no explanation was provided as to why earlier action had not been taken to avoid such a stark choice.

The selection process itself raises concerns. A confidential paper outlined how bids were scored. Quality and commercial factors were supposedly given equal weight. On quality, GLL/Better scored higher than Places Leisure, with clear criteria applied. Yet for the "commercial" element, GLL was given a score close to zero — with no explanation offered for how this figure was reached. The absence of transparency on such a critical aspect of the scoring process undermines confidence in the outcome.

It was made clear that Places Leisure would pay the Council more for the right to run the Centre and would commit to making some "investment". However, this came with a catch — a "change to the fees which the operator would look to

charge". In plain terms, residents will be paying more so the Council can generate more income from the Centre.

This is not how important decisions affecting public services should be made. Epsom and Ewell residents deserve better than secretive processes and rubber-stamped choices. I urge the new Leader of the Council to reflect on this episode, and to commit to greater transparency, genuine scrutiny, and open debate on future decisions — especially those involving public assets like the Rainbow Leisure Centre.

**Cllr Rob Geleit**

Labour, Court Ward  
Epsom & Ewell Borough Council

**Editor's Note:** *This letter reflects the views of the author, an elected councillor. While it refers to matters that may or may not have been discussed in a closed session of the Council, we have published it in the public interest, given the implications for public services and local accountability. We invite the Council to respond if it wishes to clarify any aspect of the decision-making process.*

Related report:

Epsom and Ewell will judge change at their leisure

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## Parishing Epsom and Ewell is unholy?

29 March 2026



I enjoyed your write-up of the latest meeting of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, where you asked "Will the doomed Epsom and Ewell Borough Council rise from the ashes in other forms?" I would however suggest that the intention of the Residents Association (RA) clique that runs the council is to seek to continue its own existence as a relevant political force.

The RA has run the council since its creation and as Cllr Robert Leach (now the mayor) recently observed, feels that its dominant position means that it can do as it likes. [Epsom and Ewell Borough Council Faces Scrutiny Over Constitutional Reforms](#) > Epsom & Ewell Times

With the anticipated abolition of Epsom and Ewell as a borough council and effective merger with three or more neighbouring boroughs, the RA can see that its stranglehold will be broken. Its representatives may well be elected to a new unitary council, but they will likely be in a minority.

The paper at last week's meeting that proposed what is called a Community Governance Review noted that "Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is one of the few District Councils within Surrey that is unparished", meaning that there are no civil parishes or parish or other community councils.

Having been in charge for all these decades, the RA may wish to explain why this is the case. The answer to the *why now* question is obvious - to give the RA another host body to move to when its current host expires. Not that the RA clique doesn't already have its fingers in a lot of pies locally.

There is also the *why not now* question, which the administration has skipped past. The report from last week notes that statutory guidance advises councils like Epsom and Ewell to avoid starting a community governance review if a review of local electoral arrangements is being, or is about to be, undertaken - i.e. the current situation.

Your article cites me as one of the councillors at the meeting who expressed doubts about whether information being given to residents will allow them to make an informed decision. I was specifically concerned that residents will only be consulted on the RA's preference for new councils, despite recognition in the report that the government recently expressed a preference for the establishment of Neighbourhood Area Committees, which would operate within the auspices of a new authority.

Clearly these have been rejected as not suiting the RA's purposes. For now we have to accept that the RA clique that runs the council can do what it likes, including spending £300,000 of desperately short funds on a process framed around its need to perpetuate its own relevance.

Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court Ward)

## Look to your own party's dictatorship

29 March 2026



Sir,

I reply to Cllr Ames' letter attacking Residents Association councillors in general and me in particular.

It is a pity that he chose to quote me selectively. I did say that the RA Group could put through anything it wished - that is a simple fact as we hold 25 of the 35 seats. However I went on to say that we value the contributions of members from other parties. .

A council may use either the cabinet or committee system of government. We use the committee system under which all councillors may partake in all decision making, as Cllr Ames has done. Unlike many other councils, all councillors are involved.

It is also a pity that Cllr Ames did not mention the subsequent meeting of the Standards and Constitution Committee on 16 April of which he is a member. This was a long but amicable meeting where much of the two and half hours was spent dealing with suggestions from Liberal Democrat leader Cllr James Lawrence. Some of his proposals were accepted. On all the motions, James was congratulated on the effort he had put in to serve the council and the constructive way he worked with RA members. This is hardly the attitude of a dictatorial ruling group.

In contrast, let us look at the Labour government of his party. Last year in the general election it got about a third of votes on a 60% turnout. This means that only one in five electors voted Labour. Another two voted for other parties, and the remaining two did not vote at all. Subsequent opinion polls suggest that Labour has lost support since the election.

On the basis of getting just 20% support from the electorate, the Labour government has dictatorially decreed that the borough should provide more than 800 new homes each year building on Green Belt, and that the borough council should be abolished in 2027. On neither of these issues has the government consulted anyone to ask if they want all this extra housing or if they want the council abolished. I have yet to meet any resident who supports either policy. The Labour government does not listen to any voices other than its own, and sometimes does not even listen to its own voices.

I like Cllr Ames as a person, and I respect his right to criticise me and RA councillors. However I believe that this should be done fairly, and not by selective quotation wrapped up in bluster. If Cllr Ames does not like dictatorial government, he would be better advised to direct such views to his own party.

Cllr Robert Leach  
RA councillor

Nonsuch Ward

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## Labour decries Residents' Associations' unfettered power on Epsom & Ewell Council

29 March 2026



Dear Editor,

Thank you for your excellent reporting of last week's meeting of Epsom and Ewell Council's Standards and Constitution Committee, which highlighted some important and contentious issues about how councillors represent our residents.

Your analysis that public trust and democratic scrutiny hang in the balance is spot-on. In my two years so far as a councillor, I have frequently sought to highlight these issues, often in conjunction with other opposition councillors and

sometimes with the support of more independent-minded Residents Association (RA) councillors.

In this light, I would like to highlight Cllr Robert Leach's comment concerning the committees that decide the bulk of what the council does, that "The RA group can put through anything it likes".

This shocking comment goes to the heart of issues of democratic scrutiny and appears to reflect the approach of the ruling party and many RA councillors to a situation where it has two-thirds of councillors. Despite its councillors purporting to represent residents at a very local level, the RA can often operate as a monolithic block.

One major change that the RA administration has attempted to implement is to neuter the Audit and Scrutiny Committee, of which I am also a member, which should play a key role in scrutinising what the council does in the name of residents.

Despite, or perhaps because of this, the administration has proposed to remove the committee's scrutiny function, on the grounds that scrutiny should take place on the committees that make policy and spending decisions.

Cllr Leach's blunt assessment that "The RA group can put through anything it likes" on such committees should represent the death knell for this proposal, which the administration has already had to "pause" in the face of fierce opposition.

While Cllr Leach's words represent the numerical reality, they neglect the role that opposition councillors can play in raising questions and challenges and, on occasion, influencing how other committee members vote.

Last month, for the second year running, the Audit and Scrutiny Committee amended its own annual report, as drafted by the administration, to record that it had carried out "limited scrutiny" over the past year.

While this is an unfortunate situation, to say the least, it does show that some RA councillors have an appetite for a stronger scrutiny role and, despite what Cllr Leach says, can vote according to their own individual judgement.

Democratic scrutiny of what the council does in the name of residents is essential to maintain the public's trust in it. We need more of it - and less of a ruling party that thinks it can put through anything it likes.

Councillor Chris Ames - Labour - Court Ward

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## Epsom's Horton Cemetery gets attention of two kinds

29 March 2026



Just as **The Epsom and Ewell Times** was about to publish a letter concerning Council efforts to tidy and make safer the boundaries of Horton Cemetery (Hook Road / Horton Lane) a motor car struck railings near the roundabout and knocked over the Memorial to the near 9000 patients buried and neglected in the privately owned 5 acre cemetery.

**Surrey Police** issued a statement: "We were called to Horton Lane, Ewell at around 7:10pm on Wednesday 19 February after reports of a single vehicle collision at the location. Officers responded and found that the collision had resulted in damage to a fence and cemetery stone. The driver was not arrested and did not require medical treatment."



It is understood that Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is responsible for the Memorial after former Labour Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, **Alan Carlson**, raised the money for its installation through a public appeal in 2004.

The charity The Friends of Horton Cemetery continues its campaign to restore the Cemetery to community ownership following the bizarre NHS transfer of the asset to a property speculator in 1983. **Michael Heighes** of Marque Securities has taken away the tombstones and all the crosses on each grave have gone. The cemetery is barely recognisable as a cemetery and relatives cannot enter without trespassing.

Recently, the Charity has made a submission to the Law Commission, which is considering reforms to cemetery law. It has submitted that the opportunity to update the laws should include a duty to maintain and allow access to cemeteries in private hands.

The charity has also sent a letter to Epsom and Ewell Borough Council in connection with the current Local Plan arguing any development of neighbouring **Horton Farm** for housing should seek developer's funds for the restoration of the Cemetery as an amenity of peace and remembrance open to the public.

Mr **Lionel Blackman**, Secretary of the Charity, said "The existence of the largest asylum cemetery in Europe is not going to disappear. With relatives coming forward every week and our research team publishing the lives of over 600 patients so far, it is only a matter of time and whichever local government takes over, that action will redress this historic outrage."

Sam Jones - Reporter

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Letter from Matthew Walters, Epsom.

**Dear Sir,**

I would like to draw attention to recent developments concerning Horton Cemetery in West Ewell, Epsom.

For many years, concerns have been raised about the lack of respect shown to the 9,000 individuals buried there, whose graves are no longer marked. More recently, attention has also turned to the safety risks for road users on the busy Hook Road.

Until yesterday, the grass verge alongside the cemetery was largely inaccessible due to overgrown brambles and tree branches extending from the cemetery, as well as significant fly-tipping, including building waste.

It is therefore welcome news that Surrey County Council and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council have worked together to clear the area, improving both its appearance and safety, as evidenced in the accompanying photographs.

While the decision to classify Horton Cemetery and its 9,000 graves as an "amenity woodland" remains a point of contention, the recent clearance has ensured that the surroundings are now more in keeping with a cemetery. However, the public should be aware that sections of the perimeter railings remain unsafe, with some sharp railings protruding towards Hook Road at dangerous angles, none of which are currently marked with hazard tape.

Falling branches from trees inside the cemetery continue to pose a risk to road users, and it is hoped that Surrey County Council will monitor this issue and take necessary action, as indicated in previous communications.

In the meantime, cyclists, motorcyclists, and motorists should exercise caution when travelling along Hook Road near the cemetery. Furthermore, steps should be taken to ensure that the cost of maintaining overgrown vegetation from within the cemetery does not fall upon Council Tax payers.

Horton Cemetery remains in private ownership by a property developer, and the recent clearance now allows for greater visibility into the site. This presents an opportunity for the public to assess whether greater care and respect should be afforded to those buried there.

Out of sight should not mean out of mind.

Yours faithfully,

Matthew Walters

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## Will planners say “Sori, mun moka”? \*

29 March 2026



Dear Editor,

The report in the Epsom & Ewell Times (9th January) about Historic England placing the Epsom Town Centre Conservation Area on its ‘at risk register’ is extremely timely, given the current application to demolish **Café Moka**, Unit 60 of the Ashley Centre and the damaging impact this would have on the setting of what is undoubtedly one of Epsom’s most important listed buildings.

So far two formal objections have been lodged against the proposed demolition of the current turreted Café Moka - both highlighting the architectural reasons why its removal and replacement with a modern, glass and steel unit would not only spoil the visual harmony of the square but also negatively affect the setting of Waterloo House.

The objections focus on several key issues:

1. **Architectural Incompatibility:** The proposal’s replacement of the turreted Café Moka with a stark, utilitarian design would disrupt the character of Ashley Square, a blend of brick facades and tiled roofs. The original design, which still stands the test of time, complements the adjacent Market Place and reflects the history of the area. The turreted Moka unit, along with the similarly turreted (but now sadly spoiled) High Street entrance, are carefully considered features that referenced the sadly lost King’s Head Hotel coaching inn, which once stood on the site of Boots.
2. **Impact on Views:** The turreted structure helps screen the expansive service area behind the café, shielding views of the unattractive back facades of buildings on South Street. Its demolition would expose these eyesores and diminish the square’s architectural integrity.
3. **Negative Impact on Waterloo House:** Most importantly, the removal of the turreted Café Moka would harm the setting of Waterloo House’s historic carriage entrance. The building is a rare surviving example of a 17th-century spa town assembly rooms and has been sensitively restored (and appropriately renamed) by Wetherspoons. An ill-suited modern development next door would undermine this significant restoration.

Only a couple of years ago a highly questionable decision was made by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council to approve the recladding of the Ashley Centre’s main entrance in blatantly fake stone - a move that already detracts from the original architectural concept of the 1980s shopping centre and the local history it subtly references.

Losing the turreted Café Moka would be another regrettable step backward, diminishing the area’s historical and aesthetic value - and it’s therefore vital that the Council doesn’t inadvertently support another proposal that would further compound Historic England’s current concerns.

I encourage all those who care about preserving Epsom’s heritage to voice their opposition to this unnecessary and damaging proposal.

Yours faithfully,

**Simon Alford**

Epsom

Related reports:

Heritage at Risk: Epsom Town Centre Conservation Area Faces Challenges

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council response to Historic England's Report on local heritage

\*"Sori, mun moka" is a colloquial term meaning "Sorry, my bad". "Moka" is also a coffee pot.

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## Celebrating 50 Years of Epsom and Ewell Talking Newspaper

29 March 2026

Dear Editor,

I am writing on behalf of Epsom and Ewell Talking Newspaper (EETN) to share some wonderful news following our 50th Anniversary celebration this past November.

Helen Maguire, our local Liberal Democrat MP for Epsom and Ewell, has kindly recognised EETN's invaluable contribution to the community in her recent newsletter. She congratulated us on this significant milestone and commended the tireless efforts of our volunteers who ensure visually impaired residents in Epsom and Ewell remain connected through vital access to news and local information.

Moreover, we are proud to announce that Helen Maguire has submitted an Early Day Motion (EDM) in Parliament in honour of our 50 years of service. This EDM reads as follows:

*"That this House congratulates Epsom and Ewell Talking Newspaper on its remarkable achievement of 50 years of service; recognises the charity's outstanding commitment to supporting visually impaired residents in Epsom and Ewell by providing vital access to news and local information; commends the volunteers whose dedication, effort, and time have made this invaluable service possible; acknowledges the critical role such services play in fostering inclusion and community connection; and wishes the charity continued success in its future endeavours supporting those in need."*

For those unfamiliar, Early Day Motions are a way for MPs to bring attention to specific causes or achievements. While few are debated, they often attract public interest and media coverage.

We are deeply grateful to Helen Maguire for her continued support and advocacy for EETN, and we look forward to many more years of serving our local community.

Yours faithfully,

Judy Sarssam

Chairman

Epsom & Ewell Talking Newspaper