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For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

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East Surrey gets new Police Station

19 December 2025



Surrey Police's near two-year hunt for a replacement to its shut, dangerous, crumbly concrete riddled Reigate station is over – with people only needing to walk travel miles to the new one. The new base for the Reigate and Banstead area will give the force a permanent presence and front counter for the public, the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) said after securing a building at Perrywood Business Park in Honeycrock Lane in Salfords. It comes after the 2023 closure of its Reigate Station that left officers and staff stationed in Mole Valley and Caterham Police Station.

Commissioner Lisa Townsend hailed the purchase as great for policing presence in East Surrey and follows what she described as an extensive search in the Reigate and Banstead area. The new building was considered to be the only suitable site in the area and will be funded by selling Reigate Police Station. This station will run alongside the force's new eastern division headquarters in Leatherhead, which was granted planning permission earlier this year. The PCC and senior officers wanted to find a secondary site in the Reigate and Banstead area specifically for a police station and front counter service for residents.

Surrey Police maintain a counter service during office hours in the Town Hall, The Parade. Epsom.

The Perrywood Business Park keeps the trend of police sites in industrial sites and will be just a three minute drive from the Surrey Custody Centre in Salbrook Road. Lisa Townsend said: "I know how much residents value their local policing presence so this is really fantastic news for our communities in the area. The discovery of RAAC and subsequent closure of Reigate Police Station has meant it has been a disruptive time for our hard-working teams in East Surrey. I want to pay tribute to their continued patience, professionalism and resilience in challenging circumstances. The search for a site in the Reigate and Banstead area has been extensive and Perrywood was the only building which met our needs so I am delighted that we have been able to secure the purchase. I believe that together with the progress being made on our new Eastern Division HQ in Leatherhead, this heralds a bright future for policing in East Surrey."

Deputy Chief Constable of Surrey Police Mark McEwan said: "We believe this new building will provide sufficient space and facilities for our teams, be fit for purpose and enable us to continue delivering the high levels of service our residents expect. Whilst we are still at the very early stages, considerations continue into where individual teams across the Eastern division will be based in the future and we will provide updates as and when we have them. The safety of our communities remains our priority and there will be no change to officers."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Reigate Police Station (Image Google)

Related reports:

Surrey police station futures

Reigate Police Station closes with a concrete problem

New Surrey police division HQ plans

Surrey police to move to Epsom and Ewell constituency

From Abramovich's frozen wealth to Epsom's Ashley Centre – support for Ukraine continues

19 December 2025

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

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

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

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

Direct physical damage to infrastructure alone is estimated at more than $170 billion, while millions of civilians have been displaced and tens of thousands injured. The long-term health consequences of the war, including treatment for complex injuries and trauma, are expected to place a continuing burden on Ukraine's public services for many years. Against that backdrop, the Abramovich funds amount to well under one per cent of the estimated total cost of rebuilding, though they could make a substantial difference to targeted humanitarian and medical programmes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Ashley Centre provides Surrey Stands With Ukraine with a suite of rooms and storage space in Global House, Ashley Avenue. The premises also are home to the Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network and is known as the "Ukraine Hub".

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Previously a retail unit facing the mall was used by SSWU until the unit was re-let commercially. The Ashley Centre has not responded to questions from the Epsom and Ewell Times about the decision to remove the permanent kiosk.

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

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

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

Sam Jones – Reporter



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

Related reports:

Sir Ed supporting Epsom based Ukraine charities

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

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

Fire Assembly for Ukraine

2 years on Epsom to gather in solidarity with Ukraine

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

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A year in the life of Epsom's Deputy Lieutenant Mary Zoeller

19 December 2025



From scout band concerts to royal visits, the past year has offered **Epsom** resident **Mary Zoeller** a front-row view of some of Surrey's most inspiring community activity. Appointed a Deputy Lieutenant of Surrey in 2023, Mary Zoeller is now well into the rhythm of a role that quietly connects the Crown with everyday life across the county — celebrating voluntary service, youth achievement and civic endeavour.

Based in Epsom, where she has lived for 33 years, Mary Zoeller was asked to take on the role in part because of her long-standing involvement with the voluntary sector, particularly youth organisations. "I was honoured to be asked to support the Lord-Lieutenant as one of his Deputy Lieutenants," she said. "My location of Epsom and my connections with the voluntary sector were some of the reasons I was approached."

An ancient office with a modern purpose

The Lieutenancy is one of the oldest institutions in county life. The role of Lord-Lieutenant was created by King Henry

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VIII, originally to act as the Monarch's personal representative and organise local defence. While the military function has long since disappeared, the modern Lieutenancy plays a vital civic role.

In Surrey, the Lord-Lieutenant — currently Michael More-Molyneux — represents the Sovereign at major events, supports Royal visits, promotes voluntary service and recognises achievement through honours and awards. He is supported by a team of Deputy Lieutenants (DLs), drawn from across the county to reflect Surrey's diversity of place, background and experience.

Deputy Lieutenants deputise for the Lord-Lieutenant at engagements across Surrey and may be appointed for a fixed term, typically five years, or serve until the age of 75.

On the ground across Surrey

Over the past year, Mrs Zoeller has represented the Surrey Lieutenancy at a wide range of events, many focused on young people and volunteers.

Highlights have included attending the 1st Claygate Scout and Guide Band Concert, the Elmbridge Junior Citizen event, and a Chief Scout's Gold Award presentation evening, where she met young people being recognised for exceptional commitment and leadership.

One particularly notable occasion saw her escort HRH The Duchess of Edinburgh during a visit to Brooklands Museum for an International Space Station live contact, linking local students with astronauts in orbit.

Reflecting on her experiences, Mary Zoeller said she has been repeatedly struck by the scale of voluntary effort across the county. "I have met volunteers who have astonished me with their commitment and passion for the organisations they represent," she said.

Epsom connection

Although born in Bookham, Mary Zoeller has made Epsom her home for more than three decades and remains closely connected to the town's community life. Her contribution has already been recognised locally, including being named one of Epsom & Ewell's Coronation Champions in 2023.

Asked whether she wished to comment on questions of Surrey identity in the context of local government reorganisation, Mary Zoeller was clear that this would not be appropriate in her official capacity. "It would be my personal opinion and not that of the Surrey Lieutenancy," she said.

As she enters another year as a Deputy Lieutenant, Mary Zoeller's experience offers a glimpse into a role that is largely unseen but deeply woven into the county's civic fabric — quietly celebrating service, commitment and community across Surrey.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Photo: Deputy Lieutenant Mary Zoeller at Gold awards for Chief Scouts

Related reports:

Epsom & Ewell's Coronation Champion

Derby Prize Money to Rise to £2m as Epsom Seeks to Reassert Its Place at the Top of British Racing

19 December 2025



The Derby at Epsom is set to regain its position at the very summit of British flat racing after The Jockey Club confirmed that prize money for the 2026 renewal will rise to £2 million, making it the joint-richest race in the UK.

The £500,000 uplift takes the Derby's total prize fund to £2 million, with £1 million awarded to the winner, placing the race on a par with Ascot's King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes, long regarded as Britain's most valuable middle-

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distance contest.

The announcement comes after a six-month review by Epsom Downs Racecourse and The Jockey Club, prompted by a notable fall in attendance at this year's Derby meeting. Official figures show the Derby crowd dropped by more than 4,500, from over 26,800 in 2024 to 22,312 in 2025, raising concerns about the long-term appeal of Britain's most famous Classic.

A race whose prestige once eclipsed prize money

Historically, the Derby's importance has never rested on prize money alone. For much of its 245-year history, victory at Epsom carried unparalleled breeding and reputational value, dwarfing the cash rewards on offer.

Well into the late twentieth century, the Derby paid significantly less than major jumps races such as the Grand National or Cheltenham Gold Cup, yet remained the race every owner, trainer and breeder wanted to win. A Derby victory could transform a colt's value overnight, securing a lucrative stud career that far exceeded any prize cheque.

In recent decades, however, that imbalance has begun to shift. With global investment in racing concentrated increasingly in prize money-led jurisdictions such as Ireland, France, Australia and the Middle East, British racing has faced mounting pressure to compete financially as well as historically.

How the Derby now compares

At £2 million, the Derby will now sit at the top tier of UK racing alongside:

- **King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes (Ascot)** – £2 million
- **The Derby (Epsom)** – £2 million from 2026

By comparison:

- **Cheltenham Gold Cup** currently offers prize money in the region of £625,000
- **The Grand National**, Britain's most famous jumps race, has a total prize fund of £1 million
- **The Oaks**, run on the Friday of the Derby meeting, remains below the Derby but continues to hold major Classic status

The uplift therefore restores a sense of hierarchy at the very top of British flat racing, ensuring that the Derby once again leads from the front rather than trailing its peers.

Wider changes to the Derby meeting

Prize money is not the only area where change is planned. In an effort to attract a younger and more diverse audience, under-18s will be given free entry to both days of the Derby meeting in 2026. Racecourse officials hope this will help introduce a new generation to Epsom Downs and to racing more generally.

There are also significant changes to the structure of the meeting itself. The **Coronation Cup** will move from Friday to Saturday, where it will be run alongside the Derby. Its prize money has more than doubled, rising from £450,000 to £1 million following new sponsorship from leading racehorse breeders Coolmore.

Across the two-day meeting as a whole, total prize money will increase by £1.375 million, while the **Oaks** will remain the feature race on the Friday.

A response to changing times

The changes follow a 2025 Derby won by **Lambourn**, trained by Aidan O'Brien, who recorded a record-extending 11th victory in the Classic. While the quality of racing on the track remains undiminished, the attendance figures suggest Epsom is grappling with wider challenges facing British racing: competition from other sports, rising costs for racegoers, and shifting leisure habits.

By restoring the Derby's financial standing, restructuring the meeting, and lowering barriers to entry for younger fans, Epsom Downs is clearly attempting to balance tradition with modern realities.

Whether higher prize money alone can reverse attendance trends remains to be seen. But with the Derby once again sitting at the very top of the British racing prize-money tree, Epsom is making a clear statement of intent: that the world's greatest flat race should also be one of its most valuable.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Horses racing Image: Credit Paul. CC BY 2.0

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Public of Epsom and Ewell to be asked if they want two new Councils

19 December 2025



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has voted to continue exploring the creation of two new community councils—one for Epsom and one for Ewell—following an often heated debate at the Full Council meeting on Tuesday 9 December. The decision means the proposals will now go to a second phase of public consultation before a final vote in March 2026.

The meeting also saw **Cllr Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) elected—by 17 votes to 11—over **Cllr Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) as the Borough's representative on a Local Government Association forum related to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

The main item of the night, however, was whether to progress the Community Governance Review (CGR) and consult residents further on the proposed new parish-style councils.

What was decided

Two recommendations were voted on separately, both by recorded vote:

• Recommendation 1: Proceed to a second-stage consultation
• Recommendation 2: Confirm the amended Terms of Reference and delegated arrangements for running that consultation

Both recommendations were carried by 17 votes to 6 (or 7) with 6 (or 5) abstentions, depending on the motion.

Supporters: "Residents must have a voice before the borough is abolished"

Cllr John Beckett (RA Auriol), who proposed the motion, framed the issue as a democratic response to the looming abolition of the borough council under Surrey's move to two unitary authorities. He warned of a 75% reduction in elected representation once Epsom and Ewell's 35 borough councillors and 5 county councillors are replaced with just 10 unitary councillors.

Beckett said: "*These changes are about the centralisation of power and money all at the expense of local democracy.*" He added that the first consultation—352 responses, with 67% supporting further investigation—was "*the second highest response to a borough-wide consultation outside the Local Plan*".

He argued that parish-style councils could preserve local identity and provide continuity: "*For our residents… this gives our residents a choice, and it gives our residents a voice.*"

Cllr Hannah Dalton told councillors that other areas undergoing unitary transitions, including Northamptonshire, Wiltshire and Somerset, saw unparished areas "*left behind*". She said that if Epsom and Ewell did not act now, it risked becoming "*the only unparished area in East Surrey*".

She added: "*Tonight we are only asking you to support further consultation… with a precept that has no transfer of assets, whatever our colleagues are saying.*"

Cllr Neil Dallen (RA Town) said the proposal was modest: "*We go out to the residents and we ask them… whether they want us to continue.*"

Cllr Rachel King (RA Town) emphasised that the public had only given feedback on principles so far: "*We now need to give them a proper opportunity to respond to a fleshed out proposal… We owe it to our residents to give them a voice.*"

Opponents: "A flawed consultation, a financial burden, and a political stitch-up"

Opposition councillors delivered some of the sharpest criticism heard in the chamber for years.

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Claims of a flawed consultation

Cllr Julian Freeman (Lib Dem College) said the consultation process was "*flawed*" because respondents were forced to select an option rather than reject the idea outright. He argued: "*This is the wrong issue at the wrong time… The only reason this is being raised now is to create a role for the people in this room.*"

Cllr Rob Geleit (Labour Court), speaking also on behalf of absent **Cllr Kate Chinn**, said the proposals lacked community backing: "*A flawed and skewed consultation, a lack of engagement… giving no mandate… and poor financial analysis.*" He added: "*I see no point in removing a layer of democracy only to add it back again on a lesser level.*"

Cllr Alison Kelly (Lib Dem Stamford) said residents were mostly concerned about planning, but that the parish proposals did not address this: "*Most people… give the issue of allotments very little thought. We are showing a cost of a parish council around £45 for an allotment you don't need in a flat.*" She noted that only around 230 respondents had expressed a desire for a parish council.

Financial warnings: 98.7% admin, 1.3% allotments

Cllr James Lawrence (Lib Dem College) highlighted the ratio in the report: approximately £1.5m in administrative overheads versus £20,000 for allotment running costs. "*You will be telling [residents] you're creating a parish council that is just for allotments… the allotments cost is 1.3% of the tax you're going to charge.*" He added that consultation documents risked misleading residents by listing admin and allotments side-by-side "*as if they were roughly equal*".

"An uncapped tax burden on struggling households"

Cllr Alex Coley warned that the real precept could be much higher—up to £180 for Band D properties—if the community councils later took on community buildings with significant maintenance liabilities such as Bourne Hall: "*It would be disingenuous to go to residents with £40-something pounds when it could be £180… We should not seek a view from residents with a lower figure and then quadruple it.*" He said many residents were "*struggling financially*" and called the proposals "*an astonishing waste of time, energy and money.*"

Cllr Bernie Muir (Conservative Horton) urged councillors to wait until the new unitary structure and Surrey's pilot Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) bedded in: "*I think this is a premature discussion… we should see how the unitaries and NACs pan out and then move forward if we need to.*"

Cllr Chris Ames (Labour Court) was highly critical of the RA leadership: "*This wasn't a review. This was one option chosen by the Residents' Association to meet its own purposes… It's all about providing a jumping-off point for the clique that runs this council.*"

Admin cost vs allotment cost: the core numerical controversy

Using the figures in the Report to Council:

• Admin and support costs for new community councils: approx. £1.5 million
• Cost of allotment management: approx. £20,000

That means roughly:

• 98.7% of the expenditure is administration
• 1.3% is allotment provision

This ratio became a central argument for opponents, particularly **Cllr Lawrence**, who said allotments would be a "*rounding error*" in the parish budget.

Supporters responded that these were not final budgets, merely illustrative maxima, and that Phase 2 consultation would use the *true* starting point—around £43–£46 Band D—with no asset transfers.

Conclusion

The council has opted to continue exploring parish councils despite sharp divisions. The second public consultation will now seek residents' views on more detailed proposals before a final decision in March 2026—months before the borough is abolished and replaced by the new East Surrey unitary authority.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

Do Epsom and Ewell Borough's allotments need their own elected Councils?

Neighbour Area Committees in Surrey

Local government reform or just more layers?

Where do we stand on local government reorganisation in Epsom and Ewell and the County?

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Parishing Epsom and Ewell is unholy?

Debate Opens on the Future Shape of Surrey's Local Government

"Us and Them" visualises connections with former Epsom patients

19 December 2025



A ground-breaking heritage project exploring the lives of disabled people detained in Surrey's former mental hospitals is turning fresh attention on Horton Cemetery in Epsom – the burial ground of some 9,000 men, women and children whose resting place remains locked, overgrown and inaccessible under the control of a property speculator who has neglected the site since the 1980s.

Freewheelers Theatre and Media, a creative company of disabled artists based in Leatherhead, is leading *Us and Them*, a National Lottery Heritage Fund-supported initiative using original medical portrait photographs and case records from Surrey's long-closed asylums. Working with photographer Emma Brown, community history group On the Record and researchers at King's College London, they are uncovering the stories of patients whose voices were seldom heard in their lifetimes. The project includes new wet-collodion portraits of Freewheelers members made using the same Victorian techniques once used in institutions such as The Manor Hospital and West Park. These contemporary portraits will be shown alongside the originals in a touring exhibition, with the first major display due to take place at The Horton, Epsom, in 2026.

For Epsom, the work resonates particularly with Horton Cemetery – the former burial ground for patients from the Epsom Cluster hospitals, including The Manor, Horton, Long Grove, West Park and St Ebba's. Despite its national historic significance as the largest asylum cemetery in the UK, the cemetery has been left to decay for decades and remains closed to relatives, historians and the wider community. The Friends of Horton Cemetery continue to campaign for its return to public or charitable ownership so that the site can be restored, documented and respected as the resting place it once was.

The Freewheelers project highlights the human stories behind those buried there. One participant, Alice Scott, chose to pair herself with Rose Harris, a woman confined to The Manor Hospital in 1910 and buried in a pauper plot at Horton Cemetery in 1917. Another member, Pete Messer, recreated the photograph of workhouse survivor Frederick Tarrant, who spent 15 years in various institutions, part of the same system that funnelled thousands of patients to unmarked graves in Epsom.

Historians involved in *Us and Them* emphasise how the original photographs were created without consent for purposes of classification and diagnosis, often contributing to stigma. Today, the Freewheelers portraits aim to prompt public reflection on how disability is perceived and represented, and how society remembers – or forgets – those who lived and died within institutional care. The project's December creative sessions coincide with a Christie's auction of similar historical images, underlining renewed public interest in the stories of institutionalised people.

The Friends of Horton Cemetery say the renewed national attention generated by projects like *Us and Them* strengthens the argument that the burial ground must be brought back into community hands. Volunteers have long argued that the cemetery is a unique and irreplaceable heritage site, containing the life histories of people from across Britain and the world, many of whom have living descendants still searching for answers.

Recent BBC reporting has highlighted the scale of the neglect, the site's condition and the growing calls for public ownership. For many families, the cemetery is the last physical link to relatives whose lives were shaped by the former Epsom institutions. Campaigners say that without intervention, the stories now being rediscovered risk remaining disconnected from the very place where so many of those patients were laid to rest.

More information about the Friends' campaign and the history of the site and some 500 personal stories of the patients buried in the Epsom Hospital Cluster cemetery in Hook Road/Horton Lane, Epsom can be found at **www.hortoncemetery.org**

Sam Jones – Reporter

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See BBC coverage here:

Disability group recreates Victorian hospital images

‘Grandad is one of 9,000 buried in derelict site’

Call for public ownership of asylum cemetery

Related reports in Epsom and Ewell Times:

Portraits of pauper patients in Epsom’s Horton Cemetery, inspires artist

Petition to reclaim Horton Cemetery from property speculator

Local community gathered at Horton Cemetery

Another Horton Cemetery Life Story

Image: Background Horton Cemetery: *photographed on 28 February 1971 by L R James. Epsom & Ewell Local & Family History Centre.* Foreground: Courtesy Friends of Horton Cemetery

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MP warns as 3,600 Epsom homes face fuel poverty

19 December 2025



More than 3,600 households in Epsom and Ewell are estimated to be living in fuel poverty this winter, according to new figures that have reignited debate over the Government’s decision to scale back national home-insulation funding.

The estimates come in the same week the Chancellor announced cuts to the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) scheme, a long-running programme that funds energy-saving improvements such as insulation in low-income households. Government data indicates ECO has delivered 1,866 installations locally, helping families reduce heat loss from older homes that are often poorly insulated. Local MP Helen Maguire said withdrawing support now would leave “thousands of families in draughty homes and facing high bills” at a time when many residents already feel financially stretched.

Fuel poverty is measured by comparing a home’s required energy costs with household income. National charities warn the UK remains one of the worst-insulated housing stocks in Western Europe, meaning households are more vulnerable to spikes in market energy prices. Despite a fall in wholesale gas costs over the past year, Ofgem confirmed that bills remain significantly above pre-crisis levels, and several support schemes introduced during the 2022–23 energy shock are winding down.

Analysts at the Resolution Foundation have noted that around half of the temporary support announced in the Budget is due to expire within three years. Separate modelling by climate think-tank E3G suggests reducing the scope of ECO could prevent up to a million homes nationwide from receiving insulation improvements over the next four years and may lead to job losses in the retrofit and construction sector.

The Government has argued that its energy efficiency targets remain in place and that the Budget decisions reflect wider fiscal pressures. Ministers say additional measures to stabilise wholesale prices and support low-income households will continue. But campaigners and industry groups have expressed concern that cutting insulation programmes risks higher long-term costs for both consumers and the state, as poorly insulated homes require more energy to heat.

Helen Maguire said residents are already reporting that “they feel poorer by the day” and called on ministers to back a more ambitious national upgrade scheme. The Liberal Democrats are advocating an emergency programme offering free insulation and heat pumps for people on low incomes, alongside removing the Renewables Obligation levy from electricity bills. The party claims that breaking the link between gas and electricity prices and scaling up home retrofit work could halve household energy bills by 2035.

As temperatures fall, local authorities, charities and advice services expect increased demand from households struggling to balance heating costs with other essential spending. Nationally, fuel poverty campaigners continue to urge the Government to treat insulation as an infrastructure priority, warning that winter pressures will persist until the UK’s older housing stock is modernised at scale.

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Sam Jones – Reporter



Woking up to Surrey face recognition cameras

19 December 2025



Formal protests have been lodged against Surrey Police's use of facial recognition technology that scans the faces of every adult and child in a bid to identify known suspects. Surrey Police was given two live facial recognition vans from the Home Office in November and has since put them to use in Redhill and Woking. The surveillance cameras record the images of everyone who walks across their paths to see if they are a match for people on their watchlist. The force says it deletes anybody who does not match to "minimise the impact on their human rights", with watchlist images deleted within 24 hours. The police said there were known issues in the past with facial recognition technology, including potential gender and ethnic bias, but that developments and new AI-driven algorithms have reduced this.

Now, a group of 25 cross-party Woking Borough Councillors have written to the force demanding the cameras are mothballed until meaningful consultation with residents and their elected representatives takes place over how, or whether, they are used. The letter says that fundamental questions of governance and human rights should have been resolved before any decision was made – including accountability for wrongful stops or arrests from misidentification, whether cameras record continuously or selectively, and how and when data is processed, shared, stored and deleted. A resolution has also been passed by Woking Borough Council's Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee calling on Surrey Police and the Crime Commissioner to join its January 20 meeting to answer questions about the use of live facial recognition cameras in Woking. In the meantime, councillors want the cameras' usage suspended immediately, pending full consultation with residents, with a focus on young people and those from ethnic minority backgrounds and community groups, as well as a full independently led equality and human rights impact assessment.

Chairing the Tuesday, December 2 committee was Councillor Tom Bonsundy-O'Bryan. He said: "They were deployed in Woking on November 26 and in Redhill on November 13. They scanned the faces of more than 8,000 members of public; 99.9 per cent of those scanned were not arrested. Of the individuals explicitly flagged as alerts by the technology in Redhill, 60 per cent were ultimately not arrested; only two arrests were made. There are serious questions about the proportionality of this. Imagine the police standing down the road, and asking to see everyone's passport, checking their ID, just in case they are a criminal. It would be a ludicrous thing, we wouldn't stand for it, it would be outrageous, and that is effectively what this technology is doing. It scans the face of anyone, child or adult, walking down the street and compares it to a watch list. Everyone wants the police to stop criminals, to find and arrest the people responsible for crime, but is this technology really proportionate in being deployed here in Woking?"

A spokesperson for Surrey Police said: "The introduction of live facial recognition technology, which is already being used successfully by other forces in the UK, is a vital tool to help us investigate crime thoroughly and relentlessly pursue criminals. We meticulously planned the rollout of the technology to ensure our use is appropriate, proportionate, and that we are operating with transparency. As part of this, we appropriately engaged with a wide variety of stakeholders and have ensured all information, documentation and policies are publicly available on our website. Since the launch on November 13, we have successfully completed a deployment in Redhill where officers arrested a 69-year-old man for breaching his sexual risk order and conducted condition checks for a sexual harm prevention order and a stalking protection order. On a further deployment in Woking, a 29-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of rape and shoplifting and two women were issued community resolutions for shoplifting."

Police added that the technology has been extensively tested by the National Physical Laboratory and that the algorithm used "shows no statistical bias towards gender or ethnicity (as tested nationally)". They said officers are briefed before each deployment regarding any potential disparity relating to race, age and gender, and that "extra corroboration" is required before any action is taken. "It is our responsibility to use every tactic and innovation available to us to keep the public safe, deter criminal behaviour, protect people from harm, and locate the most serious of offenders – and the live facial recognition technology has helped us to do exactly that."

Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend said: "I want to make sure our communities are as safe as possible for Surrey residents which is why our police officers must have every tool at their disposal to track down criminals operating in our midst. I do understand that people may have concerns which is why it is important that the debate on policing technology reflects the facts, the safeguards in place and the clear benefits to public safety. These vans will be used proportionately and it is important to stress that law-abiding members of the Surrey public going about their daily

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business have nothing to fear by their use. The cameras will help our policing teams identify and detain those on a pre-determined watchlist such as violent criminals and sex offenders."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Related reports:

Live facial recognition policing comes to Surrey

Toyota prevention of future death report

19 December 2025



A senior coroner has warned that more drivers could die because a Toyota braking system failed to stop a woman's car before a deadly M25 crash. Lisa Bowen, 48, died instantly when her Toyota Corolla hit the back of a stationary lorry on the hard shoulder at almost 38mph in January 2022 despite her pressing the brake pedal repeatedly. Senior Surrey coroner Richard Travers said the car's anti-lock braking system (ABS) "operated to reduce the braking effect almost entirely" and was "working in accordance with its design", but the design did not account for what happened when her tyre deflated and detached at speed. He said the outcome was "an unintended effect of the system's design which arose because the specific scenario […] had not been taken into account in the design process." Mr Travers warned this creates "a continuing risk that future deaths could occur unless action is taken".

The senior coroner said he was noting that a large number of Toyota Corollas on UK roads have the same anti-locking braking system as Ms Bowen's car, and other brands may well be affected too. He also criticised the "catastrophic failure" of the lorry's under-run protection bar saying its strength was "grossly insufficient" under current laws. The coroner said he was concerned that the risk of future death will arise without more stringent requirements for how much force such bars must withstand.

He has issued a statutory Prevention of Future Deaths report to Toyota, the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency and the Department for Transport (DfT), saying: "Action should be taken to prevent future deaths by addressing the concerns set out above." They must reply by 16 January 2026. A DfT spokesperson said: "Every death on our roads is a tragedy, and our thoughts are with Lisa's family and loved ones. We will carefully review the coroner's findings from this tragic case to determine the appropriateness of further amendments to these requirements."

A Toyota spokesperson [Toyota's HQ is in Burgh Heath, Epsom] said the company was "deeply saddened by this tragic accident" and "acknowledges the findings of the coroner", adding it would "carefully review the Senior Coroner's conclusions."

Emily Dalton LDRS

Toyota HQ Epsom Google

Surrey MP intervenes in local prison transgender issue

19 December 2025



The Member of Parliament for Reigate has called for biologically male inmates to be excluded from the women's estate at HMP Downview in Banstead. **Rebecca Paul MP** argued that the presence of male-born prisoners in a women's jail placed vulnerable female inmates at risk and reflected a wider policy approach that "put inclusion and ideology above safety and reality". She made the remarks during a House of Commons debate on 24 November concerning the management of

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transgender prisoners at HMP Downview.

The debate heard that transgender women are placed at Downview primarily for their own protection and are escorted by guards when mixing with the wider prison population. MPs were also told that, since 2019, there had been no recorded case of a trans inmate assaulting a biologically female prisoner. Evidence was cited that transgender women held in the men's estate themselves experience disproportionately high levels of sexual assault.

Mrs Paul said HMP Downview includes a dedicated E Wing "specifically for biological males who identify as women", used for transgender women who, with or without a Gender Recognition Certificate, cannot be safely housed elsewhere in the female estate. She stated that between five and seven such prisoners had been accommodated in E Wing over the past year. Citing Ministry of Justice data, she said: "In 2024, of the 245 transgender males in prison, 151 — or 62 per cent — were convicted of a sexual offence, far higher than the 17 per cent rate for the overall male prison population. A similar pattern can be seen in 2023."

She concluded that "the male transgender prison population poses a much higher risk to women and girls," and urged the Government to "take action and protect women at HMP Downview and across the female prison estate".

Responding for the Government, The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice **Alex Davies-Jones MP** acknowledged that transgender women had specific vulnerabilities, but said the allocation of prisoners required "thought and tact" to ensure fairness and safety. She emphasised that exemptions allowing transgender women into the general women's population are granted only when there is a compelling reason, such as acute self-harm or suicide risk, and only when there is high confidence that the prisoner poses a low risk to others. No such exemptions have been issued recently.

The Minister noted that more than 95 per cent of transgender women are held in men's prisons and that those placed in Downview are mostly housed on the stand-alone 16-bed E Wing unit, separated from biological women and situated within its own secure compound. The unit, introduced in 2019, was created because transgender women in men's prisons face disproportionate levels of bullying, harassment, self-harm and sexual assault.

She told MPs: "There have been zero assaults and zero sexual assaults committed by transgender women in the women's estate since 2019," adding that she hoped the figures demonstrated the Government's attempt to "strike a balance" in the placement of transgender prisoners.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

HMP Downview (image Google)

Surrey Police Commissioner responds to morale report

19 December 2025



Surrey's Police and Crime Commissioner has defended a reported drop in police officer morale, pointing to public and media criticism of the force. Only 57 per cent of officers believe they are making a difference, according to a new report, but **PCC Lisa Townsend** said the decline reflects wider tensions between the force and the field. Speaking at a Surrey Police and Crime Panel meeting on November 27, she said: "It doesn't matter what this job you're in, if the profession that you do is being attacked by the public, is being attacked in the news, attacked by colleagues or other people – there is an inevitable correlation in terms of morale." She added that Surrey's proximity to the Met Police, "that features in the news on a regular basis", may also be influencing Surrey officers' perceptions. "Our officers feel that. They see police officers being attacked and it's not surprising they are not completely immune to feeling that themselves," she said.

However, Ms Townsend warned against assuming pressure is spread evenly across the force: "We've got to be careful about treating it as a single… as a uniform [experience] across all police officers or police staff." Backlogs in the justice process, not feeling adequately equipped and workload were also cited as frustrations potentially chipping away at morale. Nearly 66 per cent of officers said they were unable to finish tasks on time, according to council documents. Despite the uncertainty of local government reorganisation and the government's plan to scrap the PCC role in 2028, Ms Townsend stressed that officer numbers remain strong. "We would never have enough police officers to deal with everything every member of the public will want to deal with. It is always going to be an issue. Police officers are always going to be under a certain amount of pressure, as everyone in the public sector."

The Commissioner said work to improve retention and reduce stress is making progress but a tough reality remains: demand continues to feel high and work–life balance remains "the most common reason for leaving the force".

Emily Dalton LDRS

Image: Lisa Townsend, Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner. (Credit: Surrey PCC office)

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Epsom celebrity visits his old college

19 December 2025



Joe Wicks MBE, widely known as The Body Coach, recently visited his former college, Nescot (North East Surrey College of Technology), the place where his journey into fitness and education began. His visit to Nescot was filled with inspiration, energy and memorable moments.

Joe was warmly welcomed by Nescot Principal and CEO, Julie Kapsalis, students and staff to the college. He toured the Nescot Fitness centre where Julie proudly presented him with a commemorative plaque, 'Joe's Gym' in his honour. He also signed copies of his bestselling cookbooks for staff and the college's Learning Resources Centre and was delighted to receive his original college lanyard and a thoughtful gift from the college.

Students from our Sport, Public Services and Foundation Learning courses joined Joe in the sports hall for an unforgettable workout session. Joe led the students in a fun and energetic routine, sharing his passion for fitness and wellbeing.

Sports students, Patrick and Nathan shared their thoughts on meeting Joe. Patrick said, "It's been a huge honour meeting Joe who's done so much for fitness, inspiring young kids at an early age and even raising money for charity. A good day for Nescot too." Nathan added, "It's incredible to meet Joe who's a household name and who's been to the same college as me!"

Joe's visit continued in the college theatre, where he took part in a packed Q&A session hosted by Julie Kapsalis. Staff and students gathered to hear about Joe's incredible journey and his time at Nescot.

Joe Wicks, who completed a National Diploma in Sport at Nescot in 2002, spoke warmly about his time at the college, "Nescot started me on my journey to education. The college helped me to grow and mature, and to be more independent as a learner." Speaking candidly to the students, he encouraged them to persevere, "Always try your hardest and put your heart into what you do. It won't always be easy, but never give up – give it your all."

Nescot Principal and CEO, Julie Kapsalis, said, "It has been a privilege to welcome Joe Wicks, The Body Coach, back to his hold college. His visit was particularly meaningful as his journey began here at Nescot, and we are so proud that his time here laid the foundation for a thriving career in fitness, exercise and nutrition. A huge thank you to Joe for taking the time to inspire our community with his message to stay 'Fitter, Happier and Healthier'. We look forward to welcoming him back again in the future."

At the end of the Q&A session, Julie Kapsalis presented Joe Wicks with a Nescot Honorary Fellowship, the highest accolade that the college can bestow, in recognition of his outstanding contributions to fitness, wellbeing and nutrition education, and his mission to improve the nation's health.

Nescot's NVQ Catering and Hospitality students also presented Joe with a cheque for £300 in support of his charity, The Body Coach Foundation. They fundraised by preparing and selling meals inspired by his recipes. The visit concluded with excited students lining up for a group selfie and reflecting on how Joe's message of resilience and ambition left a lasting impression.

To learn more about Joe Wicks' journey and his time at Nescot, visit our alumni feature on our website

NESCOT

Surrey University balloon study of solar flares informs current air safety concerns

19 December 2025

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New balloon-mounted radiation probes developed by the Surrey Space Centre at the University of Surrey have captured their first readings of a major solar storm, confirming that levels of cosmic radiation at typical cruising altitude briefly surged to their highest point in almost two decades. The findings come as aviation authorities worldwide are responding to unrelated but highly publicised technical concerns affecting a small number of long-haul aircraft, prompting the UK Transport Secretary to offer public reassurance.

The powerful X5-class solar flare recorded on 11 November 2025 triggered a rare Ground Level Enhancement (GLE), in which solar energetic particles penetrated unusually deep into the atmosphere. Within an hour, the UK Met Office and the Dutch meteorological agency KNMI launched rapid-response weather balloons equipped with Surrey's newly developed sensors, sending them through commercial-aircraft altitudes and far higher.

Early analysis shows that radiation at 40,000 feet briefly reached almost ten times normal background levels. Scientists stress that the spike posed no immediate health risk to passengers or crew, but they note the potential for temporary pressure on aircraft electronics. Surrey researchers estimate that during the storm's peak, "single-event upsets" — tiny, unpredictable bit-flips in onboard computer memory caused by energetic particles — may have reached around 60 errors per hour per gigabyte.

Clive Dyer of the Surrey Space Centre said the November surge was the strongest event of its kind since December 2006, with new UK neutron monitors at Guildford, Lerwick and Camborne helping to map the storm's radiation footprint across global airspace. Researchers emphasise that while far larger historical events are known — including the record 1956 radiation storm and the ancient "Miyake Events" revealed through tree rings — such extremes have never struck during the modern aviation era.

The renewed scientific focus on space weather arrives during a period of public sensitivity around flight safety. In recent days, several international carriers have reported technical issues affecting specific aircraft types, prompting precautionary inspections and, in some jurisdictions, temporary operational restrictions. Although no link has been made between these aircraft issues and solar activity, the incidents have heightened passenger concern.

Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander, responding to the situation, said: "I am aware of the technical issue impacting certain aircraft and concerns over how this will affect passengers and flights this evening. Passengers who are due to fly this weekend should check with their carriers for the latest information. The good news is it seems the impact on UK airlines seems limited with a smaller number of aircraft requiring more complex software and hardware changes. I would really like to thank the experts, staff and airlines who are working at pace to address this and reassure passengers that work is ongoing. It is heartening this issue has been identified and will be addressed so swiftly, demonstrating the high aviation safety standards globally."

The Surrey sensors, engineered to withstand near-vacuum conditions and temperatures down to –70°C, stream real-time radiation data up to 100,000 feet. Their results will be used to refine models at the Met Office Space Weather Operations Centre, improving forecasting for sectors reliant on high-altitude electronics, including aviation.

Keith Ryden, Director of Surrey Space Centre, said the 11 November flare provided the team's first opportunity to use the rapid-launch sensors in a live event, producing a "3D picture" of radiation patterns across UK airspace. Met Office Space Weather Manager Krista Hammond added that this is the first time radiation has been measured across such a broad range of altitudes during a solar storm, describing the new data as "a big leap forward" for forecasting capability.

Further launches are planned from Met Office sites in Lerwick and Camborne, and from KNMI in the Netherlands, as the current solar cycle moves into a more active phase. Aviation regulators say the Surrey results will help inform future operational guidance during solar storms, while the Transport Secretary emphasised that UK passenger safety remains "of the highest priority".

Sam Jones – Reporter



Surrey Hills expansion

19 December 2025

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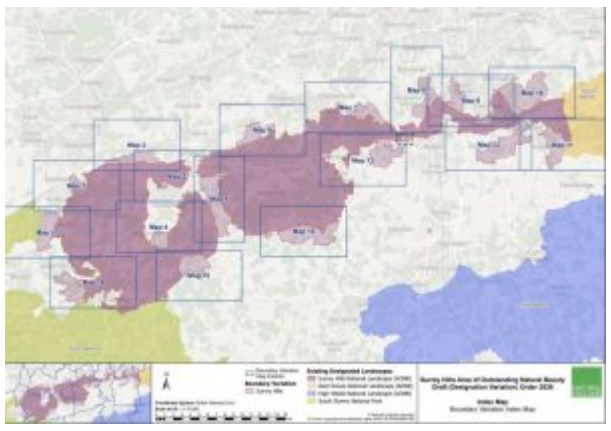

The Surrey Hills could be expanded for the first time since it was first designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty almost 70 years ago.

The Surrey Hills National Landscape boundary has remained the same since it was first introduced in 1958 but throughout that time there have been calls locally to reconsider increasing the beauty spot's borders.

Some of the land that lies next to the Surrey Hills is currently classed as Areas of Great Landscape Value by councils to recognise its value at a county level.

Now, Natural England is exploring whether to formally include 129 square kilometres of these areas into the Surrey Hills National Landscape following a series of consultations on the proposed extensions.

The first took place in 2023 with 1,518 people taking part, a second held in 2024 received over 375 responses. Natural England's report read: "The evidence provided through the first consultation process presented strong arguments to include additional land in the Surrey Hills.

"Following the decision to add further land to the proposal a second round of consultation was required in accordance with our duties under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

"The second consultation was launched with stakeholders invited to provide a response on the changes to our proposals, including further additions, minor deletions and new land in East Hampshire. We received over 375 responses to the second consultation, the vast majority of which were supportive of the proposals."

The final review period, which the public can take part in, runs until January 14, 2026. The prime purpose of the designation is to conserve and enhance the natural and scenic beauty although it understands that the Surrey Hills is not a museum, and development may need to take place.

"A fundamental role of the local planning authorities is to ensure that the very features that make the Surrey Hills special and worthy of its designation are protected. This is achieved by strict development plan policies and through the vigilant exercise of development management powers.

" The Surrey Hills Management Plan seeks to ensure that both are applied in a consistent manner across the National Landscape. Development proposals should take into account any Landscape Character Assessments for the locality and the Surrey Hills publication", the Surrey Hills National Landscape website reads.

The draft Order 2026 relates to an area of approximately 129 square kilometres in the counties of Surrey, Hampshire and Greater London in and around:

- Wey Valley, Farnhan (in Waverley Borough Council)
- Hog's Back (in Guildford Borough Council
- Binscombe Hills (in Guildford Borough Council)
- Wey Valley (in Waverley and Guildford Borough Councils)
- Enton Hills (in Waverley Borough Council)
- Cranleigh Waters (in Waverley and Guildford Borough Councils)
- Hatchlands and East Clandon (in Guildford Borough Council)
- Headley Hills (in Mole Valley District Council)
- Chipstead Valleys (in Reigate and Banstead Borough Council)
- Happy Valley (in Tandridge District Council and London Borough of Croydon)
- Caterham Woods (in Tandridge District Council)
- Woldingham Valleys (in Tandridge District Council and London Borough of Bromley)
- Limpsfield (in Tandridge District Council)
- Godstone Hills (in Tandridge District Council)
- Betchworth Hills and Mole Valley (in Reigate and Banstead Borough Council and Mole Valley District Council)
- Ockley Low Weald (in Waverley Borough Council and Mole Valley District Council)
- Dunsfold Low Weald (in Waverley Borough Council)

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- Whitemoor Vale (in East Hampshire District Council)
- Ludshott and Bramshott Comms (in East Hampshire District Council)
- Dockenfield Hills (in Waverly Borough Council and East Hampshire District Council)
- Minor boundary refinements (various)

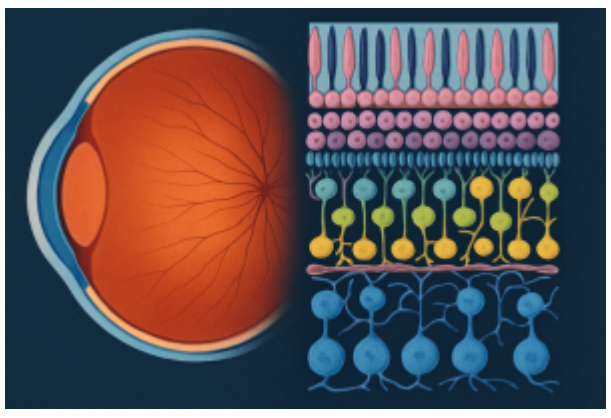
Copies of the draft Orders and maps are also available for download online from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/surrey-hills-area-of-outstanding-natural-beauty-boundary-variation.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Graphic: Surrey Hills (image Natural England)

Surrey Uni study may show way to reverse vision loss

19 December 2025



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cayla Harris added:

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

Surrey University

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