EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

26th November 2026

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Epsom and Ewell Times annual neutrality audit

21 November 2024



Epsom and Ewell Times Neutrality Council Annual Report.

The unedited and full responses from members of the Neutrality Council together with our response can be read HERE

Introduction: The Epsom and Ewell Times (EET) established the Neutrality Council to provide an independent assessment of its political neutrality. The council consists of representatives from the main political affiliations. The following sections summarise the contributions of each member.

Contribution from Robert Leach – Residents Association

1. Overall neutrality rating: 10/10.
2. Fair representation of political viewpoints: Yes.
3. Instances of bias: None noted.
4. Fair representation of Residents' Associations: Yes.
5. Handling of controversial issues: "Well."
6. Reporting quality: Moderate, with a noted lack of council item coverage and human interest stories.
7. Separation of opinion and news: Yes.
8. Coverage of local community issues: Fair, with potential for increased diversity.
9. Suggestions: Expand reporting to include information from other organizations and businesses.

Response from EET: We thank Robert for his detailed feedback and positive remarks regarding neutrality and representation. We aim to address the need for more council coverage, human interest stories, and broader engagement with local organizations.

Contribution from Alison Kelly – Liberal Democrats

1. Neutrality rating: 9/10.
2. Fair representation of political viewpoints: Yes, with occasional gaps due to lack of comments from opposition.
3. Bias instances: None significant but noted balance could improve in regional coverage.
4. Handling of controversial issues: Factual and balanced.
5. Reporting quality: High, with engaging content like "Opinion Polls" and "The Strange Maths."
6. Community engagement: Effective, with suggestions to include faith groups and increase coverage in the North Borough.
7. Suggestions: Extend coverage to faith organizations like the Hook Road Islamic Centre.

Response from EET: We appreciate Alison's thoughtful analysis and actionable suggestions, particularly regarding faith groups and geographic coverage. These insights are invaluable as we expand our community engagement efforts.

Contribution from Mark Todd – Labour

1. Neutrality rating: 9/10.

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2. Fair representation: Yes, with balanced representation of political viewpoints.
3. Instances of bias: None observed.
4. Coverage of controversial issues: Well-handled.
5. Reporting quality: Exceptional, especially on elections and green belt issues.
6. Community engagement: Effective and inclusive.
7. Suggestions: None; praised as an “amazing community newspaper.”

Response from EET: Mark’s praise for our coverage of elections and green belt issues is encouraging. We remain committed to delivering high-quality reporting on critical community matters.

Contribution from Emma Ware – Conservative

Emma expressed dissatisfaction with the perceived bias toward the Liberal Democrats and anti-green belt campaigners. She cited specific articles as examples of bias:

1. **“Belted up on Green Belt” (15 January 2024):** Allegedly one-sided with minimal counterarguments.
2. **“Democracy at Work or Strange Mathematics” (July 2024):** Criticized for unsupported assertions.
3. **“Surrey Lib Dems Majority Tale on Thames Water” (July 2023):** Lacked context, appeared biased.
4. **“Local MP Comes to Our Defence” (September 2024):** Claimed biased language.
5. **“Epsom Pensioners Gather Less Winter Fuel Pay” (30 September 2024):** Inappropriate imagery and unsubstantiated quotes.
6. **“Surrey Schools Kids Country Walk” (November 2024):** Pejorative language. [**Ed: This was a BBC report**.]
7. **“Epsom Town as a Safe Place to Live”:** Exaggerated comparisons and unsupported assertions.

Response from EET: We regret Emma’s dissatisfaction and take her concerns seriously. While our intention is always to provide balanced reporting, we acknowledge where improvements can be made, such as ensuring better context and avoiding inappropriate imagery. We remain open to constructive input and encourage diverse contributions from all community members.

Conclusion: The Neutrality Council has provided a diverse range of insights into the performance of the Epsom and Ewell Times over the past year. While the majority view reflects favourably on our efforts, we recognise that there is always room for growth. We thank each member for their time, dedication, and honest assessments.

As always, we welcome further feedback from our readers and the wider community. Transparency and accountability remain at the heart of everything we do.

The unedited and full responses from members of the Neutrality Council can be read HERE

Annual Epsom and Ewell Times neutrality audit

21 November 2024

Here we reprint the contributions of the four members of the Epsom and Ewell Times Neutrality Council in full.

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES Neutrality Council

Epsom and Ewell Times admin@epsomandewelltimes.com
12 October 2024 at 01:22

To: Robert Leach (Residents Association), Emma Ware (Conservative), Mark Todd (Labour), Alison Kelly (Liberal Democrat)

Dear Member of the Epsom and Ewell Times “Neutrality Council”,

By way of reminder, here is the link to our public announcement on the creation of the Council.

Below is a set of questions that may assist in guiding your appraisal. It is not mandatory, but if followed, there will be a consistency of approach that may make easier reading for the public.

We ask you to bear in mind during your appraisal that we are all unpaid volunteers, save for the contributions from the BBC’s Local Democracy Reporting Service (Emily Dalton, Emily Coady-Stemp, and Chris Caulfield). Also, we ask you to bear in mind that persons and parties in power can expect greater scrutiny than those who are not.

We ask you to complete your appraisals by the end of this month of October with a view to publication in November.

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Thank you very much indeed.

Epsom and Ewell Times

Robert Leach – Residents Association

14 October 2024 at 16:03

1. Overall neutrality rating: 10/10.
2. Fair representation of political viewpoints: Yes.
3. Instances of bias: No.
4. Fair representation of Residents' Associations: Yes.
5. Handling of controversial issues: Well.
6. Reporting quality: Moderate. Many council items are not covered, and there is little human interest or coverage of other EE events.
7. Separation of opinion and news: Yes.
8. Coverage of local community issues: Fair. See comments for 6.
9. Suggestions: The paper is very good and fair. I believe there is much more that could be reported. Perhaps other organisations and businesses could be encouraged to provide info.
10. Additional comments: Although not asked, I believe I have been fairly reported as a councillor.

Kind regards,
Robert Leach

Alison Kelly – Liberal Democrat

16 October 2024 at 14:41

1. Overall neutrality rating: 9/10.
2. Fair representation of political viewpoints: Clearly attributes quotes in reports on council meetings and tries to include a view from each party. Most instances where there is no opposition opinion, it was because they made no comment.
3. Instances of bias: None stood out. Some felt less mention of Lib Dem comments in areas like Mole Valley could improve balance.
4. Fair representation of Residents' Associations: As the ruling group, they seem to get a good hearing.
5. Handling of controversial issues: You reach out for opinions and tend to remain factual rather than showing political bias.
6. Reporting quality: Editorial content is limited but strong. Liked "Opinion Polls" and "The Strange Maths."
7. Separation of opinion and news: None that caused concerns.
8. Coverage of community issues: Effective and relevant, though less coverage seen in the North Borough.
9. Suggestions: Consider including more on faith groups and their activities. The Hook Road Islamic Centre revamp could be an interesting feature.
10. Additional comments: Generally find the paper useful, interesting, and balanced.

Mark Todd – Labour

9 November 2024 at 16:27

1. Overall neutrality rating: 9/10.
2. Fair representation of political viewpoints: Yes. I think everyone has been fairly represented.
3. Instances of bias: None observed.
4. Fair representation of Residents' Associations: Yes.
5. Handling of controversial issues: Well done.
6. Reporting quality: Exceptional, particularly on elections and green belt issues. Hustings coverage was a triumph.

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7. Separation of opinion and news: Yes.
8. Coverage of community issues: Adequate and diverse.
9. Suggestions: No suggestions. Congratulations on an amazing community newspaper.

Emma Ware – Conservative

20 November 2024 at 16:11

It is with a heavy heart that I have to admit I have stopped reading the Epsom & Ewell Times, so I don't feel able to answer your detailed questions. I stopped shortly after the election because, in my opinion, it has become a mouthpiece for the Liberal Democrats and to a lesser extent, the anti-green belt campaigners.

Here are seven examples of clear bias in favour of the Lib Dems and unsupported political opinions masquerading as facts:

1. "Belted up on Green Belt" (15 January 2024): Felt one-sided with limited counterarguments and no context for affordable housing shortages.
2. "Democracy at Work or Strange Mathematics" (July 2024): Contained unsupported assertions and lacked global economic context.
3. "Surrey Lib Dems Majority Tale on Thames Water" (July 2023): Used pejorative language with no explanation of long-term trends.
4. "Local MP Comes to Our Defence" (September 2024): Headline and article tone were biased.
5. "Epsom Pensioners Gather Less Winter Fuel Pay" (30 September 2024): The image was inappropriate, and the claims were unsubstantiated.
6. "Surrey School Kids Country Walk" (November 2024): Descriptions of the Conservative-controlled County Council were overly pejorative. **[Ed: This was a BBC report.]**
7. "Epsom Town as a Safe Place to Live": Over-the-top comparisons and unsupported assertions.

Thanks,
Emma Ware

Editor to Emma Ware

Thank you very much.

I appreciate all the comments you make and just want to be certain that you are content for them to be published in full?

It is proving to be challenging to sustain a perfectly balanced micro-sized local news service that seeks to serve the public interest in holding civic powers to account. The previous news services in Epsom and Ewell died over 20 years ago due to the cost of print and journalists. Epsom and Ewell Times joins a growing number of "indies" up and down the country that rely on the volunteer "citizen contributor" model.

"For the community, by the community" effectively means our content reflects the community's input. There maybe the appearance of imbalance arising from the choice or time constraints of other voices. We constantly appeal for more contributors.

The point I am making is that anyone with a criticism or disagreement with any of our published content is always welcome to contribute and within reason will be published. Equally other voices can initiate content.

I am a little surprised you should accuse EET of being a LibDem "mouthpiece" following our very fair and balanced coverage of the General Election candidates.

When Chris was MP we never criticised him and published a number of "Westminster Views" penned by him. Now we have a new and first ever female MP, she was surely entitled to a little honeymoon? And that is over as shown by our publication of a critical letter on her position on the location of a new hospital.

I am not inviting you to re-think but I have to say I think your criticisms are somewhat selective and overall very harsh and they are not shared by the others, including the RA.

Kind regards,
Epsom and Ewell Times

Epsom and Ewell Times adds we have published numerous press releases from Conservative run Surrey County Council extolling its achievements with extensive quotes from Conservative Councillors. We have also frequently quoted Epsom and Ewell's two Conservative Borough Councillors, Bernie Muir and Kieran Persand and hinted at no criticism of their efforts and service.

We hope Emma Ware's reaction post 4th July will not deter a new Conservative undertaking the role of membership of our

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Neutrality Council.

Surrey’s focus on independent lives is “good”.

21 November 2024



Surrey County Council’s adult social care services have been rated as ‘good’ by a health watchdog – despite some inconsistencies. In the local authority’s first ever overall rating, the Care Quality Commission found SCC ‘good’ at keeping people independent for longer in communities.

The new report, published November 20, comes from the CQC’s new responsibilities to assess how local authorities meet their duties under the Care Act. The watchdog assessed SCC in nine areas, including how the local authority works with people, safeguarding and leadership.

The CQC’s report found one of the county council’s strengths was that a “variety of measures were in place to prevent, reduce and delay people’s needs”. People could access information and advice where needed but improvements could be made to streamline this further.

CQC assessment teams reported 70 per cent of the service’s provision should be rated “good”. The report did highlight some areas that needed improvement, which the council said it would be working on.

Sinead Mooney, Surrey County Council’s Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, said: “The dedication of our staff shines through the report and I’d like to thank them publicly for their hard work making a positive difference to the lives of thousands of people in communities across Surrey.

“Our ultimate goal is to deliver the best possible services for Surrey residents and this ‘good’ outcome will help instil confidence in the services and support we are providing and that we are on the right path to making further improvements.”

Partners with SCC gave positive feedback about how the authority worked with them to support people’s independence, according to the report. Data for Surrey showed 86% of people who have received short term support didn’t need ongoing longer-term support which is positive compared to the England and regional average of 78%.

Inspectors praised Surrey for their “ambitious” plans to increase supported living by at least 500 spaces to help encourage people’s independence, choice and control. The council is also working to keep people in their homes for longer and avoid unnecessary hospital admissions, reducing pressure on A&E departments.

Good, but inconsistent

However, the CQC found there was room for improvement. Although a lot of the feedback seemed positive in the report, inspectors noted experiences of receiving care and support in Surrey varied.

The report said: “One person was assessed and felt listened to, achieving the outcome they wanted, which was to return to live at home. Other people had similar good experiences with staff focusing on what people wanted plus their future wishes, people described staff as being empathic and showing them respect.”

Safeguarding was judged to be effective, slightly above the national average, but has some shortcomings. Staff and partners raised concerns about some new safeguarding processes that were not yet fully embedded with knowledge and understanding of some staff.

Staffing challenges were also flagged as an issue, leading to some reviews not carried out in a timely way and leading to a backlog. Partners working with SCC told inspectors the cost of living crisis had affected people on low incomes, and Surrey was an expensive place to live, making it hard to recruit and retain staff and then impact on care services, the report said.

But the report noted SCC has long-term plans to address recruitment challenges which had been created with staff. The local authority stated they were making improvements to manage risks until staffing levels had improved, by making better use of existing resources.

James Bullion, CQC’s chief inspector of adult social care and integrated care, said the county council “should be proud of this assessment and the foundation they’ve created on which to build improvements and further innovation”.

He added: “The local authority was very aware that although Surrey is an affluent county, there are pockets of deprivation where residents have high levels of need and disadvantage. The authority knew of these very differing needs of its population and were doing some creative work to meet those needs and help people keep their independence.”

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Commenting on the report's feedback for improvement, Mrs Mooney said: "As we celebrate this achievement, we also recognise that there are areas where we need to learn and develop and we are actively working to address all feedback from the CQC through comprehensive improvement plans. Our new director of adult social services recently started with us, so we're well-placed to build on this result to further raise the bar for our residents."

Photo: Sinead Mooney, Surrey County Council's Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care *(second from right*), pictured with people who draw and care and support alongside staff from the provider Dramatize, which supports adults with learning disabilities after they leave education, offering a wide range of activities including day provisions and employment and life skills programmes.

Surrey University Launches UN-Affiliated Centre to Tackle Climate Change

21 November 2024



Drastically improving the UK's ability to address climate change is the grand challenge that the new United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)-affiliated CIFAL centre at the University of Surrey will tackle.

CIFAL Surrey will be officially launched on Monday, 25 November, with a ceremonial UN flag raising, a Signing Ceremony and a panel event. In attendance will be a senior delegation from UNITAR, including Alexander Mejia, Head of the CIFAL Global Network and Director of the Division for People and Social Inclusion at UNITAR, other UNITAR delegates, Zöe Franklin, M.P. for Guildford, alongside a range of the university's collaborative partners in business and government.

Drawing on the University's strong research heritage and active engagement in sustainability, the new CIFAL Centre (Centre International de Formation des Autorités et Leaders), known as 'CIFAL Surrey', will work with UNITAR (the UN's training branch) and the CIFAL Global Network among other stakeholders to lead both training and capacity-building initiatives in sustainability. In doing so, CIFAL Surrey will make a unique and much-needed contribution to empowering climate leadership through enhanced climate literacy within and beyond Surrey.

As part of its activities, CIFAL Surrey will work in partnership with national and local government, industry, civil society, and beyond, developing sustainable economic practices, and helping to advance action towards the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

Situated within the University's Institute for Sustainability, CIFAL Surrey will draw strongly on multi-disciplinary expertise in delivering both training and capacity building on a wide range of sustainability challenges, to help facilitate knowledge exchange among leaders in government, the private sector, and civil society – locally, nationally and internationally, as well as UK-based international organisations.

Professor Amelia Hadfield, the University of Surrey's Associate Vice President for External Engagement, and the new Director of CIFAL Surrey, said:

"Sustainability is far more than just a philosophy limited to net zero here at the University of Surrey. For us, and our community, sustainability reflects our deep, shared commitment to rebuilding a thriving planet for future generations. From the fundamentals of climate change to advanced policy implementation, CIFAL Surrey will provide hands-on training and resources to national and local government, businesses, and community groups, helping them deliver on the demands for a more sustainable future.

"Focused on knowledge sharing, skills building and decision-making, CIFAL Surrey will connect local expertise with global insight, fostering collaboration across government, the private sector, civil society, and the United Nations system to drive sustainable progress. As CIFAL Surrey Director, I'm delighted to be working with our own Institute for Sustainability, other CIFAL centres around the world, and UNITAR itself to deliver these critical goals."

CIFAL Surrey is the second UN-affiliated centre on campus, following the 2023 launch of the Centre of Excellence for Ageing, which appointed its first cohort of Fellows in June 2024.

Nathalie Hinds, co-founder of the Institute for Sustainability at the University of Surrey, said:

"If the UK is to be a leader on sustainability, leaders need more than just an awareness of net zero – they need the skills to create real change. CIFAL Surrey's training gives leaders hands-on experience with sustainable practices and governance, focusing on systems thinking and breaking down silos across sectors. Alumni of CIFAL Surrey will leave not only with world-renowned accreditation but they will also be part of a global network of alumni, gaining access to our Sustainability Innovation Hub for insights, research partnerships, and ongoing support."

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Mr Alex Mejia, Division Director at United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), said:

“We are honoured to inaugurate CIFAL Surrey, hosted by the University of Surrey, a renowned global institution at the forefront of innovation and learning. This new centre will mark an important step in our mission to advance sustainable development and capacity-building worldwide. It will serve as a vital hub for fostering collaboration, innovation, and knowledge exchange across the United Kingdom and beyond.”

Deputy Leader and Lead Councillor for Regeneration at Guildford Borough Council, Cllr Tom Hunt, said:

“We are proud to support the launch of CIFAL Surrey and be a key partner in the project. This initiative will play a big role in driving sustainable development. It will give us the chance to work together to share knowledge, improve skills and deliver practical solutions for our communities. One of our key priorities as a council is to create a more sustainable borough. Our partnership with CIFAL gives us a unique opportunity to work alongside local, national and international experts to ensure a bright, sustainable future for Guildford.”

Councillor Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth at Surrey County Council, said:

“It’s a pleasure to be able to welcome the team from the United Nations to launch this new international centre in the heart of Surrey. The CIFAL centre will play a key role in promoting sustainable development at home and abroad while also opening up opportunities for our communities. It also reinforces the region’s global reputation for innovation, research and knowledge exchange.”

Party divide on Surrey solar farm?

21 November 2024



Plans for a Surrey solar farm have been questioned as an MP has called for the government to look again at the “nationally significant” decision. Jeremy Hunt, MP for Godalming and Ash, has supported the request of Compton Parish Council to call in the application.

The University of Surrey was granted permission to build solar panels on a 43-hectare site west of Blackwell Farm, Hog’s Back near Guildford on November 6. In partnership with SEE Energy, the solar farm is said to provide 34% of the University’s current electricity needs. On its own, the facility will increase total renewable energy generation in Surrey by 13%.

Mr Hunt, whose constituency covers the southern and western part of the site, has written to the Minister of Housing, Communities and Local Government Angela Rayner to express his concern on the facility’s impact on the countryside. The southern parts of the site are assessed as meeting National Landscape criteria and recommended for inclusion within the revised part of the Surrey Hills boundary.

In his letter to Mrs Rayner, who is also the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Hunt said he was worried the development “may set a precedent for emerging policy relating to National Landscape land”. He wrote: “Rather than selecting brownfield, this site selected is high value farmland in a geographically significant and nationally important landscape.”

He added: “Given the national importance of this decision, I support the view of Compton Parish Council and CPRE that the application should be called in and determined by a Planning Inspector.”

The secretary of state decides whether to review a planning decision based on government policies after a request to call in has been made. If approved, the Planning Inspectorate will hold a public inquiry into the proposal and produce a recommendation.

Surrey Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) charity also wrote to the deputy PM in November, arguing the decision for the solar farm on green belt land be overturned. John Goodridge, Surrey CPRE chair, raised concerns on the impact of “agricultural land, encroachment on the green belt, harm to ancient woodland, the land’s legal status as candidate for inclusion in the Surrey Hills National Landscape”.

However, Guildford’s MP Zöe Franklin has defended the solar farm plans and she support’s the university’s aims through the investment.

The new Liberal Democrat MP said she “recognise[s] that solar farms can be contentious “important part of providing renewable energy for a sustainable, low-carbon future”. Mrs Franklin said: “This solar farm proposal is a move towards clean, affordable, local energy production and supports our local grid capacity in Guildford and our villages.”

She expressed her confidence in Guildford Borough Council’s planning committee having made the decision in line with planning regulations. But, the Guildford MP added she would also like to see the university include solar installations of their existing buildings and car parks.

A spokesperson for the University of Surrey said: “We are proud to play our part in reducing emissions – not just through this facility, but also through adding solar to the large roof on the Surrey Sports Park, progressing feasibility studies to

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maximise other on-campus generation – for example on our car parks – and a comprehensive energy efficiency programme.

“We hope others will follow our lead, as there is no time to waste in increasing renewable generation to reduce emissions and increase Surrey and UK energy security. This project is firmly in line with local and national planning policy priorities, and we look forward to bringing it on stream in the near future.”

Related report:

Surrey University to get a third of its power from the Sun

£12 million bus boost for Surrey

21 November 2024



Surrey County Council has been allocated £12,074,800 from the Department for Transport, to further improve and protect local buses.

The council will work with bus operators to allocate the funding, which is likely to generate more frequent buses on popular routes, protect services in rural areas and improve punctuality.

The investment will also be used to help Surrey bus services grow their passenger numbers and to support people who rely on them to make essential journeys.

Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Growth at Surrey County Council said, “I’m delighted that Surrey will benefit from this essential funding which will help us to build upon our own significant investment and encourage more people to take the bus.

We’ve recently added 54 new zero emission buses to our fleet, invested £6.3m in more ultra-low and zero emission community transport minibuses, £9m in bus priority measures to ensure Surrey buses turn up on time, and £1.4m in improving information for passengers at bus stops.

Our Surrey LINK card gives young people half-price bus travel and we’ve expanded our on-demand Surrey Connect bus services to cover areas where there are limited fixed bus routes, giving more options to travel by bus for all residents right across Surrey, particularly supporting our rural areas.”

26 million journeys were made by bus in Surrey during 2023.

Epsom and Ewell business Oscars night

21 November 2024



Last night Epsom Social in the Epsom Square hosted the Oscars of local businesses. The annual Epsom and Ewell Business Awards recognised excellence in 9 categories with the cafe in the park “Park View” scooping the Best Overall Winner. The Mayor of Epsom and Ewell **Steve Bridger** bestowing the final prize.

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Park View is a family run business operating in Alexandria Park in Epsom. “Our story began in 2020 with a successful pitch to the Epsom Council for a café in Alexandra Park. Since then, we have worked hard to create a special place, which we have opened to our customers in July 2021. It has become a thriving meeting place for the local community”.

Michaela and Erik of the Your Park View Cafe Team – The Pavilion. Alexandra Park, Epsom, KT17 4BU, proudly hold their awards.

Another notable winner (pictured above) was **Emily Fry**. A local artist with an extensive portfolio of styles and genres. “A key mission of my art is to create unique and passionate work that personally touches my clients. My most common enquiry is pet commissions. With a photo of your beloved companion I will transform them into a unique, personal piece of art. Despite this I am able paint anything from people to animals, cars to trains, buildings to landscapes. I really enjoy having the ability to produce any piece of artwork which means so much to my client.”

The full line up of winners. First **in bold** the winner and runners up in no order below the winner.

The Sponsors:

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Judging Panel:

CLLR NEIL DALLEN, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, JULIE KAPSALIS Chief Executive & Principal at NESCOT, JACKIE KING Chief Executive, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council. KAREN PENGELLY Epsom Bid Manager, PAUL TAYLOR What’s on in Epsom, LEE WIDDOWS University for the Creative Arts, MARY ZOELLER Deputy Lieutenant

Award Categories & Finalists:

BEST RETAIL BUSINESS – Sponsored by Epsom Square:

Randy Cow
Camille
The Secret Garden

BEST INDEPENDENT BUSINESS – Sponsored by Federation of Small Businesses:

Emily Fry Art
Grow Cook Enjoy
The Secret Garden

BEST ENTREPRENEUR -Sponsored by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council:

Dave Weller of Randy Cow
Yolanda Artal
Itay & Zia Zilkha

BEST BUSINESS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE -Sponsored by Amber Group:

Snipperty Do Dahs
Cronos Protection Ltd.
The Personal Agent

COMMITMENT TO THE COMMUNITY – Sponsored by TWM Solicitors:

The Well Being Therapy Hut
All Things Nice
NEAT

BEST BUSINESS FOR FOOD & HOSPITALITY – Sponsored by Epsom Downs Racecourse:

Park View Café
Kornetto
The Secret Garden

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BEST BUSINESS FOR HEALTH & BEAUTY – Sponsored by Nescot:

Honey & Bamboo
Aphrodite Aesthetics
Snipperty Do Dahs

GO EPSOM BEST BUSINESS IN EPSOM TOWN CENTRE – Sponsored by GO Epsom:

Epsom Picturehouse
Epsom Foot Care
White House Health and Wellness Centre

BEST OVERALL WINNER:

PARK VIEW

Proposed Battery Energy Storage System Near Ashtead Common Faces Objections

21 November 2024



Plans to install a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) near Ashtead Common have sparked significant opposition from local conservation groups and residents. The proposed facility, intended to support renewable energy integration and grid stability, has raised environmental and safety concerns, particularly given its proximity to a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Ashtead Common National Nature Reserve.

The Proposal

Bluestone Energy Ltd has submitted plans to Mole Valley District Council for the installation of a BESS facility near Barnett Wood Lane, Ashtead. The project includes underground cabling, access roads, security fencing, and biodiversity enhancements. Proponents argue that the facility is vital for managing energy supply fluctuations, particularly with the increasing reliance on renewable energy sources.

Benefits of BESS Technology

Battery Energy Storage Systems play a crucial role in modern energy infrastructure:

- **Renewable Energy Support:** BESS allows for the storage of solar and wind energy for use during periods of low generation, helping to stabilise energy supply.
- **Grid Stability:** These systems can manage fluctuations in electricity demand, reducing the strain on power grids.
- **Emergency Power:** They provide backup electricity during outages, making them indispensable for critical infrastructure.
- **Environmental Gains:** By reducing reliance on fossil fuel-powered plants, BESS supports the UK’s transition to a low-carbon energy system.

Potential Hazards

Despite their advantages, BESS technology carries significant risks:

- **Fire Hazards:** Lithium-ion batteries, commonly used in these systems, are susceptible to thermal runaway, leading to fires that are difficult to extinguish and can reignite.
- **Environmental Impacts:** Manufacturing and disposal of batteries contribute to pollution if not carefully managed. Additionally, construction can disrupt local ecosystems.
- **Noise and Light Pollution:** Ongoing operations may disturb nearby wildlife and residents.
- **Land Use Concerns:** Large-scale facilities can lead to habitat fragmentation and loss of natural landscapes.

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Objections Raised

1. Environmental Concerns

The City of London Corporation, which manages Ashtead Common, highlights the potential harm to local wildlife, including bat species protected under national and international law. Their letter of objection emphasises the detrimental impact of light, noise, and habitat fragmentation on these species. Ashtead Common is home to ancient oak pollards and biodiversity of national significance, further underscoring the ecological risks.

2. Fire Risks

Ashtead Common has a history of significant biodiversity loss due to wildfires. Objectors express concerns over the fire hazards posed by lithium-ion batteries, particularly given the facility's location and prevailing winds. The proposed water tank is deemed insufficient to address thermal runaway events effectively.

3. Green Belt and Landscape Impact

Councillor Andy Smith notes the intrusion on Green Belt land, citing concerns about coalescence, encroachment, and loss of openness. He argues that such developments undermine the distinct landscape qualities of the countryside and suggests that the facility's location does not align with local conservation goals.

4. Questionable Site Selection

Critics question the necessity of placing the facility adjacent to Ashtead Common when closer alternatives to the Chessington substation could reduce environmental impact and energy loss. They argue that the benefits outlined by the developer are generic to any BESS project and fail to justify the chosen location.

5. Opportunity Cost

The City of London Corporation suggests that the land, currently transitioning to a natural habitat, offers better long-term biodiversity potential if left undisturbed. They challenge the proposed biodiversity net gain enhancements, arguing that natural succession would achieve similar, if not superior, outcomes without artificial intervention.

Public Sentiment

While there is broad acknowledgment of the need for renewable energy infrastructure, local stakeholders believe this project's costs outweigh its benefits. "We need to modernise our energy systems, but not at the expense of our precious natural habitats," commented one resident.

Next Steps

The planning application is under review by Mole Valley District Council. Public and expert feedback will weigh heavily on the decision, particularly given the sensitive location and environmental stakes.

Balancing Progress and Preservation

The debate over the proposed BESS facility near Ashtead Common encapsulates a broader challenge: balancing the urgent need for renewable energy infrastructure with the equally critical imperative to protect natural ecosystems. As local authorities deliberate, the outcome may set a precedent for future developments in similar areas.

Epsom Schools Unite for Children in Need

21 November 2024



Schools across Epsom and Ewell, along with Banstead, joined forces to support this year's **Children in Need** appeal, raising impressive amounts through creative and engaging activities.

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Danetree Primary School – Guess the Bear's Name

At **Danetree Primary School** in West Ewell, children participated in a range of activities designed to both entertain and educate. Younger pupils in Early Years and Key Stage 1 enjoyed a "guess the name of the teddy" competition, while Key Stage 2 students took on the challenge of guessing the number of objects in a jar, with winners taking home the prize-filled jar.

The school also held a non-uniform day, contributing to a fundraising total expected to exceed £800. Reflecting on the event, Reception Class Teacher **Tracy Willemse** highlighted its broader significance:
"Events like this support teaching children about the importance of charities – how they help people in need and promote community values such as diversity, equality, and inclusion."

The Vale Primary School – Spotty Fun and Coin Trails

Staff and pupils at **The Vale Primary School** embraced a spotty theme, donning polka-dotted outfits for their fundraising efforts. The school organised a variety of activities, including a coin trail created from donations brought in by pupils, and a raffle for Pudsey Bear toys donated by the PTA.

Year 6 pupils enthusiastically sold raffle tickets ahead of the event, with winners announced during a celebratory assembly. Classroom activities also helped pupils learn more about the work of Children in Need. The Vale aimed to raise over £500, a testament to the community's generosity.
"Preparing children as active and empathic citizens is central to our ethos," said Co-Headteacher **Cathy Browne**.

Warren Mead School, Banstead – Make Life Lighter

At **Warren Mead School** in Banstead, the theme "Make Life Lighter" inspired a vibrant day of fun-filled activities. Pupils and staff came dressed in costumes ranging from disco outfits to Pudsey Bear-inspired ensembles. The day began with an energetic assembly featuring a "fizzy drinking challenge," setting the tone for the festivities.

Children participated in a **Pudsey Maths Challenge**, treasure hunts, and group art projects, with a focus on mental health and emotional resilience. Younger pupils enjoyed learning the Piggle-Wiggle dance and taking part in a school disco. An after-school fun run brought together staff, parents, and the local community, rounding off a memorable day.

Assistant Headteacher **Jess Moylan** expressed pride in the school's efforts:
"The smiles and camaraderie displayed throughout the day reflected our commitment to fostering compassion, unity, and resilience." Warren Mead aimed to raise £500, building on the success of previous years.

A Collective Effort

All three schools are part of the **GLF Schools Multi-Academy Trust**, which collectively raised thousands for the cause. The enthusiastic participation and creative approaches from Danetree, The Vale, and Warren Mead highlight the local commitment to supporting those in need, while also instilling important values in the next generation.

Community Spirit Shines

Across Epsom and Ewell, these Children in Need events have shown the power of community spirit, creativity, and compassion, making a real difference for children and families in need.

Epsom born baritone to bring requiem to life

21 November 2024



Epsom-born baritone Mark Nathan will feature as one of the soloists in Verdi's Requiem, performed by the Epsom Choral Society on Saturday, 23rd November at 7:30 pm at St Martin's Church, Epsom. Known for his commanding stage presence and dynamic voice, Mark is delighted to perform this dramatic piece with his hometown choir.

Mark Nathan has earned acclaim for roles across opera stages in the UK and Europe. A former Emerging Artist with the Scottish Opera, he has captivated audiences as Joseph de Rocher in Dead Man Walking (Royal Conservatoire of Scotland), which garnered praise for his intense portrayal and powerful baritone. His notable performances also include Schaunard in La Bohème Maximilian in Candide, with Welsh National Opera, Giuseppi in Scottish Opera's The Gondoliers which was televised for BBCTV, the title role of Don Giovanni with Opera Loki, and roles with Garsingto Opera, Waterperry Opera. Critics have celebrated his performances as "commanding" and "emotionally rich," and he continues to expand his repertoire with roles for Scottish Opera and English Touring Opera this season.

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In addition to his operatic work, Mark is an accomplished concert soloist, with oratorio performances that include Vaughan Williams' Five Mystical Songs, Fauré's Requiem, and Saint-Saëns' Requiem. His versatility and vocal warmth make him an ideal choice for Verdi's Requiem, a piece known for its dramatic intensity and sweeping emotional range.

"Performing Verdi's Requiem with the Epsom Choral Society in my hometown is very special," said Mark Nathan. "The power and emotional depth of this music are incomparable, and to share this experience with my community is a privilege."

This special performance by the Epsom Choral Society uses an innovative arrangement by Michael Betzner-Brandt, making Verdi's Requiem more accessible for local ensembles without sacrificing its grandeur. For Mark, who has returned to his roots in Epsom, the opportunity to perform this iconic piece with the Epsom Choral Society is especially meaningful.

For tickets and more details on this powerful evening of music, please visit the Epsom Choral Society website

www.epsomchoral.org.uk .

Event Details:

- Date: Saturday, 23rd November 2024
- Time: 7:30 pm
- Location: St Martin's Church, Church Street, Epsom KT17 4PX
- Tickets: Available online https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/epsom-choral-society/t-ojydkvp

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Surrey Uni to research mono-syllabic complexity

21 November 2024



The University of Surrey is part of an international team of researchers that has been awarded £8.3 million to better understand human language by researching one of the world's most complex linguistic systems.

Thanks to a prestigious Synergy Grant from the European Research Council, the project will explore the West Nilotic languages of East Africa. These languages are able to pack more information into a single syllable than any other known language family. Exactly how such systems could have evolved remains a mystery.

The project brings together experts from the Surrey Morphology Group, the University of Edinburgh, and France's CNRS, in partnership with institutions in the USA, and will engage stakeholders in South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya to ensure wide-reaching impacts, including literacy initiatives.

Professor Matthew Baerman, who leads the project at the Surrey Morphology Group at the University of Surrey, said:

"Our aim is to discover how West Nilotic languages evolved structures of such complexity, and just as importantly, why other languages did not. It's a puzzle that could reshape how we think about the cognitive limits of human language."

The team's approach combines traditional fieldwork with cutting-edge experimental techniques to reconstruct the historical evolution of these languages. The findings promise to have far-reaching implications, offering new insights into the possible and impossible in human language evolution.

Professor Erich Round, Research Centre Leader of the Surrey Morphology Group. said:

"The Surrey Morphology Group has carried out world-leading research into the wonders of human language for over thirty years. We are delighted to have secured our second major grant from the European Research Council in two years, and our third since the Council's establishment in 2007. Most of all, we're thrilled to bring to the world's attention some of humanity's most astounding and illuminating linguistic systems."

Professor Baerman continued:

"The languages we find in the world today represent just a small fraction of what must have existed over the course of history, meaning much remains to be discovered about the full potential of human language. West Nilotic gives us the means to uncover this potential."

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Faces and People (Sudan) a west-Nilotic language License details

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Surrey University to get a third of its power from the Sun

21 November 2024



Permission has been granted for The University of Surrey to build a solar farm on green belt land. The scheme will provide the university with 34 per cent of its electricity, helping reach its net zero carbon emissions targets by 2030.

Working in partnership with SSE Energy Solutions, the university has proposed to place 22,410 solar panels across three fields on the Hogs Back in Guildford. The 12.21 megawatt farm will provide electricity directly to the university by a 50m underground cable link, zig-zagging to a substation on the Stag Hill campus.

After rigorously debating for over an hour, members of Guildford Borough Council's (GBC) planning committee approved the scheme on November 6. A majority of nine councillors voted in favour, with four against and two abstentions.

Cllr Joss Bigmore said it was an "incredibly difficult decision", boiling it down to the "substantial benefits" of renewable energy versus "some of the highest landscape protection areas".

Despite the students' union supporting the scheme, the application attracted over a hundred objections from residents, and 15 other groups. Speakers at the meeting vocalised their anxiety that the harm to the green belt and Area of Great Landscape Value had been "downplayed" by planning officers and feared approval would open the floodgates.

Cllr Pat Oven raised issues with the solar panels being used on agricultural land, arguing: "You can't grow crops on any old land but you can graze sheep anywhere; we need to grow food in this country."

Planning agent Paul Rogers told the committee it is "financially essential" the university decarbonises its energy supply. He added: "A stable university is critical to a thriving Guildford". Councillors heard that the university's energy costs have increased significantly, soaring from £4m to £17m per year.

Will Davies, Chief Operating Officer for the University of Surrey, said: "This solar facility is critically important for our University and the wider Guildford community – helping us to deliver on our commitment to achieve net zero by 2030, while also enhancing our financial stability and energy security after the price shocks caused by the energy crisis.

"Our modest scheme will boost the county of Surrey's renewable energy generation capacity by 13%. It will be delivered alongside wider plans to add solar to University rooftops and car parks, and a package of measures to increase our energy efficiency in general."

Set to go live in 2025, the solar farm will be in operation for 35 years before being decommissioned back to a field.

Image: Solar Power farm unrelated to University

Surrey Police HQ redesign will quieten the dogs

21 November 2024

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Plans to redevelop Surrey Police headquarters, at Mount Browne, have been given the go-ahead. The changes also include a new access road which the Force say will speed up response times from Mount Browne by two minutes.

The significant modifications to the police's home include demolition and rebuilding of the dog school, accommodation for Police students, and a new Contact and Deployment centre, a multi-storey car park with electrical charging points.

Members of Guildford Borough Council (GBC) planning committee unanimously approved both applications on November 6. Councillors praised the application for the compactness of the development, with no overall height increase and limited harm to the Green Belt.

One of the applications included a new western arm to Artington Roundabout, which the Force says will reduce traffic on neighbouring roads like Sandy Lane and The Ridges.

Straight through the middle of an open field, officers highlighted the new access road would be visible and harm the Green Belt as well as agricultural land. However, they also noted even small improvements in Police response times can have a large positive impact on how emergencies can be handled.

The second application relates to the redevelopment and modernisation of the site, including demolition and construction of operational buildings, as well as internal refurbishment of the old building, corridor wing and sports building.

Mount Browne, on the outskirts of Guildford, has been the headquarters for Surrey Police for over 70 years. The current campus contains a large number of buildings which have been constructed mainly on a piecemeal basis and are judged no longer fit for purpose by the Force.

The benefits of the scheme include high quality facilities to meet the ongoing operational needs of the Police, as well as staff retention and well-being, according to the report. Replacing the dog kennels was also said to provide significant improvements to operations. Officers told the committee that currently all the training dogs can see each other in the kennels, so if one dog barks "they all go off".

Surrey's Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Lisa Townsend has welcomed the decision, calling it a "significant milestone for the Force". A six-week judicial review period now awaits before Surrey Police can take decisions on the next steps.

Mrs Townsend added: "Mount Browne has been Surrey Police's home for over 70 years, but the buildings here are run down, expensive to maintain and simply no longer meet the requirements of a modern police force."

The PCC and Surrey Police's Chief Officer decided in 2021 that the Force should remain at Mount Browne, on the edge of Guildford, rather than seek a new location.

Image – unrelated dog in a kennel

Epsom and Ewell College wins Surrey's employer of the year

21 November 2024



Nescot college in Reigate Road, Ewell, won "Employer of the Year' at the Surrey Business Awards last night, against some stiff competition. (NESCOT stands for North-East Surrey College of Technology.)

The **Surrey Business Awards**, which took place at G Live in Guildford, is the largest event of its kind and the most

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prestigious in the county. Winners were chosen by a distinguished panel of judges, consisting of industry experts and influential business leaders.

Nescot has an annual turnover of £25m and is one of the largest employers in East Surrey, supporting over 7,000 learners and 500 businesses each year. The award highlights that Nescot's greatest asset is its staff, who work 365 days a year (the farm never closes!) to ensure that the 60-acre site is fully functioning and providing high quality training and facilities.

Nescot is rightly proud of its work culture and its leadership, with 650 staff who support thousands of learners each year, but also have the opportunity to learn, develop and progress in their careers.

Julie Kapsalis, CEO and Principal at Nescot said "We're over the moon to win the 'Employer of the Year' award. Nescot is a unique and special place to work and our investment in staff wellbeing and professional development is a key priority. We have an incredible community of dedicated staff who share our vision and work tirelessly, for both our students and our staff. This award is for them."

Julie was also recognised personally last night with a nomination for 'Businessperson of the Year' as a result of her work both within the college and externally.

As well as her role at Nescot, she has been Chair of the Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) for the last four years and on the Board for over a decade. The role helped to oversee £275 million of investment in the region which supports infrastructure, skills, heritage and businesses. For the past three years she also served as Chair of Catalyst South – a group of six LEPs covering the South East as a direct voice to Government. Julie is also a director, trustee, advisor and mentor and already has awards under her belt for inspirational leadership, corporate social responsibility and being a community hero.

In addition to the award win and nomination, Nescot was also a proud sponsor of the 'Future Talent of the Year' award at the event, attended by business leaders and guests from across Surrey.

Anyone interested in joining the team at 'Employer of the Year' – Nescot, can visit www.nescotcareers.co.ukor email jobs@nescot.ac.uk

Photo: Nescot team: Donna Patterson – Chief People Officer, Andy Cowan – Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality, Julie Kapsalis – Principal and CEO and Sarah Watson – Chief Operating Officer.

Sir Ed supporting Epsom based Ukraine charities

21 November 2024



Today, Sir Ed Davey MP, leader of the resurgent Liberal Democrat Party, accompanied by Epsom and Ewell MP Helen Maguire, visited the "Ukraine Hub". Offices generously provided by the owners of the Ashley Centre and where Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has waived all business rates.

The premises are home to the Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network and Surrey Stands With Ukraine.

Sir Ed was introduced to the leaders of the refugee network, Nina Kaye and Jo Sherring, who told him of the hardships faced by refugees fleeing persecution and conflict. He saw English classes in session and shook hands with many refugee students.

The Party leader and new MP were given a tour of the Hub and took part in packing winter survival packs for Ukraine. Costing £50 the smart packs contain a gas cooker, a power bank and a flexible re-chargeable torch. Essential items fo civilians effected by the inevitable power outages that will occur this winter throughout Ukraine.

If you wish to donate please visit Surrey Stands With Ukraine and businesses that sponsor full packs will benefit from the charity's extensive social media coverage.

Sir Ed then helped pack some survival kits and proceeded to help clean walking aids the charity is sending to Ukraine.

The Hub was full of volunteers for both charities who work closely together and a press posse was all around.

Sir Ed undertook a series of interviews with media representatives and fielded questions ranging from the election of Donald Trump to the future for Ukraine.

Image: Sir Ed Davey MP and Helen Maguire MP and Roy Deadman of SSWU in Epsom's Ukraine HUB

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