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Limits on AI use? County Council confronts the challenge

13 October 2026



Surrey councillors and officers could soon be barred from using online AI tools such as Gemini and ChatGPT under new rules around the burgeoning tech's use.

A Surrey County Council AI policy has been put forward, which aims to set out when it is appropriate and inappropriate to use artificial intelligence for council business.

The draft document, which was reviewed by a council committee ahead of final approval, demands that AI users must only utilise approved tools and softwares for council business.

Gemini and ChatGPT are explicitly listed as examples of tools accessed directly via the internet – which would not be permitted under the new regulations.

The new policy comes following a motion from October 2025 that called on Surrey County Council to present an AI policy in response to the technology's rapidly growing use.

While guidance on its use already existed for the council's members and officers, this is the authority's first formal policy on the matter.

Other inappropriate uses of AI listed include using it to make decisions that affect people "without human oversight" and generating false or misleading information.

It also prohibits the use of AI that results in discrimination on the basis of protected characteristics, breaching data protection or unlawfully accessing sensitive information.

The policy says: "Where AI is used for general business purposes, users must use Microsoft Copilot Chat or Copilot 365 (or other SCC-authorised tools) rather than consumer tools such as Gemini or ChatGPT, due to data-security concerns.

"Approved tools have been risk-assessed and have existing SCC guardrails and oversight."

The council instead says assistance with "routine administrative tasks" is an example of where AI can be used within the rules – such as summarising reports and scheduling meetings.

It also says the tech can be used to generate meeting minutes so long as they are clearly labelled as AI-assisted.

Summarising public consultation responses and improving workflow efficiency are also on the list of approved uses.

Breaches of the rules set out in this policy would be treated as misconduct, according to the document, which could result in disciplinary action for employees or other contractual consequences for agency workers and contractors.

Surrey County Council's resources and performance select committee put forward recommendations around the policy – including that it be shared with the future West and East Surrey council, which will take over responsibility in April 2027.

The recommendations also called for strengthening the policy around training for the tech's use and considering AI's environmental impact.

If adopted, the policy would be reviewed on an annual basis – or sooner if required, such as if it needed to be brought in line with any prospective national laws or regulations.

Last October's motion, proposed by Councillor Jonathan Essex (Green Party: Redhill East) called for transparency about where AI is used and for awareness as to the energy and environmental impact of the technology.

"The energy use and wider environmental footprint associated with server farm capacity used by AI is significant," the motion reads.

The policy is expected to be discussed and finalised by Surrey County Council's cabinet following the committee's recommendations.

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

Jim Al-Khalili to delve into the mysteries of time at

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Guildford Book Festival

13 October 2026



Acclaimed physicist and broadcaster, Professor Jim Al-Khalili, will join fellow University of Surrey astrophysicist, Dr Noelia Noël, at the Guildford Book Festival for a conversation exploring one of science's greatest mysteries: the nature of time.

Taking place on Tuesday evening, 13 October, at Guildford Baptist Church, the event will centre on Professor Al-Khalili's new book, On Time: The Physics That Makes the Universe Tick.

The book explores questions that have puzzled philosophers and scientists for thousands of years, including whether time had a beginning and if it will have an end, why it appears to flow towards the future rather than the past, whether it can be stretched, squeezed or even reversed – and, at the deepest level, whether time itself is real.

In a conversation with host Dr Noël, Professor Al-Khalili will take audiences on a journey through physics, philosophy and cosmology, unpacking what modern science can tell us about something that governs every moment of our lives yet remains mysterious.

Professor Al-Khalili said:

"Time is something we all experience, but the deeper you look, the stranger it becomes. Quantum mechanics, relativity and thermodynamics all give us different ways of understanding what time is and how it works. That's what makes it such a fascinating mystery – we live our whole lives by it, yet there is still so much we don't understand."

Professor Al-Khalili is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Physics at Surrey, a Fellow of the Royal Society and one of the UK's best-known science communicators. He has written numerous popular science books, presented television documentaries and is best known for his long-running BBC Radio 4 programme The Life Scientific.

Dr Noelia Noël is a Senior Lecturer in Astrophysics at the University of Surrey's School of Mathematics and Physics. She has received multiple awards and recognition for her work, including a prestigious 2026 Leadership Fellowship in Public Engagement from the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC), recognising her contributions to astrophysics and sustainable space research, as well as her commitment to creating more inclusive pathways into science.

Dr Noël said:

"Jim has a wonderful ability to make some of the biggest questions in physics accessible, exciting and relevant to everyone. Time is something we all think we understand because we experience it every day, yet in physics it quickly becomes wonderfully strange. I'm really looking forward to exploring those ideas with Jim and sharing the conversation with audiences here in Guildford."

The ticketed event, Jim Al-Khalili in conversation with Dr Noelia Noel – On Time, is dedicated to the memory of Patricia Grayburn, in recognition of her strong and lasting connection with the University of Surrey.

Surrey University

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Latest news from Surrey County Council

13 October 2026

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Surrey County Council has issued a flurry of announcements covering school environmental projects, a major Government-backed reform of special educational needs provision and the future of Council Tax support when Surrey's new unitary authorities take over next April.

For Epsom and Ewell residents, the most immediately relevant development may be a consultation on how Council Tax Reduction will operate under the new East Surrey Council from 1 April 2027.

Council Tax support under the new East Surrey Council

Residents are being invited to comment on proposals for the Council Tax Reduction scheme which will apply when Epsom and Ewell Borough Council and the other existing councils in eastern Surrey disappear next year.

At present Surrey's 11 district and borough councils each operate their own Council Tax Reduction scheme. Eligibility and the amount of help available can therefore vary depending on where somebody lives.

From 1 April 2027 those councils, together with Surrey County Council, will be replaced by East Surrey Council and West Surrey Council. Each of the two new authorities will consequently require a single Council Tax Reduction scheme for its entire area.

Council Tax Reduction is intended to help people on low incomes or receiving certain benefits by reducing the amount of Council Tax they have to pay.

Draft schemes for both new authorities have now gone out to consultation. Surrey County Council says no final decisions have been made and existing support will continue while consultation takes place.

The East Surrey consultation runs from 7 October until 3 December 2026, with current recipients of Council Tax Reduction and organisations supporting them particularly encouraged to respond.

East Surrey Shadow Councillor Andy Burton, portfolio holder for finance and resources, said residents' responses would help decision-makers assess the effects of the proposals before a final scheme is agreed.

The exercise is one of the many pieces of administrative plumbing required before Surrey County Council and the borough and district councils cease to exist next April. Services which are currently administered differently across council boundaries will have to be combined into common systems for each of Surrey's two new authorities.

Government approves Surrey SEND reform plan

Meanwhile, the Department for Education has approved Surrey's three-year Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Reform Plan.

The Government told Surrey that its plan had met the required threshold and provided a basis for moving into implementation.

Of substantial financial significance is the Council's eligibility for an indicative £205.2 million High Needs Stability Grant. SCC says this represents 90 per cent of the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit accumulated up to the end of the 2025/26 financial year.

The scale of the problem is considerable. Surrey County Council's more recent budget monitoring has referred to a cumulative Dedicated Schools Grant deficit of around £238 million, against which approximately £205 million of Government stability funding was anticipated.

The reform programme is intended to place greater emphasis on earlier intervention and supporting more children with additional needs within mainstream education.

One element, called "Experts at Hand", is intended to bring specialists including educational psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and specialist teachers closer to mainstream schools and colleges. Surrey's Cabinet was told in July that £8.3 million would be available in 2026/27 for this part of the programme.

The wider plan includes increasing the SEND workforce, expanding provision, improving governance and seeking better transitions for young people entering adulthood.

Government approval was not, however, an unqualified endorsement. The Department for Education said further work was required on delivery capacity, partnership working and governance, together with clearer measures of success, post-16 pathways, co-production with families and assessment of future early-years and specialist provision requirements.

SCC Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning Cllr Helyn Clack said the Council would now move from planning into delivery.

The success of that delivery will matter more to families than approval of the plan itself, particularly against a

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longstanding background of pressure on specialist places, Education Health and Care Plans and Surrey's high-needs education budget.

Surrey tops Eco-Schools table

On a rather different educational front, Surrey says it has retained the highest number of Eco-Schools Green Flag awards of any English local authority area for the fourth year running.

More than 200 Surrey schools are taking part in the Eco-Schools programme, with 105 achieving Green Flag status, its highest accreditation.

SCC says about 55,500 pupils are involved, including around 1,900 pupil eco-leaders. Projects range from wildlife-friendly areas and plastic-free lunches to sustainable food, monitoring energy use and encouraging active travel.

According to figures supplied by the Council, participating schools over the past year diverted 362,452kg of waste from landfill and saved 61,107kWh of electricity and 152,223kWh of gas.

The County Council has supported the Eco-Schools programme for 13 years and says it has also provided more than £120,000 in grants during the past 12 months to help schools become more resilient to the effects of climate change.

Marisa Heath, SCC Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning, described the Green Flag results as evidence of the work being undertaken by Surrey school communities, while Cllr Clack said environmental projects also allowed children to develop knowledge and skills which could benefit their schools and wider communities.

Taken together, the three announcements illustrate the unusually broad range of responsibilities still resting with Surrey County Council during its final months – from children with complex educational needs and environmental education to preparations for the entirely new local government structure that will replace it on 1 April 2027.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Image credit SCC

Leatherhead boy's circus dream takes him onto European stage

13 October 2026



A 13-year-old Leatherhead boy who once strapped balloons to himself in an attempt to fly has been selected as the only UK performer at this month's European Youth Circus in Germany.

Olivier Wehbe will perform his award-winning pirate-themed aerial silks act in Wiesbaden from 22 to 25 October. He is also the youngest artist selected for the festival.

The international audition process attracted 152 applications from 23 European countries, with 25 acts from 11 nations chosen to appear. The festival brings together circus artists aged 12 to 25, performing before an international audience and a professional jury.

For Olivier, who dreams of joining Cirque du Soleil, the invitation marks another step in a journey that began with gymnastics classes at Leatherhead & Dorking Gymnastics Club when he was five.

He later discovered aerial and circus arts at Acrosphere Circus Studio in Brockham, where he trains with Katherine and Igor Karpovich, both former Cirque du Soleil performers.

Under their guidance, he has developed skills in aerial silks, straps and hoop, combining demanding physical routines with characters ranging from a French mime to a sinister clown and a pirate.

Olivier is now homeschooled, allowing him to balance his education with intensive training and performance commitments.

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His international achievements include gold on straps and bronze in aerial silks at the Madrid Aerial Art International Competition in 2025. His gold-winning routine featured a French mime character, while his bronze medal came with a creepy clown performance. He was seven years younger than the next youngest competitor in his straps category.

Earlier this year, he won gold, the Overall Best title and the Best Tricks award at the International Pole & Aerial Art Tournament with an aerial hoop act.

He also performed at Zirkusfest in Hückelhoven, Germany, in October 2025, where his silks routine earned him a place in the festival's final gala. His pirate-themed act has won several UK competitions.

Alongside his regular training, Olivier has attended workshops with a current Cirque du Soleil artist performing in KURIOS, giving him an insight into the professional circus world he hopes to join.

His coaches said: "Olivier has worked incredibly hard to get to this point. His dedication, perseverance and commitment to his art have really paid off."

They added: "We've watched him progress from local competitions, shows and in-house events to national and international stages, and we couldn't be prouder of him.

"This is such an exciting next step in his journey. He has a bright future ahead of him, and we are all incredibly proud to see him representing the UK on such an important international stage."

For Olivier, the appeal lies as much in storytelling as in the aerial skills themselves.

"I feel so excited and so proud to be representing the UK. Performing is all I want to do. I train really hard and I'm always thinking of ways to develop and create new ways to express myself and bring characters to life without saying a single word," he said.

"I feel incredibly lucky to have such amazing coaches who have believed in me and supported me from the very beginning. Their hard work, creative guidance and encouragement have helped me develop not only as a performer, but also as an artist."

His fascination with flight began long before his first circus lesson.

"When I was three, I strapped balloons to myself because I wanted to fly. I really believed I could, and I was always trying to find a way to make it happen. Now I actually can!

"I get to soar high above audiences and bring my characters to life, and it makes me so happy to be able to share that with people.

"My dream is to work for Cirque du Soleil."

Lionel Blackman

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council publishes final Annual Report

13 October 2026



Today, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has published its 2025/26 Annual Report, marking the authority's final annual report before local government reorganisation and reflecting on almost 90 years of service to residents.

The report showcases both the council's achievements over the last financial year and key moments from its history since the Borough of Epsom and Ewell was established in 1937.

The council will be 90 years old when it is dissolved ahead of East Surrey Council's Vesting Day on 1 April 2027.

The report highlights key achievements over the past year, including:

- setting a balanced budget for 2026/27 without cuts to services
- allocating more than £1.6 million to Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) projects supporting local infrastructure and community organisations
- determining around 94% of planning applications within statutory timescales, including 100% of major applications

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- progressing the borough's Local Plan through Public Examination, helping to shape how future development is managed while protecting the borough's green spaces, heritage and character
- progressing the council's Climate Change Action Plan through energy-efficiency improvements and renewable energy investment
- preventing or relieving homelessness for 525 households and supporting vulnerable residents through housing and home improvement services
- launching new health and wellbeing initiatives for young people and families across the borough.

As well as highlighting the council's work during 2025/26, the report celebrates 90 years of local government in Epsom & Ewell, featuring notable milestones from the borough's history, including the creation of the borough in 1937, the establishment of Bourne Hall and the council's support for residents through national events including the Second World War and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Jackie King, Chief Executive of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, said:

"This Annual Report is a particularly significant one, as it will be the last published by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council before the authority becomes part of the new East Surrey unitary council in April 2027.

"While the report highlights the achievements of the past year, it is also an opportunity to reflect on almost 90 years of public service and the people who have made that possible.

"Over nine decades, generations of councillors, officers, volunteers and community partners have helped shape Epsom & Ewell into the thriving borough it is today. As we enter a period of significant change for this borough and Surrey as a whole, this report recognises the lasting legacy they leave behind.

"It has been an honour to serve this borough and I hope residents will enjoy looking back on the council's history as we prepare for the next chapter of local government in Surrey."

Hannah Dalton, Leader of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, added:

"This report is an opportunity to reflect on 90 years of service to our communities and the lasting contribution the council has made to life in Epsom & Ewell.

"Since the council was established in 1937, it has been led by the Residents' Association, with a strong focus on local priorities and community values. As we prepare for local government reorganisation, I am proud of what has been achieved by generations of councillors, officers and community partners working together on behalf of residents.

"While this chapter is coming to a close, the legacy of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council and the strong sense of local identity that defines our borough will endure."

The report is available on the council's website at: Epsom & Ewell Annual Report 2025/26 | Epsom and Ewell Borough Council.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

Bust mains, bust company?

13 October 2026



A burst main that is leaking up to 750 litres of water every second has cause widespread outages across north east Surrey and forced a raft of school closures.

The issue, affecting Molesey, Esher, and the surrounding areas, was first reported at about 5am but the Local Democracy Reporting Service understands the leak is still ongoing and the valve has yet to be switched off.

Esher and Walton MP Monica Harding has described the widespread problem affecting her constituency as a massive failing of Thames Water saying years of under-investment in its infrastructure has once again hit residents.

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Shops in the towns have run out of bottled water and huge tankers have been brought in to help top up the mains – but even these have run dry.

The Wilderness area of Molesey is underwater and is thought to be the source of the leak, but as of 9.30am water was continuing to flood the playing fields.

Mrs Harding said: “The whole of the Wilderness is flooded, I’m at the perimeter of Island Barn where the leak is.

“My understanding is the leak was first reported at about 5am this morning but it took Thames Water a while to find it.

“It’s still flowing, they haven’t turned off the valves.

“It’s because Thames Water doesn’t have data loggers and they were scrabbling around to find it.

“This is an infrastructure failing, the regulators haven’t done their jobs for years and the money has been sucked out of Thames Water.”

As yet, no decision has been taken on whether to set up bottle stations, or how long the problem will last.

Some suspect the issue could become more commonplace as rainfall returns; the long dry summer has left the ageing pipe network in a brittle state and the system is not resilient enough to cope.

Mrs Harding added: “The teams working on the pipes have been brilliant, they’ve been working really hard but they are dealing with the fallout of a failed infrastructure.”

Thames Water has been approached for comment.

In a statement the firm had previously said: “We are sorry customers in parts of south west London do not have any water or are experiencing lower pressure than normal this morning. Our engineers have located the leak and doing everything they can to ensure water is back on as soon as possible.

“The latest updates will be posted on our website, thameswater.co.uk.”

Chris Caulfield Local Democracy Reporter

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Esher and Molesey water outage – tankers are being used to top up the mains and shops have run out of bottled water (image Chris Caulfield)

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Related EET reports

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Epsom students enter the Dragons’ Den and secure Tycoon Competition success

13 October 2026



Four Business students at Nescot College in Epsom recently joined Peter Jones at a charity day, following their success in the national Tycoon Enterprise Competition. As part of their course, the students created a business concept and

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presented it Dragons' Den style to five local business leaders. Their product impressed and generated enough income to secure them third place in the national competition.

Students on the Nescot Business and Entrepreneurship course had to create a business, research the market, launch a product and try to make as many sales as possible. The winning students – Reem Abid, Johnny Connolly, Nathan Dean and Mattie Ray – created The WalkBottle, a 3 in 1, double insulated dog water bottle with two detachable bowls for food, water, or to carry treats.

Earlier in the course, a variety of local businesses supported the competition and the college by offering up 'dragons', to review each group's business idea and pitches, giving feedback on each one. Matt Thomas – CEO and Founder of Matthew Thomas Garden Design, Andi Drishi – Director and Owner at HICL Builders, Jon Skinner – CEO and Founder at Glow Homes, Lance Harris – National Sector Lead at Ministry of Justice UK and Vanessa McCormack – Hub Manager at the Epsom and Ewell Hub all gave up their time to help motivate and encourage the students as they competed not just with their coursemates, but also against groups nationwide.

Securing third place in the national Tycoon Enterprise Competition saw the team invited to the Peter Jones Foundation Charity Clay Pigeon Shoot earlier this month at the prestigious Holland & Holland Shooting Grounds. They were able to meet Peter and run a promotional stall during an afternoon showcase, to present their products, branding and entrepreneurial journey to guests.

Julie Kapsalis MBE, CEO and Principal at Nescot College said "I am so proud of our students, who pushed themselves out of their comfort zone and created a credible business, which beat hundreds of others across the country. I want to thank the Peter Jones Foundation and the local businesses who supported them by offering up their experienced, inspiring leaders to act as 'dragons' in our Nescot den. Our students learned a huge amount and could absolutely be tycoons of the future. We've provided a launchpad and I'm looking forward to seeing them fly."

Peter Jones CBE said: "My Foundation has been helping to empower young people for over 20 years. With so many challenges facing school leavers, it's more important than ever to provide young people with support to help them fulfill their potential. Charity days allow us to raise vital funds – every pound raised will support the Foundation's work to transform the lives of young people and particularly those at disadvantage, giving them the skills, confidence and opportunities to dream big and build brighter futures."

Samantha Carey, Curriculum Manager for Catering, Business and Travel at Nescot, said: "This was an incredible opportunity for our students, and I'm hugely grateful to the Peter Jones Foundation, as well as the dedicated employers who generously gave their time to support them. Experiences like this not only help students develop their confidence, skills and professionalism, but also provide valuable networking opportunities, enabling them to build connections with industry professionals and gain insight into future career pathways. Seeing our students grow in confidence and realise their potential is incredibly rewarding, and it's exactly why I chose a career in teaching."

Students on the business course can now enter the National Entrepreneur of the Year competition, also run by the Peter Jones Foundation, which allows 16 – 21-year-olds to launch or scale a business.

The Business and Entrepreneurship course hones maths skills, teamwork, communication and critical thinking. It also promotes confidence and resilience as students take on the presentations, networking and promotion.

Nescot offers a range of courses for school leavers and adults, including Motor Vehicle, Animal Care, Hair & Beauty, Computing and IT, Performing Arts, Childcare and Health & Social Care. To find out more about studying at Nescot call 020 8394 3038, visit www.nescot.ac.uk or email adviceteam@nescot.ac.uk

The WalkBottle can be bought on Ebay:https://www.ebay.co.uk/usr/thewalkbottle

NESCOT

Image: Peter Jones, Tom Kerridge and Touker Suleyman show off The Walk Bottle, alongside the student entrepreneurs from Nescot.

Surrey Uni to probe Moon dust for rocket fuel

13 October 2026



Could magnesium found in Moon dust help future spacecraft travel further into deep space? A new European Space Agency (ESA)-funded project led by the University of Surrey aims to find out.

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Researchers at the prestigious Surrey Space Centre are working with UK propulsion company Eos Space Technology Ltd to investigate whether the metal magnesium can be extracted from lunar regolith (the loose rock and dust covering the Moon) and used as a solid propellant for electric propulsion.

Electric propulsion systems can use gases such as xenon and krypton, but they would need to be transported from Earth. Producing propellant from materials already available on the Moon could reduce this reliance and potentially support future deep space exploration and cislunar commercial activity.

However, using metals such as magnesium in conventional Hall-effect thrusters (a type of electric propulsion system that uses electrically charged particles to generate thrust) presents several challenges, including condensation, unstable plasma and erosion of the channel through which the plasma travels.

The nine-month MAGPIE project (MAGnesium Propulsion from In-Situ Extraction on the Moon) aims to tackle these barriers by testing a novel Hall thruster design and assessing, from extraction through to propulsion, whether lunar-sourced magnesium could become a viable propellant for future spacecraft.

Dr Sungwoo Lim, Principal Investigator of MAGPIE, and Senior Lecturer in Space Applications, Exploration and Instrumentation at the Surrey Space Centre, University of Surrey, said:

“The exciting question behind MAGPIE is whether spacecraft could one day use a resource that is already available on the Moon instead of having to carry all of their propellant from Earth.

“We are proposing to melt the regolith and dust to see if it is possible to extract usable magnesium on the Moon’s surface. Using the specialist facilities here at Surrey Space Centre, we will confirm the effect of changes on how thrusters perform and will develop a way of feeding in magnesium.”

The research team will assess how much magnesium could be obtained from different types of lunar regolith, test ways of extracting it and develop a system for feeding the metal into an electric thruster. They will then test how the thruster performs with different propellants and how tolerant it is to impurities in the magnesium.

Dr Szymon Dworski, CEO and Co-Founder at Eos Space, said:

“We will provide the first dataset grounded in actual experimentation which links lunar extraction pathways to a functional thruster architecture. We hope to define the feasibility envelope for metallic-propellant electric propulsion, which will enable future lunar mobility and orbital logistics concepts that do not rely on propellants that are launched from Earth.”

Running from September 2026 to May 2027, the MAGPIE project is backed by £112,795 in funding through the European Space Agency’s Open Space Innovation Platform (OSIP), which supports novel ideas for new space technologies and applications.

Surrey University

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Epsom and Ewell’s New Local Plan sites advance amid clash over scrutiny and cost

13 October 2026



Epsom and Ewell’s Local Plan moved closer to public consultation on Tuesday 22 September, but cllrs clashed over proposed Green Belt development, decisions taken without committee debate and a government requirement to begin

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another plan before the borough council is abolished.

The Licensing and Planning Policy Committee voted **six to three** to recommend that Full Council approve a consultation lasting at least six weeks on modifications proposed by the Planning Inspector. Full Council has yet to make that decision; the council expects it to meet next month.

The modifications include **12 additional urban sites and four additional Green Belt sites**. Proposals for the latter include at least **530 homes at Downs Farm** and **275 at Priest Hill**. Planning officers said land south of College Road at Downs Farm would remain in the Green Belt for open space, routes and playing pitches. They said the Sutton and Epsom Rugby Football Club playing fields were outside the proposed Priest Hill allocation.

Who chose the additional sites?

Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development Ian Mawer told the committee that many changes to the plan's policies arose from examination hearings. Following a further hearing in July, he said, the Inspector's programme officer asked the council to draft modifications for 12 urban sites and subsequently confirmed which Green Belt sites to include.

"The main modifications are those that the inspector considers are necessary to make the plan sound," Mr Mawer said. "They must be consulted on as they are presented."

Cllr **Christine Howells** (Independent Nonsuch) challenged the absence of a further decision by elected members on the sites. "At no time did elected councillors agree to these material changes, both to the evidence base and the proposals for the local plan," she told the committee.

Cllr **Bernie Muir** (Conservative Horton) raised concerns about flooding assessments, school capacity and traffic. Cllr **Steven McCormick** (Conservative Woodcote and Langley Vale) criticised the opportunity members had been given to scrutinise the changes, calling them "an unprecedented sacrifice of our green belt".

The dispute concerned both the proposed development and the process that brought it before the committee. Officers said the Inspector had requested the draft modifications as part of the examination. Members were told they could recommend whether the modifications went out to consultation, but could not rewrite the Inspector's proposals beforehand.

The committee voted **seven to two** to note the modifications and **six to three** to recommend consultation. It then voted **five to four** on each of two delegations: allowing Mr Mawer, in consultation with the committee chair, to make further amendments required by the Inspector after consultation and to update the Local Plan timetable.

The Inspector will consider responses before issuing a final report. If the plan is found sound, Full Council will still have to decide whether to adopt it.

No affordable homes completed in 2025–26

The committee also agreed, by **eight votes to one**, to publish its Authority Monitoring Report. It records **37 homes completed in the borough during 2025–26, none of them affordable**. The council cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of housing land.

Cllr McCormick described the report as "an annual health check on our borough's planning performance" that showed a serious shortfall. Cllr **Julian Freeman** (LibDem College) focused on younger residents priced out of housing. "My own children can't even imagine owning their own home," he said.

Cllr **Neil Dallen** (RA Town) agreed that delivery was a problem but said the council could not force developers to build homes for which they had permission. Mr Mawer also pointed to building costs, market conditions and the limited number of large sites ready for development.

Urgent decisions challenged

Earlier in the meeting, members examined EEBC's responses to Local Plan consultations by neighbouring Tandridge and Kingston. Both had already been submitted using urgent decision procedures. The committee was asked to note them afterwards and did so in each case by **five votes to three, with one abstention**.

Cllr McCormick called the Tandridge decision a "fait accompli". He said its consultation had been open for weeks and asked why members had not been convened to consider a response. Cllr Kieran Persand (Conservative Horton) repeatedly questioned why a special committee meeting had not been arranged.

Committee chair Cllr **Peter O'Donovan** (RA Ewell Court) said he had been advised that the response needed to be submitted and had agreed to it. Asked why a meeting had not been called, he said: "Can't give you an answer this evening." He undertook to seek an explanation.

Cllr **Phil Neale** (RA Cuddington) acknowledged the frustration but argued that the summer holiday period and the unusual pressure created by reorganisation and the Local Plan made urgent decisions necessary in this instance.

The exchanges raised a question that extends beyond these two consultation responses: decisions made by councils shortly before they join East Surrey may affect the new authority, while members of the existing councils have limited time left to scrutinise them.

Government seeks work on another plan

The final item brought a further complication. Mr Mawer reported that new government rules placed EEBC among authorities expected to begin preparing another Local Plan, even though its **2022–2040 plan remains under examination** and the borough council is due to be replaced by East Surrey Unitary Council on **1 April 2027**.

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He said the government recognised the resources involved in working on two plans at once but did not accept local government reorganisation as a reason to defer the new work. He estimated that taking a plan through to adoption under the new system could cost **about £1 million**, stressing that this was an estimate for a system no authority had yet completed.

Cllr McCormick criticised the absence of money in the budget for the work and called for a costed plan of action. Cllr Alex Coley (Independent Ruxley) asked why it had not been made a priority. Cllr O'Donovan said he would have to find out.

By **seven votes to two**, the committee agreed that officers should seek a meeting with the Shadow East Surrey authority's chief executive and executive member for strategic planning and growth, then report back.

Surrey's local government reorganisation is proceeding despite pauses announced elsewhere. That leaves EEBC facing the cost and staff demands of a new planning requirement during its final months, while East Surrey prepares to take over. The committee was given no assurance of additional government funding. How much work EEBC should commission before April, and who will pay for it, remain unanswered.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Time for Cllr Dallen to drop his taxpayer funded complaint?

13 October 2026



A few minutes of video from an Epsom and Ewell Borough Council meeting have now generated an external investigation, a legal adviser's attendance at the Town Hall and a standards hearing that could not get past a basic question: **which rules is the Council using?**

Councillor **Neil Dallen** (RA Town) complained that Councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) had failed to treat him with respect during a heated exchange about the Rainbow Leisure Centre in January. An external investigator recommended a finding against Ames. But at a preliminary hearing on 22 September, the panel made no finding on his conduct. Instead, it heard a sustained challenge to the Council's handling of the complaint and paused proceedings to consider it.

The question for Cllr Dallen is whether he still wants taxpayers to fund the pursuit of his complaint. He is entitled to make one. He is also free to withdraw it.

The rules the Council used in 2019

The Council's own papers for its February 2019 standards hearing provide a striking point of comparison. This being the only other hearing of the committee on a complaint against a councillor since 2015. That hearing's officer report said the Council had **approved a process for investigating complaints in July 2012**. It attached a document headed *Arrangements for dealing with standards allegations under the Localism Act 2011* and identified it as the procedure for investigating and determining the complaint. The eventual decision recorded that the Independent Person's views had been sought and taken into account.

The 2012 document remains in that publicly available hearing pack. It says the Independent Person's views must be considered before a decision on whether a councillor breached the Code and on any action to follow. It also gives a

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councillor the right to require a further hearing sub-committee to **review a sanction**.

Yet the officer report prepared for the Ames hearing did not mention that document or explain whether it had ever been withdrawn or replaced. It instead pointed to provisions of the Constitution and guidance for people making complaints, while acknowledging that the arrangements it identified did not provide a standards hearing procedure. Officers asked the three-member panel to adopt a newly proposed procedure or amend it for fairness.

That omission is extraordinary. If the Council used the 2012 arrangements at its last publicly documented hearing in 2019, what changed, who approved the change and when? Those questions should have been answered in the report placed before the panel.

Safeguards missing from the proposed procedure

The differences matter. The proposed 2026 procedure does not expressly require the Independent Person's views to be sought **before** the panel decides whether the Code was breached. It says there is **no right of appeal**, without preserving the sanction review set out in the 2012 arrangements. It also offers a wider list of actions, ending with "any other sanction" considered appropriate in consultation with the Independent Person.

A hearing panel appointed to determine one councillor's complaint has not been shown to have power to replace the Council's standing complaints arrangements or expand the sanctions it may impose. The 2012 arrangements were approved by the Council. If different standing arrangements have since been made under a valid delegation, the Council should identify the decision. Adopting new rules in the middle of Ames's case cannot substitute for showing which rules lawfully applied when the complaint was handled.

At the hearing, Ames and his Labour Party legal representative, Matthew Burn, repeatedly asked for that answer. The external legal adviser to the panel argued that the Council's arrangements need not be contained in one document: in his view, they could be found across the Constitution, delegations and published guidance. But he could not identify when the complaints leaflet on which Ames said the Monitoring Officer had relied was adopted. He accepted that a clear, consolidated document would help the Council. The adviser's position was that the Council nevertheless had sufficient arrangements and powers to investigate the complaint. The panel did not resolve that disagreement.

Nor was this a question sprung on officers at the Town Hall. Ames and Burn said they had been seeking an explanation for months. Monitoring Officer Piero Ionta and his deputy did not attend to give one. The panel's chair, Councillor Rachel King, eventually called a pause so members could consider what they had heard.

How much has this cost?

The Council's hearing report confirms that it commissioned an external investigation and instructed an external adviser for the panel. It says the bills will be met from corporate reserves but gives no amount, stating that final invoices had not arrived. EET has also sought cost information from the Council without obtaining a figure. Officer preparation and attendance have not been costed publicly either.

CH&I Associates director Alex Oram declined to tell Epsom and Ewell Times his firm's fees or hourly rate. He confirmed that the rate was **no more than £100 an hour**, but would not say whether it was below £50. A representative of the Norwich-based firm also travelled to attend the Epsom hearing in person.

Could the total already be as much as £5,000 once external fees, travel and officers' time are counted? That is a question, not an established estimate: without invoices and a record of staff time, we cannot calculate the total. The Council should publish what it has spent so far and the anticipated cost of any further hearing, including additional external advice.

A complaint born of unanswered Rainbow questions

The underlying incident is recorded on the Council's meeting video. Ames was asking who had decided to keep confidential an urgent decision concerning up to £500,000 of potential repairs at the Rainbow Leisure Centre. Dallen had supported that decision and was chairing the meeting when Ames questioned it. Dallen stopped further discussion, saying, "It is my meeting" and failed to stand aside for his vice-chair to rule on the matter. Ames called him "arrogant" and alleged a "cover-up".

Ames has since said he regrets using "arrogant" and should instead have raised a formal point of order about Dallen continuing to chair that item. The investigator recommended a finding that Ames had failed to show respect, while recognising that he was pursuing a genuinely held argument about transparency. The investigator did not decide whether his questions about the Rainbow decision were right. The hearing panel has not determined the complaint.

Speaking after the preliminary hearing, Ames said he was grateful that the panel did not press ahead without clarity about the applicable arrangements. He accused the administration of spending taxpayers' money pursuing a "low-level complaint" while his complaint about Dallen's conduct at the same meeting had been rejected. Those are Ames's criticisms, not findings by the panel.

The recorded exchange will still be there if a properly constituted panel is asked to judge it. First, the Council needs to explain why its 2019 hearing used arrangements absent from the 2026 report, what authority supports the proposed replacement and what this process has cost. Dallen, meanwhile, has a simpler decision: **is continuing this complaint a proportionate use of public money?**

Sam Jones – Reporter

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Former Epsom Glyn pupil not tyred of flipping in world-record bid

13 October 2026



A former Glyn School head boy is preparing to flip a 100kg tractor tyre continuously for 24 hours in an attempt to break a Guinness World Record and raise £20,000 for his old school.

Professional trainer and fitness instructor James Farmer will begin the challenge at midday on Sunday 25 October, finishing at midday on Monday.

He will flip the tyre around a marked course within the Epsom school’s grounds, continuing throughout the night under the observation of independent witnesses.

The current Guinness World Record for the greatest distance covered by tyre flipping in 24 hours stands at 11.21km. James hopes to exceed 15km.

Money raised will contribute towards a new sports pavilion at Glyn School, which is part of the 43-school GLF Schools trust.

The proposed pavilion would provide improved facilities for physical education, competitive fixtures and after-school sport. It would also offer opportunities for use by the wider community.

James has worked in health and wellbeing for more than 20 years, training athletes and Olympians and appearing on ITV as a fitness expert. He credits Glyn with setting him on the path to his career.

He said: “I owe Glyn a debt of gratitude for providing the foundation upon which I built my entire career.

“Twenty-four hours of flipping a tyre is a hard way to say thank you. But if it puts a pavilion on those playing fields, it will have been worth every hour.”

Glyn headteacher Jo Garrod said: “James left here in 1999 and he has never really left us behind, which says something about Glyn, and James as a person.

“What he is taking on is extraordinary, and the pavilion he is raising money for will be used by our pupils every week for decades. We will be out there cheering him on through the night.”

The challenge comes as Glyn prepares to celebrate its centenary in 2027. James hopes the new pavilion will honour the school’s history while supporting its ambitions for the future.

Spectators are welcome to attend and encourage James during the challenge. Local businesses interested in sponsoring his attempt can contact the school.

Donations can be made through the James World Record for Glyn fundraising page.

Further information about the school is available from the Glyn School website.

Image: James Farmer flipping a tyre and inset when head Glyn boy

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Criminal convictions follow Banstead construction site death

13 October 2026



Two companies and a manager have been sentenced 9th September), after being found guilty of a health and safety charge of failing to discharge their duties following the death of a labourer who died on a construction site in Banstead in June 2020.

Gheorghita Arsene, 33, died when a 10ft (3m) trench collapsed on top of him, covering him in soil. He had been working on a site in Park Road where an old care home was being demolished to make way for a new purpose-built home.

Following a three-month trial at the Central Criminal Court in London, principal contractor Appledorn Developments Limited were found guilty of a health and safety charge of failing to discharge their duties. They were fined £500,000 with the judge, Her Honour Judy Khan KC, commenting that “their failure to ensure that a safe system of work was motivated by the desire to get the works done quickly and cheaply”.

T Vaughan Limited were also found guilty of a health and safety charge of failing to discharge their duties and were fined £650,000. They were also ordered to pay a further £40,000 in costs. The judge said she was” satisfied that systems were in place, but these were not sufficiently adhered to or implemented”.

Contracts manager Anthony O’Connor, 42, of Romford, Essex, pleaded guilty to failing to discharge his duty under the Health and Safety Act 1974, which was accepted by the prosecution. The judge sentenced him to 10 months in custody, suspended for 18 months, and ordered to carry out 150 hours of unpaid work, saying that “a number of workers were exposed to the risk of harm”.

The jury failed to reach a verdict in relation to a charge of manslaughter against O’Connor.

Site manager Peter Wraith, 54, from New Waltham in Lincolnshire, was found not guilty of manslaughter and assistant site manager Gregory Peake, 51, from Bromley in south-east London, was acquitted of failing to discharge his health and safety duty.

The court was told that a health and safety inspection found there were no supports to the trench and the excavated soil had been deposited unsafely close to it.

Mr Arsene, described in court as a “good man who worked hard and achieved everything through his
hard work”, had been working to replace a damaged pipe at the bottom of the trench and was clearing soil when one of the trench walls collapsed.

Despite desperate attempts by his colleagues, they could not pull him free.

Fire and ambulance crews were called to the scene but faced similar difficulties in digging Mr Arsene out, and he was confirmed deceased at the scene shortly after the incident took place.

Senior Investigating Officer, Detective Inspector Debbie Birch, said: “Gheorgita Arsene’s death could have been avoided if the appropriate health and safety measures had been followed. It can be easy to cut corners to save time and money but this tragic death highlights just how important health and safety legislation is on all building sites.

“Sadly, this resulted in the death of a 33-year-old man who was simply trying to do his job, and our thoughts remain with his family and friends at this difficult time.”

A Health and Safety Executive spokesperson said:

“Gheorghita Arsene’s death was as horrifying as it was preventable. He lost his life because basic precautions were not in place to protect workers from the well-known risks that come with excavation work.

“Anthony O’Connor had observed workers in the trench without adequate protection and was aware of the measures required to prevent a collapse.

“This case is a stark reminder that when basic safety standards are ignored, the consequences can be fatal. Companies and individuals alike have legal duties to protect workers and where they fail to do so, and we will not hesitate to take enforcement action.

“Our thoughts today are with Mr Arsene’s loved ones, as they mourn their loss.”

Surrey Police

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Surrey Hills National Landscape to expand?

13 October 2026



East Surrey's MP has called on the government to approve the expansion of the county's protected landscapes "as soon as possible".

Claire Coutinho has written to Environment Secretary Dame Angela Eagle to voice her support for the recent review of the Surrey Hills National Landscapes' boundaries.

Formerly known as the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the proposed expansion would see 129 square kilometres of stunning landscape brought under its umbrella.

Ms Coutinho wrote: "We are so lucky in East Surrey to be surrounded by such beautiful countryside – rolling hills, grazing fields, historic woodland.

"I am proud to have helped to secure this long overdue boundary review over six years ago, and it is wonderful to see it has reached this major milestone.

"Countless individuals and groups have poured thousands of hours into this project to get it to where it is today.

"Particular thanks must go to the team at Surrey Hills National Landscape, Tandridge District Council, our local farmers and landowners, and the many other organisations that have been intimately involved in this process from the very beginning."

National Landscapes give designated stretches of countryside additional protections against development under planning laws.

While they receive similar safeguards, they differ from National Parks, which are overseen by separate National Park Authorities.

The new boundaries will see Surrey Hills stretch all the way from Hampshire to parts of Greater London, increasing its size by almost a third.

Areas poised to be brought into the National Landscape include Godstone Hills, Chipstead Valleys and Caterham Woods.

"Protecting our natural environment means cherishing the inheritance entrusted to the current generation by our forebears for the benefit of the next," Ms Coutinho added in her letter.

"This Burkean contract between the living and those yet to be born, through which the protection of our natural landscapes can be preserved, is a core principle many of my constituents hold dear and one that should never be abandoned.

"I therefore hope that, as the Secretary of State responsible, you will consider the proposal with a view to approving it as soon as possible."

Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs spokesperson said: "We know Surrey Hills is loved by its local community and volunteers for its natural beauty, and it is great that so many people care about its future.

"We have received an application from Natural England to extend the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and, as with all applications, will be considering it in due course."

Surrey Hills Board chair Kathy Atkinson previously said she would be writing to Dame Angela to invite her to visit the National Landscape.

She said: "The proposed extension represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to recognise and protect more of the special landscapes that define Surrey Hills and the surrounding area."

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

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Box Hill (Credit: Google Maps)

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Surrey burglary figures spark row

13 October 2026



Helen Maguire MP has accused the Government of leaving Surrey families and businesses to “fend for themselves” after Liberal Democrat analysis suggested that fewer than one in 15 burglaries recorded by Surrey Police in 2025 resulted in somebody being charged or summoned.

However, Surrey Police and the county’s Police and Crime Commissioner have responded that burglary has been falling, detection rates are improving and officers attended almost 97% of reported residential burglaries during the latest financial year.

The Liberal Democrat MP for Epsom and Ewell said 3,045 burglaries were recorded across Surrey in 2025. According to figures supplied by her office, 6.4% resulted in a charge or summons, while 2,272 cases – 74.61% of the total – were closed without a suspect being identified.

Nationally, the party said 223,194 burglaries were recorded in England and Wales during the same calendar year. Of these, 13,936 – 6.24% – resulted in a charge or summons, while no suspect was identified in 160,396 cases, or 71.86%.

The figures were described as having been drawn from Home Office crime outcome statistics and analysed by the Liberal Democrats.

Mrs Maguire said: “It is unacceptable that families and businesses across Surrey are being left terrified as the vast majority of burglaries go unsolved. The Government has been asleep at the wheel; a persistent lack of support for community policing has left our streets vulnerable.

“In 93.6% of burglary cases in Surrey, the victims never see someone charged – this has to change. Surrey Police work tirelessly, but they require the proper resources and mandate from central government to ensure every single case is rigorously investigated.

“That’s why I’m demanding urgent action from the Prime Minister to restore neighbourhood policing and to back our calls for an investigation guarantee for all burglaries in Surrey.”

The Liberal Democrats are calling for what they describe as a “Burglary Response Guarantee”, backed by legislation requiring the police to attend and properly investigate every domestic burglary.

Police points to higher ‘solved’ rates

Surrey Police said the figures needed to be placed in context, particularly because the classification of burglary offences changed in April 2023. Burglaries are now divided into residential and business offences.

Detective Chief Inspector Jo Horner, the force lead for burglary, acknowledged that further improvement was required.

She said: “We know there is more to do to improve burglary detection rates, but it is also important to provide context to the data which has been used.”

Between April 2025 and March 2026, Surrey Police attended 96.9% of reported residential burglaries, according to the force.

Over the same period, it recorded a “solved rate” of 10.44% for residential burglary and 12.18% for business burglary.

A solved outcome is not necessarily the same as a charge or summons. It can include other recognised outcomes, so the police percentages cannot be compared directly with the 6.4% charge-or-summons figure quoted by the Liberal Democrats. The figures also cover different periods: calendar year 2025 in the MP’s release and the 2025/26 financial year in the police response.

DCI Horner said burglary remained “an area of continued focus and priority” for the force.

She highlighted an investigation that led to five offenders admitting a series of car-key burglaries, attempted burglaries and vehicle thefts across Surrey, Sussex and Kent. Investigators linked the group to more than 20 stolen vehicles with a

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combined value of £337,100.

A separate East Surrey operation resulted in six men being charged with nearly 80 offences, including burglary, motor vehicle theft and vehicle interference. Five of the men are now serving prison sentences.

Surrey Police said each of its two divisions has a proactive team monitoring burglary patterns, identifying hotspots and targeting prolific offenders and organised criminal networks.

PCC says burglary is falling

Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend said domestic burglary was “deeply invasive” and could have a profound effect on its victims, while acknowledging that improving detection remained a challenge for police forces nationally.

She said: “The good news is that Surrey Police is one of the fastest improving forces in the country and burglary rates across the county have been consistently falling.

“According to figures available on my Data Hub, the number of domestic burglaries fell by over 15% between 2023 and 2025. And more recent provisional data shows that in April and June this year, we saw the lowest monthly rates of domestic burglary in the latest three years.”

Mrs Townsend said the force’s burglary solved rate between April 2025 and March 2026 was more than 10%, which she described as considerably higher than the national average.

She added: “Surrey Police is already committed to deploying to every residential burglary reported in the county and each policing division has its own proactive team which identifies trends and ‘hotspot’ areas and targets offenders.

“The force has made great strides in tackling burglary over the last two years and this will be an area I will continue to scrutinise performance on to ensure they maintain that trajectory going forward.”

What the figures do – and do not – show

The competing statements measure several different things.

A 6.4% charge-or-summons rate does not necessarily mean that the offender “got away scot-free” in every other case. Cases may remain under investigation, be resolved through another recorded outcome or fail to proceed for evidential or other reasons. Nevertheless, the figures supplied by Mrs Maguire’s office indicate that no suspect was identified in almost three-quarters of Surrey’s recorded burglaries in 2025.

Conversely, attending a burglary does not mean that it will be solved. Surrey Police’s 96.9% attendance figure relates only to residential burglary and not to the business burglaries included in the MP’s overall total.

Neither side supplied Epsom and Ewell-specific figures, so the statistics in the exchange relate to the Surrey Police area as a whole.

Residents can report suspicious activity through Surrey Police’s website, by calling 101 or anonymously through Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111. A crime in progress or an immediate danger should be reported by calling 999.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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