

Lung disease death widens investigation of Epsom and St Helier Trust service

3 April 2026



Widow still seeking accountability two years on.

A widow whose husband died aged just 48 after treatment at Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust has spoken of her continuing search for answers, as investigations continue into the care of more than 200 lung disease patients.

Laura Noakes, from Sutton, says she still does not know why her husband Daniel died from interstitial lung disease (ILD) in February 2024, despite concerns raised about his treatment before his death. Speaking on the second anniversary of his passing, she said the lack of clear information has left her feeling isolated and unable to move forward.

Her case forms part of a wider investigation involving patients treated under respiratory consultant Dr Veronica Varney, whose practice is under scrutiny. The investigation includes a review by the General Medical Council, though no outcome has yet been made public.

According to reporting by the Daily Telegraph (29th March), a letter from the Trust acknowledged that Mr Noakes had been prescribed Roflumilast for several years — a drug licensed for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease but not for ILD — and that he could have lived longer had he received treatment in line with guidelines.

Mrs Noakes said: “While nothing will bring Daniel back, finding answers is really important. It feels like I’ve been treated in a silo. I haven’t been able to understand the wider picture, and answers have only come after I complained.”

Concerns over treatment and oversight

Mr Noakes, who had never smoked, was first referred to respiratory services in 2018 after developing a persistent cough. The Trust later accepted that earlier scans suggesting ILD were not properly followed up, and that there was insufficient senior medical oversight during his care.

His condition deteriorated significantly from late 2023. While still alive, he was contacted by the Trust raising concerns about his treatment — something his wife describes as a “double trauma”, learning both that he was dying and that aspects of his care may have been avoidable.

She said: “We trusted we were getting top-level care. Instead, we later found there had been serious failings. We could have had many more years together.”

The Trust has apologised to the family and acknowledged that Mr Noakes’ care “fell far below” expected standards. It has also commissioned an external review by the Royal College of Physicians into more than 200 cases.

Wider investigation and cultural concerns

Findings reported by the Telegraph indicate that internal reviews identified a culture at St Helier Hospital that discouraged junior staff from challenging senior clinicians. The Trust has since said it has strengthened safeguards and systems to prevent similar failures.

Dr Varney left the Trust in 2023. The GMC has confirmed she remains registered with conditions while its investigation continues.

An inquest into Mr Noakes’ death has yet to reach a final conclusion.

Legal action and calls for others to come forward

Mrs Noakes is now being supported by clinical negligence specialists at Slater and Gordon.

Senior associate Nadia Saber said: “Daniel’s death was avoidable and premature, and Laura understandably has many questions. The number of cases under investigation gives cause for serious concern, and we would urge anyone worried about their care to come forward.”

Mrs Noakes added that accountability is essential not only for her family, but to ensure lessons are learned: “We need to know what happened and why — so this doesn’t happen to anyone else.”

Sam Jones - Reporter



Epsom March crime and safety round-up

3 April 2026



Policing activity across Epsom and Ewell in March 2026 saw a mix of enforcement successes, court outcomes and continued concern around acquisitive crime, drugs and community safety.

30th March an unexploded ordnance was handed in to the police counter in the Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom. The area was cordoned off until experts gave the all-clear.

Drug crime crackdown sees cash seizures in Epsom

A significant policing outcome during March was the seizure of more than £12,000 linked to criminal activity following a proactive stop by officers in Epsom. The funds, recovered under the Proceeds of Crime Act, are set to be reinvested into policing.

Local police social media updates suggest this forms part of wider activity targeting drug-related offending and organised crime in the borough, with officers using stop-and-search powers and intelligence-led patrols to disrupt offenders.

Targeted operations lead to arrests across offence types

Neighbourhood policing teams reported intensive enforcement weeks during which more than 20 arrests were made across a range of offences including burglary, theft, drugs and weapons possession. (Facebook)

These operations reflect a continued emphasis on “visible policing” and proactive interventions in hotspot areas.

Burglary and vehicle crime remain priorities

Across Surrey, two burglars were jailed in March after targeting homes to steal car keys and vehicles in early-morning break-ins.

While not limited to Epsom and Ewell, such offences remain a key policing priority locally, with residents repeatedly advised to secure vehicles and keys.

Domestic abuse and sexual offences prosecutions

March also saw several significant court outcomes across the county, including custodial sentences for domestic abuse, coercive behaviour and serious sexual offences.

Police continue to highlight safeguarding and victim support as central to their work, alongside encouraging reporting and use of protective measures such as Clare’s Law disclosures.

Community engagement and policing visibility

Residents are being invited to participate in upcoming “Policing Your Community” roadshows, aimed at gathering local concerns and shaping neighbourhood priorities.

This follows ongoing efforts in Epsom and Ewell to strengthen engagement between officers and the public.

Ongoing concerns around public safety incidents

Although outside the March reporting window, earlier incidents such as the January report of a teenage girl being approached by two men in Court Recreation Ground continue to frame community concerns about safety in public spaces. (The Sun)

Police have maintained increased visibility patrols in such areas in response.

Overall picture

Data and operational updates suggest that policing in Epsom and Ewell during March has been characterised by: targeted

enforcement against drugs and organised crime; continued focus on burglary and vehicle theft; strong emphasis on safeguarding in domestic abuse and sexual offence cases; ongoing community engagement initiatives.

While Surrey remains a relatively low-crime area overall, the persistence of acquisitive crime and anti-social behaviour continues to shape local policing priorities.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Climate emergency comes to Epsom

3 April 2026



A community screening of a national climate film is set to take place in Epsom next month, bringing together residents, councillors and community groups to explore what the climate and nature crisis means locally.

The event, hosted by St Martin's Church and Sustainable Epsom and Ewell, will feature *The People's Emergency Briefing*, a 45-minute film based on a high-level national briefing delivered in Westminster last year.

Organisers say the screening forms part of a UK-wide programme designed to make complex information about climate and environmental risks more accessible at a local level, with community discussions encouraged after each showing.

Local screening details

The Epsom event will take place on Saturday 11 April at St Martin's Church, Church Street, starting at 3pm (doors open 2.30pm). Entry is free, although attendees are asked to register in advance so organisers can plan capacity.

Invitations have been extended to local councillors, community leaders and Epsom and Ewell's MP, alongside residents interested in environmental issues.

From Westminster briefing to community film

The film is based on a landmark briefing held in November 2025 at Westminster Central Hall, attended by more than 1,200 MPs, peers and leaders from across business, culture, faith and media.

Experts at the event examined the implications of climate and nature breakdown across areas such as food security, health, infrastructure and the economy, alongside practical evidence on how risks might be reduced.

That material has now been adapted into a public-facing film, launching nationally in April 2026, with screenings planned in venues ranging from churches and village halls to libraries and schools.

A "civic event" as well as a film

Organisers emphasise that the screenings are intended not just as film showings but as civic events, encouraging discussion about local impacts and responses.

Each event is expected to include a facilitated discussion, allowing residents to reflect on how national risks relate to their own communities.

The wider programme has backing from organisations including WWF, the National Trust, CPRE and the Royal Meteorological Society, with hundreds of screenings anticipated across the country.

Broadcaster Chris Packham, who opened the original Westminster briefing, said: "I'd encourage people everywhere to attend a screening... It creates exactly the kind of honest local conversation we now urgently need."

Local focus

For Epsom and Ewell, the event offers a chance to connect global environmental challenges with local concerns, from green space and biodiversity to resilience and community preparedness.

Organisers say they hope the screening will help spark informed, constructive discussion about how the borough can respond to the issues raised.

Sam Jones - Reporter



[Event Listing Details Here](#)

Box Hill's Zig Zag Road Leads to Straight Ban on Antisocial Riding

3 April 2026



Motorcyclists near Box Hill are being targeted despite the “vast majority” who visit the Surrey beauty spot being “considerate people who behave respectfully”. A Public Spaces Protection Order is being introduced around the National Trust site following efforts from residents in Mickleham and Westhumble over what they said was excessive noise and acts of anti-social behaviour. Mole Valley District Council then carried out consultation on whether to make certain behaviour an offence within the defined area.

This includes, revving engines, keeping engines idling, speeding, stunts, driving in a convoy, exhaust popping or backfiring, racing, for sudden or rapid acceleration. The area covered includes the world famous Zig Zag road and the roundabout near Denbies wine estate.

The decision was taken by the council’s March executive committee after 603 people, 62 per cent of those who took part in the consultation, backed the measures – compared with 29 per cent who were against and nine per cent who were undecided. It will remain in place for three years unless renewed with the council estimating it will come into effect this summer once necessary signage is installed.

Councillor Caroline Joseph (Liberal Democrat: Fetcham) said: “The consultation revealed a polarised view about whether a PSPO should be introduced ranging from citing behaviour that it disrupts residents’ lives and threatening safety to viewing it as unenforceable and being harmful to local businesses and long-standing biker traditions. “Motorcycle riding at Boxhill and the surrounding area dates back to at least the 1920s from early racing and trials, and the Surrey Hills area remains a popular destination. “It is important to recognise that the vast majority of motorcyclists in this area are considerate people who behave respectfully.”

Bike groups are concerned it will impact their long-standing enjoyment of the area and groups. She added: “It’s not aimed at spoiling those traditions but it’s meant to encourage less antisocial behaviour by those who don’t respect the traditional activity of bikers in the area. “The purpose of the order is only to prohibit the behaviours that cause a public nuisance.” “The introduction of the PSPO will benefit visitors to the local area and those residents and businesses whose quality of life has been affected by vehicle noise all while not affecting responsible and considerate drivers and riders who use Mole Valley’s roads.” The council said it was open to extending the order’s coverage but would require further consultation – which would need to be done outside the upcoming election period.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Zig Zag Road (image Google)

Epsom Hospital to “merge” with St Georges in Tooting?

3 April 2026



A major NHS reorganisation affecting Epsom residents appears to have been approved behind closed doors, with no public announcement or consultation to date.

Information shared with the *Epsom and Ewell Times* indicates that St George's Hospital is set to formally merge with Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust under plans approved by their boards on 5 March.

The proposal, described in NHS terms as a "strategic outline case", is understood to be the first formal step towards a full merger. If progressed, it would ultimately result in Epsom and St Helier ceasing to exist as a separate organisation, with all services brought under a single management structure.

The development was first reported by Putney News, which described the move as having been agreed "behind closed doors" and without any public announcement or consultation. According to that report, no press release has yet been issued and residents have not been formally informed.

Financial pressures driving change

Documents referenced in the material seen by EET suggest the move is being driven by mounting financial pressures across the hospital group.

The combined shortfall is reported to be around £176 million for the current financial year. While government support has historically offset much of this gap, those payments are now being phased out. St George's has reportedly been given two years to break even, while Epsom and St Helier has been given three.

Epsom and St Helier is also said to be under formal NHS England supervision in relation to its finances, waiting lists and emergency care performance.

No public consultation announced

Despite the scale of the proposed change, there appears to have been no public consultation process announced.

Material circulated internally suggests that staff have been informed and Integrated Care Boards briefed, but that wider public engagement has not yet taken place.

The apparent lack of transparency may raise concern locally, particularly given previous assurances when the two trusts began closer working in 2021 that they would remain separate statutory organisations.

MP response focuses on patient care

Epsom and Ewell's MP Helen Maguire said she was aware of the developing proposal but emphasised that patient care must remain the priority.

She said: "I am aware the Trust has put a business case forward to the NHS on the possibility of a merger. From my perspective, my primary concern lies with ensuring that regardless of administrative decisions, residents across my constituency and the wider Trust area continue to receive the high-quality healthcare they deserve. I look forward to meeting with Michael Pantlin to discuss these priorities, and will continue to engage with key stakeholders throughout the process to ensure consistency of service provision."

Her comments suggest the proposal remains under consideration at NHS England level, with further discussions expected.

Hospital Management Response

A spokesperson for St George's, Epsom and St Helier Hospitals and Health Group (gesh) said: "We have not agreed to merge - at this stage, we have agreed an intention to submit a strategic case for merger to NHS England, asking them to approve developing a full business case.

"This builds on the work we have already done to strengthen the ties between both Trusts - sharing expertise and resources, whilst leveraging the strengths of our services to further improve patient care.

"We want to reassure people that there are no related planned changes to our services."

Long-term implications for services

If it proceeded the merger could have significant implications for how services are delivered across south-west London and Surrey, including for Epsom residents relying on local provision.

It also comes against the backdrop of delays to the long-promised Specialist Emergency Care Hospital in Sutton, now expected to open in the 2030s rather than mid-2020s.

While NHS leaders are reported to view the merger as a route to achieving Foundation Trust status and improving financial stability, questions remain about how local services may be affected and when residents will be formally consulted.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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Mayor opens Primark in Epsom

3 April 2026



Primark has opened a major new store in Epsom's Ashley Centre, drawing large crowds on its first day and appearing to confirm earlier predictions by the Epsom and Ewell Times 13th May 2022, about the likely direction of the town's retail future.

More than 1,000 people queued within the first half hour of opening on 25 March, as the fashion retailer launched its 199th UK store. The 31,400 sq ft outlet spans two floors and offers clothing, accessories, beauty products and homeware, alongside a Click & Collect service.

The arrival of Primark follows ongoing speculation about how large retail spaces in the Ashley Centre would be repurposed in the wake of high street changes. In the Epsom and Ewell Times feature examining potential replacements for the former House of Fraser site, Primark was identified as one of the most plausible candidates to anchor the centre's future retail mix.

That prediction now appears well-founded, with the brand's scale and footfall potential matching the need for a strong "destination" retailer in the town centre. Independent research cited by the company suggests Primark attracts millions of weekly visits nationwide and can generate additional spending in surrounding shops and restaurants.

Any story about Primark is the most avidly followed story in our publication.

The new store has also brought local employment, with more than 90 staff recruited, including a number returning to work after career breaks and some entering employment for the first time.

Store manager Ewa Klepczuk said the team was "excited to finally open our doors" in Epsom and thanked the community for its early support, while the owners of the Ashley Centre described the opening as a "significant moment" that would boost footfall and strengthen the centre's position.

For Epsom's retail landscape, the development may mark more than just a new shop opening. It signals a shift towards high-volume, value-led brands as the backbone of town centre recovery—an outcome the Epsom and Ewell Times had already flagged as the most likely path forward.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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Fennies Epsom Continues To Support Local Families As Demand For Quality Childcare Grows

3 April 2026



Established Fennies nursery on 1a Hook Road, Epsom, KT19 8TH, strengthens its role in the community while a new Fennies setting opens nearby in Cheam.

For families across Epsom, access to reliable, high-quality Early Years education remains one of the most important decisions in the early stages of parenthood. At Fennies Epsom, Hook Road, that responsibility is one the team takes seriously. Over recent years, the nursery has become a familiar and trusted presence within the local community, supporting working parents while providing a nurturing environment where children can build confidence and a strong foundation for learning.



Situated on Hook Road, the nursery is designed to nurture every stage of a child's development. Children aged three months to five years can explore carefully curated rooms, including:

- Two Explorers rooms, with dedicated milk kitchen and nappy change areas
- One Discoverers Room designed to encourage independence
- One Creators room with dedicated reading areas
- One Inventors room with free-flow garden access
- A dedicated studio space for young chefs and budding artists to explore
- A vibrant outdoor space that encourages curiosity and creativity

Fennies Epsom follows a child-led approach, giving children the freedom to explore their interests while building independence and essential life skills. Families are invited to make the most of communal spaces such as the Parent Room, while practical touches like on-site buggy parking make everyday routines easier.

At the heart of the nursery's approach is a carefully considered curriculum designed to reflect both the needs of modern families and the curiosity of young children. Practitioners at Fennies Epsom, Hook Road focus on creating meaningful learning experiences that feel engaging and relevant, balancing structured opportunities with space for children to explore their own interests. The emphasis is on nurturing adaptable, confident individuals who feel secure in their environment and excited about learning.

“Blending child-led exploration with purposeful guidance, the curriculum celebrates imagination, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and STEM-inspired discovery,” said Eleanor Richfield, Head of Education at Fennies. “It empowers children to communicate confidently and adapt to change, supporting children to enjoy the now whilst developing the lifelong skills they need to thrive.”

Fennies Nurseries is also proud to announce the opening of its newest setting just 15 minutes down the road in Cheam. Fennies Cheam marks the group’s 25th nursery, continuing more than three decades of delivering outstanding early learning experiences across London, Surrey, Kent, Middlesex and Berkshire.

With its passionate team, inspiring spaces and a focus on each child’s individual journey, Fennies Cheam is ready to help families in the area feel supported and inspired every day. Located at 91 Worcester Road, Sutton, SM2 6QL, the nursery is accessible for busy, commuting parents.

“The garden at Fennies Cheam is amazing, and so much natural light fills the building,” said Emma Carrington, Nursery Manager at Fennies Cheam. “We have lots of new resources, and the dedicated studio space will be a fantastic learning environment for the children.”

To learn more about Fennies Cheam, book a tour, or register your interest by contacting enquiries@fennies.com.

Sponsored article Fennies Nurseries

Photo: Fennies Nursery in Hook Road Epsom

Epsom’s UCA hosts delegation from Nigeria

3 April 2026



A new Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between University for the Creative Arts (UCA), Nigeria’s Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Economy and the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC) from Nigeria, marking a strengthening collaboration between the UK and Nigeria’s vibrant creative and cultural industries.

The signing of the agreement was the key event in a visit of UCA’s Surrey campuses in Farnham and Epsom by a Nigerian delegation, which was part of the Nigerian President’s week-long state visit to the Royal family in the UK.

Signing the agreement was the Honourable Minister of Arts, Culture, Tourism and Creative Economy of Nigeria, Hannatu Musa Musawa; the Director General of the National Council for Arts and Culture, Obi Asika; and UCA’s Joint Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mark Ellul.

Prof. Ellul remarked: “We’re delighted to sign this agreement and strengthen our deepening relationship with Nigeria’s creative and cultural industries.

“We’re pleased to be able to join the rallying call for an institutional commitment that aligns our expertise in creative higher education with Nigeria’s ambition to build lasting relationships that positions its creative economy as a central pillar to their economic diversification and youth empowerment.”

The Honourable Minister, Hannatu Musa Musawa commented: “Nigeria is proud to formalise its partnership with the University for the Creative Arts (UCA), marking a significant milestone in advancing the nation’s creative industry and creative economy.

“This collaboration reflects a shared commitment to innovation, talent development, and institutional exchange, building on sustained engagement with key stakeholders including the National Council for Arts and Culture and the Nigeria Governors Forum.

“The agreement underscores a forward-looking vision to strengthen bilateral ties between Nigeria and the United Kingdom, driving long-term growth and global competitiveness across the creative sector.”

Joining the Minister and Director General were multiple creative leaders from Nigeria and the UK including the British Council, the UK Department for Business and Trade, Bank of Industry Nigeria, Nigerian Film Corporation, DG of National Institute for Hospitality and Tourism, Nigeria, Senior Special Advisers to the Minister, VC and Pro Vice from University of Abuja.

The delegation received a tour of UCA’s industry-grade facilities in traditional and emerging arts at its School of Creative & Cultural Industries in Farnham and School of Creative Business, Fashion & Enterprise in Epsom. They also engaged in a panel discussion about UK-Nigerian Creative and Cultural Collaboration.

Director General, Obi Asika, added: “National Council of Arts and Culture (NCAC) is delighted to have convened the Honourable Minister Hannatu Musa Musawa, the Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Economy of Nigeria (FMACTCE), and UCA in the UK, to advance a bold global knowledge and curriculum partnership designed to

unlock the full potential of Nigeria's creative industry and creative economy.

"Strengthened by our ongoing collaboration with the Nigerian Governors Forum (NGF) established in 2025 and aligned with the UK-Nigeria co-working group under Enhanced Trade and Investment Partnership (ETIP), where I serve as Co-Chair for Nigeria with Hon Florence Eshalomi, Mp, as Co-Chair for the UK, this milestone moment brings together influential leaders across the public and private sectors to drive innovation, talent development, and sustainable growth across the creative ecosystem."

Many talented creatives from Nigeria are already studying at UCA, across disciplines such as film, fashion, design, animation, and digital media, and making a lasting impact across UCA's three campuses - bringing fresh perspectives, cultural richness, and creative excellence that continue to enrich the university's global community.

By recognising Nigeria's ambition to promote its nation's cultural and creative industries, UCA will utilise its expertise to further help it grow and sustain the next generation of creative talent and cultural leaders globally.

University for the Creative Arts



Photo: Nigerian delegation at The Wells, UCA in Epsom

Epsom on road to twin with world-famous Ukraine town of Bucha

3 April 2026



BBC reports: Epsom and Ewell has taken the first step towards twinning with a Ukrainian town.

Epsom & Ewell councillors have backed plans to explore a twinning link with the Ukrainian town of Bucha. At a strategy and resources committee meeting on March 17, councillors voted to set up a small working group to look into the proposal before any final decision is made.

The idea, introduced earlier by the council, would see Epsom & Ewell formally linked with Bucha. The town became known around the world after atrocities against civilians in 2022, but which is now seen as a symbol of resilience and rebuilding.

Opening the discussion, public speaker **Lionel Blackman** (Director of Surrey Stands With Ukraine) told the committee the borough had already shown "extraordinary generosity and compassion" towards Ukraine. He pointed to millions of pounds in aid raised locally, support for refugee families, and community events celebrating Ukrainian culture.

"Bucha is a community that mirrors Epsom in many ways," Blackman said. "It is similar in size and character and like Epsom it sits close to its nation's capital around 25km from Kyiv. Much as Epsom lies within easy reach of London."

He said twinning would be a natural next step, stressing it would not be about sending aid, but about building long-term links. "This is about friendship: cultural, educational and civic connections," he said, adding that much of the work would be handled by a volunteer-led Bucha-Epsom Association rather than the council itself.

What was actually agreed?

A three-member working group will now be formed to look at the practicalities, including costs, risks and how the partnership would work in reality. They are expected to report back in the summer before any final decision is taken.

Despite the differing views on the process, there was broad agreement on one thing: support for Ukraine and the idea behind the twinning itself.

Some concerns raised

But not everyone was convinced the process needed to slow down. Some councillors questioned why a working group was needed at all, arguing it could delay a relatively simple decision. Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative Horton) warned the extra layer of process risked the opportunity "drifting", while Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) said previous working groups had a habit of dragging on "forever".

Cllr **Lucie McIntyre** (RA West Ewell) , however, said taking time to get the details right was essential and a working

group would be the best means of doing so. Cllr **James Lawrence** (LibDem now Independent - College) agreed, and said the councils should know what it is endorsing.

Councillors raised concerns about how much officer time the project might take up, especially with major local government changes on the horizon. and said the council needed a clearer picture of the organisation it was being asked to back.

In the end, the committee agreed to press ahead cautiously. If it eventually goes ahead, the link would make Bucha Epsom & Ewell's first new twin town in decades.

Emily Dalton BBC LDRS

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[From Ukraine to Epsom: How Music and Kindness Struck the Right Note](#)

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Epsom's Cllr McCormick gives Middlesex revival the irregular iambic treatment

3 April 2026



Historic nostalgia could be upheld in naming a new Surrey council next year. Surrey County Council has backed a symbolic call to recognise Middlesex in the name of a future unitary authority. But councillors were all too aware the proposal had no legal power in officially changing the name.

This move comes amid plans to abolish all 12 of Surrey's existing borough, district and county councils and create two mega authorities to replace them, East Surrey and West Surrey. Middlesex was effectively abolished in 1965 and outside the living memory for many residents.

A majority of councillors supported a motion asking the government to name one of the new authorities "West Surrey and South Middlesex" as part of local government reorganisation due in 2027. Members voted 32 in favour, eight against with 24 abstentions at a full Surrey County council meeting on March 17.

The proposal, put forward by Robert Evans OBE (Stanwell and Stanwell Moor), centred on Spelthorne's long-standing ties to historic Middlesex. The borough is the only part of the old county that ended up in Surrey after boundary changes in the 1960s, and remains the only Surrey district north of the River Thames.

Cllr Evans told the chamber the Middlesex name still carries weight for many residents and "cannot be erased", arguing the change would recognise more than 1,000 years of shared history.

Cllr Harry Boparai, who put forward the same motion to Spelthorne Borough Council in January but was blocked, said he was "pleased" the issue was finally being heard. He explained how the name 'Middlesex', which may seem like a simple thing to some, "created a sense of connection to the place where I lived" and recognises the "heritage and identity" of the community.

But councillors explained that under current legislation, the final decision on any new council name will rest with the authority created after reorganisation not existing councils.

Even so, several members said the debate was about sending a message rather than making a binding decision. Cllr Sinead Mooney said "names really do matter", adding that the motion reflects a genuine sense of identity among Spelthorne residents. Another described it as a chance to show the new authority that heritage should not be overlooked.

Others were more cautious. Cllr Joanne Sexton, leader of Spelthorne Borough Council argued that now is not the right time to focus on naming, with major structural changes ahead. She said the priority should be "working together and maintaining unity" during the transition, suggesting the issue be decided later with public consultation.

Cllr **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley EEBC and Surrey County Councillor) delivered a tongue-in-cheek

poem suggesting the name had effectively already been decided. He said: "So toast to the history of Spelthorne's old soul, while West Surrey wagons begin their first to roll." Cllr Edward Hawkins joked confusion over boundaries left them unsure "which way to go" on the vote.

Despite mixed views, several councillors said they would support the motion simply to acknowledge the strength of feeling locally. Given it was the council's last full meeting before the local election campaign gets underway, it is not surprising members did not want to rock the Middlesex boat, or vote.

Others opted to abstain, saying the decision ultimately lies elsewhere. In the end, the motion passed with cross-party backing.

While the result will not change the formal process, supporters hope it sends a clear signal: that for many in Spelthorne, Middlesex is more than just a historic footnote and it is still part of who they are.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Photo: David Howard Licence details

Local LibDem leader slams Helen Maguire MP in shock resignation

3 April 2026



In a shock development in the politics of Epsom and Ewell Liberal Democrat Council Group Leader Cllr **James Lawrence** (College Ward) has resigned from his Party and joined the growing Independent Group on Epsom and Ewell Borough Council.

The Independent Group, led by former Residents Association Councillor **Alex Coley** (Ruxley), has been joined by ex-LibDem and long serving Councillor **Julie Morris** (College) and former Residents Association Councillor for Nonsuch Ward, **Christine Howells**.

The Liberal Democrats once formed the largest opposition group on the Council. Now the group is the smallest. The Independent Group has four councillors, Labour four and the Liberal Democrats just two.

The first version of this report overlooked the little known fact that Cllr **Chris Watson** (Ewell Court) defected from the RA to Labour on 10th February this year.

The Residents Association remain predominant with the remainder of the total 35 seats in the Chamber.

In Cllr James Lawrence's resignation letter he takes wounding Parthian shots at both Epsom and Ewell's first woman and first Liberal Democrat MP **Helen Maguire**, who was elected in the July 2024 General Election and her Party's leader. He pulls no punches in his critique of Sir **Ed Davey**, MP for Kingston-Upon-Thames.

Resignation letter of Cllr James Lawrence

Dear Resident

I joined the Liberal Democrats in 2018 because I believed that the Party had both the strong intellectual foundations Britain needs and the pragmatism to achieve them. A principled commitment to liberalism, socially responsible markets, and devolved power differentiated the Liberal Democrats from other parties. Moreover, the Party's understanding that it existed to influence politics from the outside by winning public support for important issues was tried and tested.

In 2023, I decided to play an active role in this mission and stood for election. I was fortunate enough to win and become a councillor representing College Ward. Serving the community where I grew up has been a great privilege. I'm proud to have co-led a cross-party coalition working for better outcomes at the Chalk Pit site, increased Council lease scrutiny, and passed a motion requiring all urgent council decisions to be published. Navigating an overly complex housing payments system to keep a roof over the head of a vulnerable resident is an experience that will stay with me.

While I have been doing all I can to serve our community, I have unfortunately been undermined by both the national and local Liberal Democrats Party. Under Ed Davey's leadership, the Party has become rudderless. What do the Liberal

Democrats stand for? I wish I could tell you. Davey's Mr. Tumble-style stunts cover up a lack of direction, policy, and commitment to seriously engage with the challenges this country faces, particularly the economy. As the two-party system collapses, the Liberal Democrats should stand to benefit. But Davey's Party is incapable of taking advantage, and given its purposelessness, that's probably a good thing.

Locally, I have been disappointed with our Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament who seems more interested in leafleting and electioneering than engaging in meaningful policy change at the national level. Having worked with the MP closely on local matters, I am also concerned by her ability to alienate volunteers who freely give up their time. While I was pleased to support the successful campaign to displace the Conservatives in Epsom and Ewell, I now feel a sense of guilt at having played a role in enabling her to be elected.

For these reasons, I am resigning from the Liberal Democrat Party with immediate effect. I sincerely hope that the Party returns to the seriousness of its past, but I unfortunately no longer have faith it will. I will continue to serve the people of College Ward and the Borough to the best of my ability as an Independent councillor.

James Lawrence

In response Helen Maguire has issued the following statement:

I understand that Cllr James Lawrence has decided to step away from the Epsom and Ewell Liberal Democrats and will finish his term as an independent.

While I wish him well in his future endeavours, I am saddened to see his portrayal of my values and priorities as a Member of Parliament working for local matters at a national level.

The feedback I receive from local residents is consistently positive. I frequently receive correspondence from constituents who value the regular literature they are sent informing them of the important work I am conducting in Parliament. It is equally vital to me that constituents know how accessible and visible I am as their MP, engaging with them on their doorsteps each week. It is because I am an MP who strives to be a truly present voice within Epsom and Ewell that I am able to understand these concerns and raise them at a national level.

I recently met a constituent during one of my canvassing sessions, who told me that they were having difficulties accessing a breast cancer drug. I raised this issue directly with the responsible Minister, who then intervened with our local NHS organisation, and consequently the constituent received their medication. I do not need to debate the merits of consistent canvassing when the importance of it is so clear in cases such as this.

I am proud to be a very visible and active Member of Parliament within the Epsom and Ewell community, and will continue to fight for every single one of my constituents at both a local and national level.

Helen Maguire MP

Sam Jones - Reporter



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Ash dieback keeps Thames island closed

3 April 2026



The Environment Agency has warned against any planned protests over the closure of a Surrey riverside island and announced a public engagement event to update residents on safety work there.

Penton Hook Island has been shut since July 2025 after diseased trees were discovered across the site. Officials say the trees are affected by ash dieback, a disease that rots them from the inside and makes them unstable and unpredictable to cut down. As a result of the scale and complexity of the work required the island cannot safely reopen yet, officials said.

The agency has warned people not to attempt to access the island amid reports of possible protests around the site. A spokesperson said: "We would like to remind everyone that access to the island is currently prohibited due to the significant safety concerns resulting from diseased trees. Please do not attempt to access the island."

Ash dieback weakens trees internally, meaning they can collapse or drop branches without warning. The Environment Agency said this creates a serious risk to both workers and the public, with falling branches, collapsing trunks and debris on the ground posing a potential injury hazard.

Local residents will have a chance to discuss the plans at a public engagement event on March 20, 2026, at Staines Library between 2pm and 5pm.

Environment Agency staff will provide an update on the work and hear feedback from the community. People will also be able to share information about memorials located on the island so they can be protected where it is safe to do so.

A spokesperson added: "Keeping the public safe is one of our priorities and we apologise for any inconvenience this closure may be causing. We know the importance of this site to the local community, and we are committed to keeping everyone updated on our progress."

Instead of using standard chainsaws, specialist mechanical equipment will be needed to remove the affected trees, the Environment Agency said. The machinery will have to be transported to the island by river, adding further logistical challenges.

The agency said additional work will also be required to strengthen parts of the island bank before equipment can be brought in.

Seasonal wildlife restrictions are another factor. The bird nesting season, which runs from March to September, limits when some work can take place, further complicating the project.

Plans are also being explored to restore the island once the dangerous trees have been cleared. Environment Agency officials said they hope to replace the diseased trees with new species better suited to the island's ecology.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Penton Hook Island - Google Maps