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

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Epsom woman celebrates remarkable 100th birthday

23 August 2026



An Epsom woman has celebrated her 100th birthday surrounded by three generations of her family and dozens of friends.

Helen Blackman, née Aldridge, was born in Richmond upon Thames on 22 August 1926. She later married Epsom resident Derek Blackman and has lived in the borough ever since.

Mrs Blackman was widowed when her husband died in his 50s, leaving her with three children. She never remarried and has remained closely involved in the local community, where friends describe her as a public-spirited woman who is always willing to help anyone in need, without waiting to be asked or expecting anything in return.

A committed monarchist, Mrs Blackman joined the crowds on The Mall for the coronation of the late Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. She has amassed a treasured collection of royal memorabilia marking coronations and other important anniversaries, to which she can now add a centenary message from King Charles III.

A keen traveller and sightseer, she has enjoyed numerous coach holidays across Europe and the United States. Her other interests include crosswords and the arts, particularly theatre, ballet, opera and classical music.

She continues to attend Glyndebourne Opera each year, courtesy of a nephew who is a conductor and countertenor.

Although her sight is now badly impaired, her speech, hearing and memory remain strong, and she continues to walk with no more assistance than a walking stick.

Mrs Blackman marked her milestone birthday at a celebration organised by her three children at her eldest daughter’s home and garden in Tadworth.

Around 60 guests attended the gathering, including many of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The festivities took place in near-perfect weather and came as a surprise to the centenarian, who had known she was visiting her daughter but had little idea of the large gathering awaiting her.

Friends and family describe her as “a very exceptional and remarkable lady”.

A special correspondent.

[Despite sharing a surname, the late Derek Blackman is not believed to have been related to Epsom & Ewell Times director Lionel Blackman.]

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Police headquarters in Leatherhead a step closer

23 August 2026



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Work is set to begin on Surrey Police's long-awaited new eastern headquarters, bringing an end to a saga stretching back to 2023, when the force was compelled to vacate its Reigate base because of dangerous reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC).

Surrey Police was granted planning permission for the Cleeve Road site in Leatherhead in November last year. According to papers filed with Mole Valley District Council, preparatory work is expected to begin on 7 September.

The force originally bought the building in 2018 for nearly £20.5 million, intending to move into the site. Those plans were subsequently put on hold while it considered relocating staff to its Mount Browne headquarters in Guildford.

If the project proceeds as planned, the main construction work will begin in February 2027. The new eastern headquarters, accommodating about 500 officers and staff, will be built on what is currently an unused car park.

Planning permission was also granted for 40 affordable homes on the site, although these will be constructed separately.

The second stage of the development will involve demolishing the existing redundant buildings to make way for a residential block containing the affordable homes. Surrey Police has said it would ideally like the homes to be occupied by its own officers and staff.

Once the headquarters is completed, the force will have a permanent eastern base. By then, officers and staff will have spent about four years temporarily housed at Surrey Fire and Rescue Service's former headquarters at Wray Park in Reigate.

A Surrey Police spokesperson said the new headquarters would provide a financially sustainable base and ensure officers and staff had the facilities needed to investigate crime and keep communities safe.

The force said the Leatherhead site best met its operational needs because of its access to the surrounding area and major road links. It added that the improved facilities would help Surrey Police attract and retain staff.

Chris Caulfield Local Democracy Reporter

Image: Illustrative Visuals of the new Eastern Divisional Head Quarters for Surrey Police. (Credit: Pick Everard/ Surrey Police/ Mole Valley District Council Planning

Related reports:

- Leatherhead to be home to 500 Surrey Police officers
- New Surrey Police division HQ plans
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- Surrey Police HQ development dogged by flood risks
- Surrey Police HQ redesign will quieten the dogs

Options are open at Nescot – GCSE students reassured there's still time to apply

23 August 2026

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Students collecting their GCSE results today are being reassured that there is still time to apply for courses at Nescot college in Epsom. Options range from Animal Care and Public Services to Travel & Tourism, Business and IT.

Whether students are keen to help look after the college alpacas as part of the Animal Care course or visit a cruise ship to learn about the industry up close, Nescot has a range of courses which blend practical skills, theory and real-world experiences.

Those who didn't get the results they wanted today are able to get support from Nescot's advice and guidance teams. Most courses start at level 1 and students can re-take their English and Maths GCSEs alongside their new course. Last term, 1,367 students sat Maths and English GCSEs at Nescot, with entries significantly increasing compared to the previous year – a 16% rise in students taking Maths and a 29% rise in those taking English.

Nescot Principal and CEO, Julie Kapsalis MBE said: "Whatever your results today, it's not too late to explore your options and enrol on a course starting in September. Our expert team is on hand to give you personalised support and advice, and we've got a wide range of subjects to get you inspired and excited about your next step."

Katie, Level 3 business student said: "If anyone is thinking of coming to Nescot, I would definitely recommend it. I've really enjoyed my time here and I'm happy with the decision I made."

Nescot is located on a 60-acre campus near Epsom, Surrey. Learning spaces cover a wide range of sectors and include construction workshops, a garage, labs, kitchens, salons, and a farm. There's also a theatre, gym, café, day nursery and a hair and beauty salon.

Students who didn't achieve the grades they were hoping for, or are still not sure what's next can contact Nescot's Admissions and Careers team, who are on hand to help. They can discuss alternative pathways, progression opportunities and the support available to help students reach their goals. Students can call the team on **020 8394 3038** or email **adviceteam@nescot.ac.uk**.

Nescot provides college courses for school leavers and adults, with a wide range of career-focused vocational courses on offer. Located on a 60-acre campus near Epsom, Surrey, Nescot is a modern, exciting, and innovative college, which cares about students and invests in their future. Learning spaces cover a wide range of sectors and include construction workshops, a garage, labs, kitchens, salons, and a farm. There's also a theatre, gym, café, day nursery and a hair and beauty salon. Visit www.nescot.ac.uk to find out more.

NESCOT

nescot

Heathrow expansion consultation deadline

23 August 2026



Night flights in and out of Heathrow could be changed as part of new plans being consulted on – as moves to ramp up to a third runway continue and residents have just two weeks left to have their say.

The government is changing its Heathrow Expansion National Policy, which sets out how a third runway would be built.

The draft applies only to the northwestern runway project and also takes into consideration road and rail links, economics, as well as the social and environmental impacts related to its proposed expansion.

The deadline to take part is September 1 and questions include whether people support the proposed expansion, their thoughts on the new runway's impact on air quality, noise, climate change mitigation and economic growth.

On night flights, the Government has said that the ban will remain in place – but that it is seeking to change the

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“definition” through this consultation”.

Residents are being asked whether they agree or disagree that the proposed ban should be defined as when a ‘plane takes off or lands’ instead of ‘departure from and arrival to terminal’.

It also asks whether compensation for residents affected by noise breaches is fair. Heathrow is the United Kingdom’s only major hub airport and has operated at or near capacity for years.

Those in favour of expanding the airport say it needs the new runway to meet the growth in demand for aviation or risk missing out on opportunities available to businesses, passengers and communities.

Opponents have argued the economic benefits are overstated and the environmental harm too great.

The development consent would cover the Northwest Runway which, if built, would be up to 3,500m and be capable of enabling at least 260,000 additional flights a year. It would also cover any new or reconfigured terminals.

Heidi Alexander, Secretary of State for Transport, at the launch of the consultation: “The government will consider all responses carefully before deciding whether to proceed with designation.

“Any final Heathrow Expansion National Policy Statement will be published, laid before Parliament, and subject to a vote in the House of Commons before having legal effect.

“Heathrow expansion is a decision of national importance. It requires ambition, responsibility and proper scrutiny. This consultation is an important part of that process, and I encourage everyone with an interest to take part.”

Chris Caulfield Local Democracy Reporter

S e e :
https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/draft-heathrow-expansion-national-policy-statement-proposed-amendments/draft-heathrow-expansion-national-policy-statement-consultation-on-proposed-amendments

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Heathrow 3rd runway green-light by 2029?

Tunnel vision for Heathrow’s 3rd runway?

Conditional nod to southern rail link to Heathrow

Heathrow expansion – what it may mean for Epsom

Image: Heathrow shown with a third runway over the M25 (image Heathrow)

Surrey train timetable overhaul pending

23 August 2026



Once in a generation changes aimed at improving rail schedules are being set to be introduced across Surrey but there are concerns about how these may impact level crossing downtime, an MP has said.

South Western Railways (SWR) is set to carry out the first full refresh of train timetables across Surrey for more than 20 years.

The formal public consultation will begin this autumn when the operator publishes its options for the new timetables and will be inviting feedback on the plans.

It said it is doing this because the times and ways people travel has changed,

The new timetable, they say, will better match how passengers travel and come following the widespread introduction of the new, larger and more spacious, Arterio trains across the network.

South Western Railways, which came into public ownership last year, said the new timetable will need to balance journey times, connectivity, train performance and economic value.

Sweeping changes may not be entirely possible however as they need to work within existing infrastructure such as tracks, signals and stations – as well as sharing lines with other passenger and freight services.

SWR said feedback will play a crucial role in designing the new schedules -whether that is improving reliability or making journeys quicker and more convenient.

Previous efforts to increase rail capacity in Surrey, for example the proposed Airtrack line to Heathrow, would have resulted in level crossing barriers to be down for up to 45 minutes every hour in parts of Runnymede leading to concerns that the need to improve services must be balanced by what is best for the whole community.

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Posting to Facebook, the Runnymede and Weybridge MP Ben Spencer said: “Residents need no reminder of the impact railways can have.

“The upcoming timetable review presents both opportunities and risks for rail passengers and the wider community, given the impact rail services have on our level crossings and access across the community. Current rail services are falling well below the standard passengers should expect with thousands of residents frequently delayed by late trains, cancellations, and missed connections.

“But if changes are proposed to deliver improvements in these areas, they could also affect the frequency and duration of level crossing downtimes. It is therefore vital that residents share their views now on what are the most important issues SWR need to address as part of this review ahead of the public consultation being published this year.”

The full refresh of the timetable will be the first major changes across the south and west of England since 2004.

South Western Railway said some technical decisions will need to be balanced, for example between faster journeys from one station and more stops at another.

Consultation here: https://www.southwesterntimetable.com/

Chris Caulfield Local Democracy Reporter

Image: Epsom Railway station. Google

Patient injuries quadruple in Surrey’s largest mental health trust area

23 August 2026



This article has been amended to include statistics relating to the total number of patient restraint incidents across the trust in the relevant timeframes, and to clarify this number is what the trust’s quote (par 7) refers to.

The number of patient injuries at Surrey’s largest mental health trust have risen since the opening of its new inpatient facility last year.

Data obtained through a freedom of information (FOI) request to Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (SABP) found that the number of patient injuries across the county had more than quadrupled in the space of two years.

In the 2023/24 financial year, 92 service user injuries were reported across the trust, which shot up to 365 incidents in 2024/25 and 431 in 2025/26 – meaning more than one incident per day on average was reported in the most recent complete financial year.

A total of 141 incidents had been reported in the ongoing 2026/27 financial year at the time of the FOI response.

In addition, the number of incidents in which patients were restrained also leapt to a five year high in the 2025/26 year. A total 1,287 incidents were recorded, up from 826 the previous year.

An SABP spokesperson stressed that not all patient injuries reported were related to restraint incidents. “The use of restrictive practice is a very complex area and reducing restrictive practices is a trust priority,” they said.

The spokesperson told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) that the sharp rise in reported restraint incidents was “due to the opening of Silverwood’s inpatient services last year”.

Silverwood, located in Chertsey, began admitting patients in February 2025 and was designed to help Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust’s work to care for acutely mentally ill people.

The facility boasts 64 ensuite bedrooms across four wards, and was established to replace the old Abraham Cowley Unit (ACU).

However, the trust’s FOI response did not declare the number of staff injuries in this same time period, as it would have exceeded the cost limit on requests as each record would have to be reviewed manually.

The FOI response also revealed major changes in the trust’s use of restraint against acutely ill patients, with the reported number of “prone” restraints – where a patient is forced face down on the ground – dropping to zero in compliance with recent laws.

The Mental Health Units (Use of Force) Act 2018 was brought in to improve transparency in the use of such force in restraining patients, and contains guidance against the use of prone restraints.

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Better known as Seni's Law, it was implemented following the death of Olaseni "Seni" Lewis, who died in 2010 after being restrained at Bethlem Royal Hospital in Bromley.

While 20 prone restraint incidents were reported at the trust in the 2021/22 financial year, that number dropped into single figures for the following few years before reaching zero in 2025/26.

At the same time, the reported use of chemical restraints has risen substantially, with this jumping from 11 in 2022/23 to 830 in 2025/26 – and a further 333 in 2026/27 so far.

The SABP spokesperson added: "We record all cases when restrictive interventions are used in line with Seni's Law, officially the Mental Health Units (Use of Force) Act – which was fully introduced in 2022.

"It is also important to note that the number of recorded injuries may be caused by many reasons, the majority of which are not related to restraints."

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

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Sabp Silverwood (Credit: Google Maps)

Does Epsom and Ewell have the geo-thermal energy to solve our pothole problems?

23 August 2026



Could geothermal roads help prevent potholes before they form? Surrey trial aims to find out.

The UK's pothole problem could one day be tackled from beneath the road surface, as researchers at the University of Surrey launch a pioneering trial that uses heat stored underground to keep roads cooler in summer, warmer in winter and less prone to damage.

The Thermo-active Roads for Heat Harvesting and Pavement Temperature Regulation project will test whether a ground-source heating and cooling system can regulate road temperatures throughout the year – helping roads better withstand increasingly extreme weather while reducing the carbon footprint of highway maintenance, improving safety and reducing the inconvenience of roadworks.

The system works by embedding a network of heat exchange pipes beneath the road surface, running through both the asphalt and the layers below. During summer, water circulating through the pipes absorbs heat from the asphalt and transfers it to a 100-metre-deep borehole, where it is stored underground. In winter, that heat is circulated back through the pipes to warm the road surface, helping to prevent ice from forming and reducing the freeze-thaw cycles that contribute to potholes.

Installation has already begun in the Senate House car park on the University's Stag Hill campus, with the first phase of the trial underway and the second phase starting in mid-August 2026. Once operational, researchers will monitor the system over a number of years using underground sensors to assess how effectively it regulates road temperatures.

Project lead, Dr Benyi Cao, who is a Senior Lecturer in Geotechnical Engineering at the University of Surrey and Royal Academy of Engineering Research Fellow, said:

"Rather than reacting to potholes after they've formed, we're asking how we can prevent them in the first place. Potholes are more than an inconvenience – they are a safety hazard; they disrupt journeys and are costly to repair. Our project will explore whether geothermal technology can help prevent that damage from happening at scale."

Unlike many emerging infrastructure technologies, Surrey's project uses mature, readily available materials, including standard plastic pipework and water circulation pumps, making future deployment both practical and affordable.

Previous studies in Europe and the United States have explored similar concepts, but Surrey's project will provide detailed real-world evidence of how the technology performs in UK conditions.

As well as monitoring the road itself, the team will measure air temperatures above the test section to investigate whether cooler pavements could also reduce surrounding air temperatures during periods of extreme heat.

Dr Nikolas Makasis, Lecturer in Civil Engineering at the University of Surrey and project co-investigator, said:

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“This trial will give us real-world evidence of how geothermal road systems perform outside the laboratory. If the results are promising, road authorities will have the evidence they need to deploy this technology to create longer-lasting roads, reduce maintenance costs and make transport infrastructure more resilient to a changing climate.”

The project is funded through Dr Benyi Cao’s Royal Academy of Engineering Research Fellowship, with additional support from Surrey County Council’s Lane Rental Scheme.

Surrey University

Image: Construction underway outside Senate House, University of Surrey. Image credit: University of Surrey.

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Free bus travel is a good idea; so why does it stop at 15?

23 August 2026



Dear Editor,

This August, children aged five to 15 can travel free on local buses across England. I think that’s genuinely good. It makes days out cheaper, helps children get to summer activities, and might persuade a few families to leave the car at home.

But I can’t quite work out why it stops at 15. And where I live, age isn’t really what decides the price of a bus seat anyway.

I’m 16. I live in Epsom and travel to school in Wallington, which is in the London Borough of Sutton. I have a 16+ Zip Oyster photocard. Going to school in London, it turns out, makes no difference at all; the rule follows where you sleep, not where you study.

So here is what the same card is worth to different people. If you’re 16 and live in a London borough, it gives you free bus travel. If you’re 16 and live outside London, as I do, it gives you half the adult fare – about 88p a journey. And if you’re 16 and have never applied for one, you tap a contactless card and pay the full £1.75.

Three 16-year-olds. Same bus, same stop. One pays nothing, one pays 88p, one pays £1.75.

Nothing in that reflects need, or distance, or what anyone’s family earns. It reflects which side of the Greater London boundary you sleep on, and whether somebody remembered to tell you the card exists.

That second part bothers me most, because it’s the easiest thing to fix. Some students will inevitably miss out simply because nobody has explained the system clearly enough. A benefit that depends on knowing it exists ends up helping the organised rather than the people who need it.

And the cost starts to matter more at 16 than it did at 15. At 15, most journeys are still with your family. At 16 you’re travelling on your own to sixth form, a Saturday job, or a work experience placement you were told to arrange yourself. Nobody tells you that you can’t apply for those things. On paper they’re open to everyone. But one student can afford the journey every week and another quietly decides they can’t, and from the outside that never looks like unfairness at all.

I should admit I’m arguing against my own convenience here. I have the card, and half fare is not a hardship. I’d still rather Epsom’s 16-year-olds got what Sutton’s get. The Greater London boundary was drawn to decide who administers what; it was never meant to decide which teenager can afford to get to an interview in Croydon. TfL buses cross it every twenty minutes.

Surrey does have its own scheme, the LINK card, which halves fares for under-20s. It’s useful, it’s badly advertised, and it doesn’t work on TfL services – which are the buses that actually serve this town.

Of course the government has to draw a line somewhere, and August’s offer was aimed at families with younger children. That’s fair. Public money isn’t unlimited. But 15 isn’t an obvious place to stop, and a postcode isn’t a principle at all.

Two things would help. Extend the August offer to everyone under 18; we’re legally required to be in education or training, and most of us earn very little. And make sure every pupil in Epsom and Ewell hears about both the 16+ Zip and the LINK card before their sixteenth birthday, with a plain list of what each one covers.

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Free buses this August are a good idea. I just don't think a birthday, a boundary and a form should decide who keeps them.

Yours faithfully,

Emad Rehman
Aged 16, Epsom, student at Wilson's School, Wallington

Record A level results open doors for Epsom and Ewell students

23 August 2026



Students at two Epsom and Ewell secondary schools are celebrating impressive A-level and vocational qualification results, with Rosebery School recording its best results to date and seven Glyn School students securing straight A* grades.

At Rosebery School in Epsom, 43% of all A-level entries received an A* or A grade, while 73% were graded A* to B and 88% A* to C. All three figures represent new records for the girls' school.

Twenty-four Rosebery students achieved A* or A grades in every subject. Five secured straight A*s: Emma Glencross, with four A*s, and Emily Woodville, Grace Worley, Amy Box and Amy Helyar, each with three.

The school also highlighted students whose results demonstrated particularly strong progress since their GCSEs. Emily Gromova, Amelie Dale, Lara Sollewijn Gelpke and Jacqueline Tetteh were among the strongest members of the cohort when measured by the progress made from their earlier attainment.

Rosebery headteacher David Lach said: "These results are truly outstanding and reflect the talent, resilience and determination of an exceptional group of young women. We are enormously proud of what they have achieved and the way they have supported one another throughout their journey.

"At Rosebery, we believe there should be no limits to what girls can achieve, and this year's results demonstrate exactly that."

Members of the Class of 2026 will now progress to destinations including Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial College London, King's College London and the universities of Warwick and Bath. Others have secured degree apprenticeships or will pursue specialist training, including pilot training and drama school.

Mr Lach thanked Rosebery's teaching and support staff for helping the students to believe in themselves and fulfil their potential.

At Glyn School in Ewell, staff and students were meanwhile celebrating A-level and vocational qualification results in which more than 51% of students achieved A* to B grades.

Seven students obtained straight A*s. Vrushabh K achieved four, in chemistry, further mathematics, mathematics and physics, and will study mechanical and electrical engineering at the University of Bristol.

Oliver H gained three A*s in mathematics, further mathematics and physics and is heading to the University of Sheffield. Amri R achieved the same top grades in computer science, mathematics and further mathematics and will study at Imperial College London.

Amelie S secured A*s in biology, chemistry and mathematics, while Ilario Lok C achieved A*s* in further mathematics, mathematics and physics and will attend the University of Hong Kong.

James D received three A*s in chemistry, mathematics and physics, while James Y achieved three in economics, mathematics and geography.

Glyn headteacher Jo Garrod said: "We are thrilled to see this year's A-level and BTEC exam success. With over 51% of students achieving A* to B grades, they should all be extremely proud of their efforts, and we wish them the very best for their futures."

She said the school was delighted that students had secured places at their chosen universities, apprenticeships and careers, while paying particular tribute to those who had overcome significant barriers before sitting their examinations.

"They should be incredibly proud of themselves and the results they have secured under difficult circumstances," she added. "Thanks also go to the staff for their immense effort this year to ensure our students got the grades they deserved."

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Warwick Sharp, chief executive of GLF Schools, which includes both Rosebery and Glyn, congratulated the students and staff.

Describing Rosebery's results as "record-breaking", he said its students had been set on a path towards future success by the school's committed team.

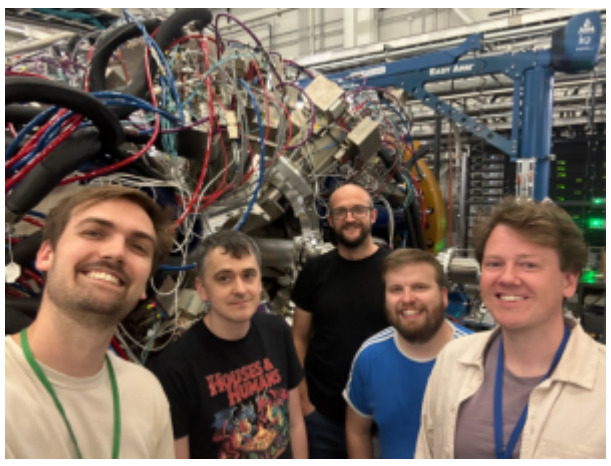
Addressing Glyn's results, he added: "We are excited to see what these wonderful young people go on to do next as they shape their futures. A huge thanks and well done to the brilliant team at Glyn who should be proud of these impressive achievements."

Sam Jones – Reporter



Surrey leads first nuclear science experiment with world's most advanced gamma-ray detector

23 August 2026



Nuclear physicists at the University of Surrey have become the first to carry out a scientific experiment using the world's most advanced gamma-ray spectrometer – investigating a sudden change in the shape of the atomic nucleus that could challenge existing theories.

Nuclear physicists at the University of Surrey have become the first to carry out a scientific experiment using the world's most advanced gamma-ray spectrometer – investigating a sudden change in the shape of the atomic nucleus that could challenge existing theories.

The experiment took place at the Facility for Rare Isotope Beams (FRIB) in Michigan, USA, using the newly delivered and characterised Gamma-Ray Energy Tracking Array (GRETA). Led by Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (LBNL) and delivered by a collaboration with Argonne National Laboratory, Oak Ridge National Laboratory and FRIB, GRETA is a $58 million detector designed to reveal the structure of atomic nuclei in unprecedented detail.

Working with collaborators from FRIB and Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, the Surrey team investigated a radioactive isotope of germanium to help answer a long-standing question about the shape of its atomic nucleus.

For many years, physicists predicted that the nucleus should resemble a rugby ball. However, more recent evidence has suggested it could instead be flattened like a disc – a result that would challenge current theories describing how protons and neutrons behave inside the nucleus.

Dr Jack Henderson, Co-Project Investigator, UKRI Future Leaders Fellow and Senior Lecturer at the University of Surrey's School of Mathematics and Physics, said:

"Beam time at facilities like FRIB is exceptionally competitive, with proposals assessed by an international panel of experts. Being selected to lead the first scientific experiment using GRETA is an incredible achievement for us here at Surrey.

"Nuclear physicists deliberately study the most unusual atomic nuclei because they provide the toughest tests of our understanding. In this case, we wanted to investigate whether this isotope of germanium really does have an unexpected disc-like shape – a bit like chocolate Smarties."

GRETA uses highly segmented high-purity germanium detectors to detect, localise and track gamma rays emitted by unstable atomic nuclei, allowing scientists to study their structure with unprecedented sensitivity and precision. Compared with the detector originally planned for the germanium experiment, GRETA is around five times more efficient, meaning measurements can be completed faster and with far greater precision.

Because access to rare isotope beam facilities is limited, GRETA's efficiency enables scientists to study more exotic, short-lived isotopes within the available beam time.

Beyond Surrey's experiment, GRETA opens up new opportunities to study how the elements are formed in explosive astrophysical events and deepen scientists' understanding of how protons and neutrons interact within the atomic

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nucleus. Its exceptional sensitivity also allows researchers to detect tiny signals hidden within complex datasets and investigate increasingly rare isotopes that were previously beyond reach.

Paul Fallon, GRETA project director and interim director of Berkeley Lab's Nuclear Science Division, said:

"The completion of GRETA and the first installation for physics experiments is a major milestone. This is the result of years of effort from a very big team."

The experiment was led by Dr Jacob Heery, a postdoctoral research assistant at the University of Surrey, whose proposal secured the highly sought-after beam time after being selected by an international panel of experts.

Jacob Heery said: "Securing the first scientific experiment using GRETA is a huge achievement within the nuclear physics community. The detector gives us a level of sensitivity we've never had before, allowing us to investigate extremely rare isotopes that were previously beyond reach. We're only just beginning to explore what's possible, and I hope this will be the first of many collaborations between Surrey, FRIB and the GRETA team."

Analysis of the experiment is now underway. The work formed part of the JANUS (Joint Arrays for Nuclear Structure) collaboration between FRIB, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and the University of Surrey. It also builds on Surrey's leadership of the £3.1 million FAUST project, which is developing a next-generation detector system that will operate alongside GRETA in future experiments.

Surrey University

Photo: Credit University of Surrey. Caption: From left to right: Chris Cousins (Surrey), Stephen Gillespie (FRIB), Jack Henderson (Surrey), Tom Parry (FRIB – Surrey PhD), Daniel Doherty (Surrey).

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Drones may reduce delays on Waterloo line

23 August 2026



A drone is now operating at London Waterloo to tackle trespass, fix infrastructure faults and reduce disruption
Operated remotely from Southampton, the drone provides live intelligence to South Western Railway and Network Rail Wessex for rapid response to incidents.

Trespass and fatalities account for almost 14 per cent of delays, making them a leading cause of disruption and costing taxpayers millions.

Automated drone technology is part of publicly owned South Western Railway and Network Rail Wessex's plan to improve services for customers ahead of the establishment of Great British Railways
RAILWAY customers at London Waterloo may have spotted a new presence overhead: a drone helping to prevent delays at Britain's biggest station.

South Western Railway (SWR) and Network Rail Wessex (NR Wessex) are deploying automated drone technology to deter and tackle trespass, improve safety and reduce disruption on one of the country's busiest rail corridors.

Trespassing on the railway is illegal and extremely dangerous. SWR and NR Wessex trains are powered by an 'always on' electric third rail carrying 750 volts of direct current, which can cause severe, lifechanging injuries or death.

When trespass is reported on the railway, SWR and NR Wessex must turn off the power, preventing trains from running until the incident has been resolved and power to the lines can be safely restored.

Most of South Western's 1,600 daily services begin or end at London Waterloo. Even minor incidents can delay thousands of customers and cost taxpayers millions.

Between April 2025 and June 2026, trespass and fatalities caused almost 14 per cent of cancellations and over 200,000

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minutes of delay to SWR and NR Wessex services, making it one of the leading causes of disruption.

Last September, a trespasser near Clapham Junction caused more than 57 hours of delays and was later imprisoned for eight weeks.

Another even more serious incident in the New Malden area in August 2024 saw the equivalent of nine days of delays, costing the taxpayer £1.2 million. The trespasser was sentenced to 18 months in prison.

The drone is operated remotely by British firm SkyBound from a high-tech control centre almost 80 miles away in Woolston, in the Southampton area.

When required, operators launch the drone from its trackside station to provide rapid intelligence for SWR and NR Wessex's control centre, security and engineering teams, even before teams arrive on the ground.

Its high-resolution and thermal imaging cameras give enhanced visibility of trespass incidents, infrastructure concerns or any situation that requires inspection, with live footage streamed directly to the network's operations centre in Basingstoke.

This allows the railway and emergency services to respond more quickly, reduces the need for ground teams to access the track, and limits the need to switch off the power and delays customer journeys.

The drone at Waterloo is just the first of a planned chain of SkyBound drones to help protect the busiest section of the SWR and NR Wessex network, with further drones to be based at Clapham Junction, New Malden and Walton-on-Thames.

South Western Railways

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A battle in Epsom: "A Bridge Too Near"

23 August 2026



A newly built railway footbridge has been delivered to Epsom Common but cannot be installed after a late dispute emerged between Surrey County Council and Network Rail over its width.

Residents of Castle Road, Epsom, who have endured nearly three years without the former crossing to Evelyn Way, briefly blocked access to the Network Rail compound when the replacement structure arrived to be stored beside their homes.

The previous bridge was closed and demolished almost three years ago. Work to strengthen and rebuild its supports began earlier this year, and residents had expected the new bridge to be installed over the weekend of 4 July.

Instead, the structure is now lying within the building site while Network Rail and Surrey County Council attempt to resolve whether it can legally be installed.

The bridge has been designed with a width of 1.5 metres. However, SCC says the public footpath crossing the railway has a legally recorded width of 3.6 metres.

The council maintains that allowing a narrower bridge would obstruct part of the public right of way and breach its statutory duty to protect its full width.

What has particularly angered residents is that the conflict appears not to have surfaced until April 2026, despite the bridge having been absent for almost three years and construction work beginning in February.

SCC says it was neither consulted about the replacement design nor asked to approve the works before construction began.

'No choice but to object'

Cllr Matt Furniss, SCC Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth, told the Epsom and Ewell Times:

"We appreciate and share residents' frustration at the situation. Unfortunately, Network Rail failed to consult us on the installation of the bridge prior to starting construction works in February, nor did they apply under the Highways Act for

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an S118 or technical approval to undertake works to a structure on a public highway.

“This meant when we found out about the bridge work in April, we had no choice but to object in line with our statutory duty to assert and protect public rights of way.

“The bridge being proposed by Network Rail also fails to meet minimum width national design standards, with it being less than half the width of the public footpath. To provide a narrower bridge is an obstruction under the Highways Act.”

Cllr Furniss added that SCC understood Network Rail had placed a structure on the site but said the rail infrastructure body had not confirmed its intentions.

“We will continue to work with Network Rail to resolve this situation as soon as possible while achieving the best possible long-term outcome for the community and ensuring that the public footpath is protected,” he said.

Residents halt delivery

Residents learned that, rather than pay for storage elsewhere, the completed bridge was to be delivered to the site and left there pending a resolution.

When the delivery day arrived, a group gathered at the entrance and initially prevented the vehicle from entering.

“We were ready for it; the whole thing was set up for it,” said Castle Road resident Linda Barry. “But if it’s now just dumped here, we have no idea when the bridge will be installed. What has been the three-year hold-up at Surrey County Council?”

The project manager was called to the scene and attempted to reassure residents that the delay would be temporary. With the bridge already in transit and no alternative place immediately available for it, residents eventually allowed it to be unloaded.

“We were in an impossible position,” said Ms Barry. “The bridge was here, and there was nowhere else for it to go. But now we have no guarantee that it will be installed, so it could be here by the side of the road for a long time.”

Residents say they have already endured years of disruption, dust and temporary sewage-pumping arrangements associated with the works.

Council learned of bridge through social media

In a separate response to Ms Barry, a member of the SCC Countryside Capital Programme said the authority became aware of the proposed replacement bridge only in late April — and did so through social media.

She wrote: “Unfortunately, we had not been consulted on the design and therefore had no opportunity to provide input during its development.”

She explained that Section 130 of the Highways Act 1980 requires the council, as highway authority, to assert and protect the rights of people using public rights of way.

“This includes protecting the full recorded width of the public footpath,” she said. “As a result of the legislation, we are not legally able to permit the installation of a bridge that would reduce the available width of the public footpath to below the recorded legal width.”

Ms Barry questioned why consultation had apparently not taken place during the years between the closure of the old bridge and construction of its replacement.

She also pointed out that, during her 43 years living in Castle Road, she had known the crossing as a footbridge used by pedestrians and people with pushchairs rather than as a route requiring a 3.6-metre-wide structure.

Potential year-long delay

Residents have been told that resolving the dispute could delay installation by as much as another 12 months, although no revised completion date has yet been formally confirmed.

The controversy raises questions over how a replacement bridge could be designed, manufactured and brought to the point of installation without the highway authority responsible for the public right of way being consulted.

For Castle Road residents, the immediate result is that a bridge built to restore a long-closed route has reached Epsom — but remains firmly on the ground.

Photo caption: Castle Road residents Linda Barry and Rob block access to the Network Rail site before the replacement footbridge was unloaded.

Network Rail was been invited to comment.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Photo caption: Castle Road residents Linda Barry and Rob block access to the Network Rail site before the replacement footbridge was unloaded.

Related reports:

A bridge closed too far?

Epsom Council chamber walk-out: a postscript

23 August 2026



The procedural controversy at Epsom and Ewell Borough Council did not end when 11 councillors walked out of the Council Chamber on 21 July in protest at the Mayor's ruling in favour of her father participating in a debate on the development of Council owned Hook Road arena, where his annual fireworks display is held.

Since Epsom and Ewell Times's (EET) report, "Fireworks at Epsom Council spark walk-out", further exchanges with Councillor **Neil Dallen** (RA, Town) and the Mayor, Councillor **Lucie McIntyre** (RA, West Ewell), have raised questions about accountability, consistency and the proper boundary between robust scrutiny and personal abuse.

An interview made a condition of answering

Before the earlier publication, EET sent Cllr Dallen straightforward written questions about his position as a director of Epsom Fireworks Display Limited, the company's agreement to hire the Council-owned Hook Road Arena, and whether he has ever received remuneration, expenses or another financial benefit through the company. After five days Cllr Dallen did not reply before publication.

After the publication he made an interview a condition of responding: "I do not intend to answer them *(the questions)* in isolation but if you wish to meet and discuss the firework display, how it is organised, who benefits etc. I would be very happy to meet you either face to face or online."

EET explained that its settled news-gathering policy is to conduct enquiries by email. This creates an exact, contemporaneous record of the questions asked and answers given and protects reporters, contributors and those being interviewed against later disagreement about what was said. This policy has been expressly approved by EET's regulator IMPRESS. Furthermore, as volunteers we do not have the time to give and Cllr Dallen is no exception to our method. EET would welcome for publication an article about the history of the Epsom fireworks, an annual event that has been a staple of community life in the Borough since 1971.

Cllr Dallen replied: "*I can see no point in responding*. Perhaps you need to consider taking out insurance or getting agreement to record meetings."

For clarity, Cllr Dallen did not decline an interview. He required one before he would answer. EET declined that condition and renewed its invitation to answer in writing. No substantive response has followed.

Cllr Dallen is under no general legal obligation to answer questions from a newspaper. His decision not to answer proves neither payment nor wrongdoing. EET nevertheless considers the questions proper and relevant to the public controversy.

In particular, the question remains unanswered:

As a director, does Cllr Dallen receive, or has he ever received, fees, expenses or any other financial benefit from Epsom Fireworks Display Limited?

Gain is not the only possible interest

At the 21st July Council meeting, Cllr Dallen declared that he was a director and trustee connected with the fireworks display, but said he did not have a pecuniary interest in the Hook Road proposal.

It is possible that he reached that conclusion in good faith because the motion sought to advance development which might ultimately bring the annual firework display to an end rather than produce a gain for him.

A pecuniary interest, however, is not confined to the prospect of making money from the decision. An existing financial interest may also be adversely affected and that would constitute a "*pecuniary interest*"

Moreover, EEBC's Members' Code of Conduct includes among disclosable pecuniary interests a contract between the Council and an incorporated body of which the councillor is a director, where goods or services are to be provided and the contract has not been fully discharged. Epsom Fireworks Display Limited had an agreement to hire Hook Road Arena for the November 2026 display.

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The Code says that, where a matter "directly relates" to such an interest, the councillor must disclose it, take no part in the discussion or vote and leave the room unless granted a dispensation.

That leaves an important question of application. Did a motion merely making development of the Arena a strategic priority "directly relate" to the existing fireworks-hire contract? The motion did not itself cancel that agreement or approve a particular development. There is consequently room for legal argument.

But the existence of a company contract is relevant independently of whether Cllr Dallen receives directors' fees. An answer about remuneration would still help establish whether his directorship also falls within the separate category of an office carried on for "profit or gain" and would allow the public to understand the full nature of his interest.

It remains a question Cllr Dallen has chosen not to answer.

The Mayor's full statement

EET also asked Cllr McIntyre why she did not formally disclose that Cllr Dallen is her father and why she did not invite the Deputy Mayor to chair the dispute over his participation.

The Council supplied the following statement on her behalf: "I was elected Mayor this year and, as you will read in my biography on the Council website, the commitment my father, Councillor Dallen, demonstrates in helping others is one of the things that inspired me to serve my community by becoming a councillor, and now Mayor. I am perfectly able to chair a meeting in my capacity as Mayor when my father is in attendance. At the Full Council meeting on 21 July, Councillor Dallen declared that he did not have a pecuniary interest in the item concerning Hook Road Arena, which was his right."

The original report summarised the first part and reproduced the final two sentences verbatim, these being the part directly addressing the question. The Council subsequently insisted that the entire statement should appear, saying that editing it had altered its meaning.

EET therefore publishes it above in full.

The additional passage undoubtedly supplies context. It also expressly records Cllr McIntyre's admiration for her father and the influence he has had upon her own public life. Readers may consider that this reinforces, rather than dispels, the appearance of a conflict when she chaired rulings determining whether he could remain, speak and move the motion.

The issue is not whether a mayor can ordinarily chair a meeting attended by a parent. It is whether she should have continued to chair the particular dispute over that parent's interests, without formally disclosing the relationship and when the Deputy Mayor was available.

Cllr McIntyre's statement does not answer that question.

In requesting publication of the full quotation, the Council's communications team added: "We value our working relationship with local media and always respond to enquiries in good faith, with the expectation that comments will be represented accurately."

This was not an express threat to end cooperation with EET. In its context, however, the reference to the working relationship could be read as placing institutional weight behind the request. A constructive relationship between a council and the local press must permit fair editing, difficult questions and disagreement over what is relevant. It cannot depend upon every supplied statement being published in full.

Was there "hate" in the chamber?

At the conclusion of the Hook Road debate, Cllr Dallen said: "We, as a council, made a motion about Debate Not Hate, and I think we need to remind ourselves about that."

EEBC unanimously adopted its Debate Not Hate motion in July 2023. It committed the Council to challenging abuse and intimidation while encouraging healthy political debate.

The campaign was never intended to make councillors immune from criticism. When the East Surrey Shadow Authority recently supported the same Local Government Association campaign, councillors emphasised that they expected their decisions to be questioned and that there was a fundamental difference between robust disagreement and personal abuse. As one councillor put it: "We should challenge each other's policies, question decisions, and hold one another to account." Read EET's report.

EET has reviewed the transcript of the Hook Road exchange. It records repeated procedural objections, interruptions, an adjournment and the walk-out. Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative Horton) called the Council "a joke". Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) praised those opposition councillors who remained for showing a "mature side", prompting Cllr **Chris Watson** (Labour Ewell Court) to defend the walk-out as a valid democratic act. Cllr **Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) referred more generally to "cheap pop shots and remarks" and councillors feeling "mauled".

Some of that language was sharp and the atmosphere was plainly heated. EET found no threat, discriminatory abuse, harassment or personal attack upon Cllr Dallen in the recorded Hook Road exchange of the kind at which Debate Not Hate is principally directed. The objections concerned whether he was entitled to participate and whether the correct procedure had been followed.

It is therefore fair to ask what Cllr Dallen intended by invoking Debate Not Hate. If it was directed at those procedural objections, it risked treating scrutiny as abuse and turning a campaign designed to protect democratic participation into a means of discouraging it.

"Debate Not Hate" cannot sensibly mean "debate, but no uncomfortable questions". The campaign protects councillors against intimidation; it does not release them from accountability.

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Cllr Dallen may maintain that he had no pecuniary interest and was entitled to participate. Cllr McIntyre may maintain that she was capable of chairing impartially. Both are entitled to state those positions.

But accountability involves more than asserting that one is right. It includes answering reasonable questions, disclosing relationships relevant to public perception and permitting established rules to be tested without characterising the challenge itself as hate.

Whether the approaches taken here demonstrate consistency—or something closer to selective accountability—is a judgment readers can now make with the exchanges before them.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Related reports

- Fireworks at Epsom Council spark walk-out
- Why procedure matters—even in little old Epsom and Ewell
- Debate Not Hate says East Surrey Shadow Authority

Staines Ali G fans hope for Massiv support for statue

23 August 2026



A petition has been launched calling for a statue celebrating Ali G to be installed in Staines – tying in with the release of his new film.

The petitioners want Spelthorne Borough Council to explore a “temporary” Ali G attraction in the town linked to the upcoming release of ‘Ali G: Who Iz I?’, while also looking at options to fund a permanent landmark.

Nearly 15 years have now passed since Staines voted to change its name to Staines-upon-Thames – partially in response to negative associations with the character.

But the new petition wants the town to “embrace the attention with humour and pride” – and even asks the council to reach out to actor Sacha Baron Cohen himself to get involved.

It reads: “Ali G and the Staines Massiv have given Staines a distinctive place in British popular culture.

“The release of a new film provides an opportunity to celebrate that connection, promote the town centre and create a lasting community benefit.”

While the petitioners want the council to invest in a permanent statue or landmark to celebrate Ali G, it adds that this should only happen “if external funding is secured for its design, installation and maintenance”.

The petitioners explicitly state they do not want a statue to be bought and upkept using council tax receipts, and want the project to “include a secure donation facility supporting affordable sport, arts, leisure and community activities for children and young people in Staines”.

They add: “We believe Staines should embrace the attention with humour and pride, while using it to support the next generation of the Staines Massiv.”

Just ten people have signed the petition at time of writing, which will run on Spelthorne Borough Council’s website until August 24.

Played by Sacha Baron Cohen, Ali G rocketed to global notoriety following the release of ‘Ali G Indahouse’ in 2002.

While the film was broadly well received with critics and audiences, many people felt the spoof character left viewers with an undeservedly bad impression of Staines.

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Staines' name was officially changed to Staines-upon-Thames in 2012, in a move that was widely seen as being a reaction to Ali G's depiction of the town.

However, then Spelthorne Borough Councillor Colin Davis told the BBC at the time: "Ali G may have had a role, but I think it goes back further than that.

"I regard Ali G as someone who put Staines on the map, we're just telling people where it is."

The character's new film 'Ali G: Who Iz I?' is due to be released on October 23, 2026.

Chris Caulfield Local Democracy Reporter

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Photo: Ali G Indahouse (Universal Pictures)

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