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New Gatwick wetland aims to reduce flood and drought risks

21 July 2026



A new wetland capable of holding up to 600,000 litres of water has been created near Gatwick as part of efforts to make the Upper Mole catchment more resilient to flooding, heatwaves and prolonged dry weather.

The South East Rivers Trust has completed the latest phase of a project using natural measures to slow, store and filter water before it travels downstream.

Across two sites, the environmental charity has created the wetland and reconnected 100 metres of river with its natural floodplain.

The wetland will collect rainfall and surface water, releasing it gradually downstream. Restoring the connection between the river and its floodplain will also give water more space to spread out and be held temporarily during periods of heavy rain.

The measures are intended to ease pressure on downstream communities when rainfall is intense, while keeping more water in the landscape during hot and dry periods. The restored areas should also provide new and improved habitats for wildlife.

The work was funded by London Gatwick through its Decade of Change sustainability programme, a strategy covering 10 environmental and social priorities up to 2030.

The latest phase, delivered between July 2025 and June 2026, included:

- Installing more than 50 “leaky barriers” to slow the movement of water;
- Planting a 100-metre hedgerow containing 400 native trees;
- Bringing two more landowners into the catchment project; and
- Monitoring rainfall, river levels and water clarity to study how water moves through the landscape.

Leaky barriers are carefully positioned structures made from natural materials such as branches and logs. Under normal conditions, water can continue to flow through them, but during heavier rainfall they slow the flow and hold back some of the water temporarily.

George Biggs, project officer at the South East Rivers Trust, said the recent spell of hot and dry weather illustrated one side of the challenge facing the area.

“During the current hot and dry weather, it can be difficult to imagine how quickly heavy rainfall can create problems for our rivers and local communities,” he said.

“The Upper Mole responds very rapidly when it rains, with water moving quickly through the catchment. By restoring wetlands, reconnecting rivers with their floodplains and installing leaky barriers, we can give that water more space and more time.

“These measures help create a healthier, more resilient landscape that is better prepared for both very wet and very dry conditions. They also provide valuable new habitats for wildlife.”

The Upper Mole is particularly responsive to rainfall because of its clay soils, modified river channels and surrounding urban development. Heavy rain can move rapidly downstream, increasing the risk of flooding and placing additional pressure on water quality and river habitats.

Natural flood management seeks to tackle those problems nearer their source by working with the landscape to slow, store and filter water.

Mark Edwards, head of sustainability at London Gatwick, said: “This important initiative, delivered in partnership with the South East Rivers Trust, is a vital part of London Gatwick’s Decade of Change sustainability programme.

“This partnership is a great example of bringing together technical expertise, landowners and local knowledge to deliver practical measures that support biodiversity, water quality and climate resilience.

“It demonstrates how London Gatwick can support enhancements to the local area outside the airport.”

Further restoration work is now being planned across the Upper Mole catchment. Proposals include restoring an old pond so that it can store more water and support biodiversity, installing additional leaky barriers and designing another

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wetland to improve water quality and availability.

The partners also intend to extend the project into another of the Upper Mole's six waterbodies, continue monitoring the measures already installed and hold community engagement days about the river and natural flood management.

The project initially concentrated on the headwaters of the River Mole, including Baldhorns Brook near Rusper. Its longer-term ambition is to expand throughout the Upper Mole catchment and demonstrate how nature-based measures could help restore other urban river headwaters across the South East.

Monitoring equipment is recording rainfall, river levels and turbidity – a measurement related to water clarity – so that the Trust can assess how the catchment and the completed interventions respond to wet weather.

Further information about the Gatwick Airport Natural Flood Management Project is available from the South East Rivers Trust.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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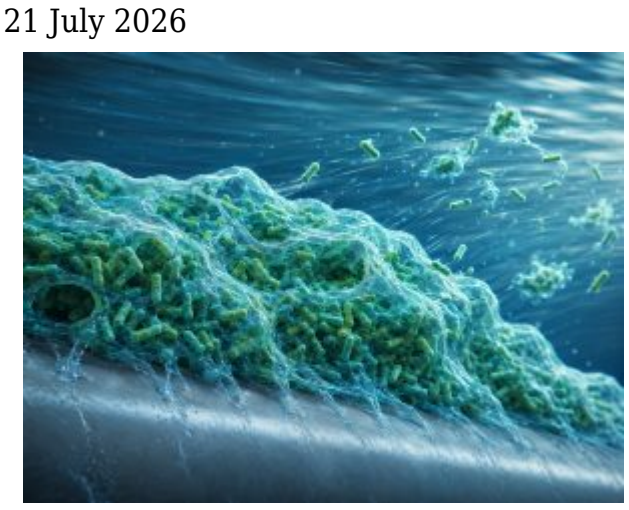
Photo: Weed clearing – courtesy South-East Rivers Trust

Surrey University leads research against anti-biotic resistance

21 July 2026



Faster and more effective ways to treat *pseudomonas aeruginosa*, a bacterium identified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as one of the most life-threatening pathogens, could be on the cards thanks to a first-of-its-kind 3D computer model developed by the University of Surrey.

The model has shown how *pseudomonas aeruginosa* grows and reshapes its protective layer and spreads to new surfaces. The WHO estimates that bacterial antimicrobial resistance – where antibiotics are no longer effective – was directly responsible for 1.27 million deaths worldwide in 2019 alone.

In a study published in npj Biofilms and Microbiomes, researchers used BioDynaMo, an open-source simulation platform developed as part of an international collaboration involving the University of Surrey and partners worldwide, to create a three-dimensional agent-based model (ABM) that recreates how *pseudomonas aeruginosa* forms biofilms.

Biofilms are communities of bacteria encased in a protective sticky layer made up of sugars, proteins and DNA that allows them to cling to surfaces and resist antibiotics. For Pseudomonas aeruginosa, these biofilms commonly form in flowing environments such as catheters and plumbing systems.

Unlike previous computer models, the Surrey-developed ABM captures how biofilms grow under constant fluid flow – similar to real-world conditions – and how the bacteria naturally break away from them to spread and colonise new surfaces. The team validated the simulation against laboratory experiments, demonstrating that it accurately reproduces the growth, structure and detachment patterns seen in real bacterial biofilms.

Ryan Bournes, postgraduate researcher at the University of Surrey and lead author of the study, said:

"Biofilms are incredibly difficult to study because many of the important interactions happen at a microscopic level. Our model allows us to simulate these processes in a virtual environment, making it much easier to test new ideas and understand how these bacteria spread without solely relying on costly and time-consuming laboratory experiments."

As well as helping scientists study *pseudomonas aeruginosa*, the modelling framework could be adapted to investigate other biofilm-forming bacteria and predict how factors such as fluid flow, surface design and bacterial behaviour influence the spread of infection.

Dr Roman Bauer, Senior Lecturer at the University of Surrey's Computer Science Research Centre and BioDynaMo spokesperson, said:

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“Antimicrobial resistance is steadily rising due to the overuse and misuse of antibiotics, so finding faster and smarter ways to understand the behaviour of pathogens is essential.

“Using BioDynaMo, we’ve been able to recreate for the first time how Pseudomonas aeruginosa biofilms grow, change shape and spread under flowing conditions – biological processes that would be extremely difficult, expensive or even impossible to observe directly. This gives researchers a powerful new tool for virtual testing before moving into the laboratory.”

The research could help researchers optimise experiments, reduce laboratory costs and support the development of safer medical devices, hospital plumbing systems and other environments where harmful biofilms can form.

Surrey University

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Image: Artist’s impression of Pseudomonas aeruginosa bacteria encased within a protective biofilm under flowing conditions.

Councillors dispute significance of EEBC’s complaint rate

21 July 2026



Epsom and Ewell recorded Surrey’s second-highest rate of upheld Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman complaints during 2025/26 — although officers and some councillors argued that the numbers were too small to indicate a systemic problem.

The Ombudsman received 18 complaints concerning EEBC, up from 15 in the previous year. Two were recorded as upheld, producing a rate of 2.4 upheld complaints per 100,000 residents. Only Spelthorne, at 2.8, had a higher rate among Surrey’s borough and district councils.

At last night’s Audit and Scrutiny Committee meeting Cllr **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) asked why Epsom and Ewell’s rate appeared markedly worse than most neighbouring authorities.

Cllr **Steve McCormick** (Conservative Woodcote and Langley) asked what weaknesses in the Council’s first and second-stage complaints processes were causing cases to reach the Ombudsman and what service improvements would be put in place before the transfer to East Surrey Unitary Authority.

Assistant Director Andrew Bircher rejected the suggestion of systemic failure. He said the actual number of complaints was very low and that one of the two cases was classified as upheld even though the Ombudsman had not opened a full investigation. In that case, the Council had already accepted the complaint and taken satisfactory remedial action.

“I don’t see that there is an issue to be concerned about here as we transition into the new East Surrey authority,” he said.

Cllr **Robert Leach** RA Nonsuch) agreed that percentages based on one or two cases could be misleading. “When you’re dealing with very small numbers, you really have to have a viability threshold,” he said. “This is probably something barely worth reporting.”

Refuse, rodents and reasonable adjustments

The first upheld case concerned repeated accumulations of refuse and fly-tipping near a resident’s home, causing a rodent problem.

Following the Council’s own stage-two investigation, it apologised and agreed to double waste collections and inspections, make the location a priority site and increase the presence of uniformed officers.

The Ombudsman decided that no further investigation was required because the Council had already remedied the

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injustice. Its system nevertheless recorded the complaint as upheld.

The second case concerned the Council's requirement that reports of planning breaches be submitted online or on a specified form.

The Ombudsman found that, after the complainant explained difficulties using their hands, the Council should have asked whether a reasonable adjustment was required. Its failure to do so caused uncertainty, although the Ombudsman could not say that an adjustment would necessarily have been granted.

The Council subsequently contacted the complainant and reminded officers of their anticipatory duty under the Equality Act.

Eleven data breaches

The report also disclosed 11 data breaches since the committee's February meeting.

Nine involved email. Two were reported to the Information Commissioner's Office, which took no further action beyond providing general advice.

The Council had also been notified of two complaints to the ICO concerning its responses to Freedom of Information requests. At the time of the committee meeting, both were still awaiting allocation to an investigator.

Under the new data legislation, residents will generally be required to complain to the Council about its handling of personal information before taking the matter to the ICO.

Mr McCormick asked how the Council could guarantee that complaints about its own conduct would be investigated objectively and whether the financial and staffing implications had been calculated.

Mr Bircher said the Council's Business Support Team would provide an independent review through its existing two-stage complaints procedure. He could not say how the workload would be measured or reported under the new unitary council. "I dare say that this annual complaints report won't come to this committee next year because it won't exist," he said.

The committee noted the report.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Image: Alan Stanton Licence details

The Man Who Signed It, Chaired It, and Wouldn't Explain It: Six Months of Silence Over Rainbow's £500,000 Bill

21 July 2026



Six months after Epsom and Ewell Borough Council quietly authorised the use of its reserves to cover a dilapidations bill of up to £500,000 at the Rainbow Leisure Centre, the six basic questions this paper put to the Councillor who approved that decision remain unanswered. Not because the council disputes the facts. Not because litigation prevents comment. But because, first, it said the matter was commercially sensitive; then, once an election was called, it said the law forbade a response; and now that the election is over, it has offered residents a statement about gym upgrades instead.

The common thread through every stage of this story is one councillor: **Neil Dallen** (RA Town), Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee, who signed off the original urgent decision, chaired the meeting where questions about it were cut off, and has twice found a procedural reason not to say how the bill arose.

A smooth handover, on paper

Rainbow Leisure Centre transferred from its operator of 22 years, GLL, to Places Leisure on 1 October 2025. The

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council's own account, recorded in the Urgent Decision document later obtained by this paper, describes an unremarkable changeover: no break in service, a deal offering "significantly more income than the Council had been receiving," and a pre-handover check by an external consultant intended to confirm the building "would be handed back in good condition." That check, the document specifies, "was not an invasive analysis."

Within weeks, Places identified a long list of problems: faults in fire alarms, lifts, seating, glazing, sanitaryware, ventilation, damp, possible roof cracks, and machinery officers now describe as at "end of life." Some were flagged as health and safety risks requiring immediate action.

December: a £500,000 estimate, marked not for publication

On 17 December 2025, under the reference DEC 158, the council took an Urgent Decision — a mechanism used when a matter cannot wait for the ordinary committee cycle — authorising its Section 151 officer to finalise dilapidations negotiations with Places. The document, marked "OFFICIAL SENSITIVE – NOT FOR PUBLICATION" and exempted under paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, put the likely cost at up to £500,000, to be met initially from the council's dilapidations reserve and recovered from GLL only "in due course" — with the same document conceding the council "must accept that it will not be able to recover the Places claim in its entirety." Cllr Dallen was consulted as committee chair and recorded his view in two words: "Happy to support."

The decision stayed confidential until this paper obtained and published it in January.

January to March: leak, backlash, and the first stonewall

The story prompted sharp criticism from opposition councillors, who accused the ruling Residents' Association of secrecy and complacency. The council's public response — attributed to Dallen and Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village)— framed the transfer as "an exciting new chapter" and declined to discuss "terms and financial arrangements" as commercially sensitive. GLL, for its part, maintained it had fixed everything flagged by the pre-handover survey and handed the building back to the required standard.

This paper submitted a Freedom of Information request on 13 January seeking the lease's inspection clauses, any log of landlord inspections or condition surveys since 2003, records identifying the backlog and its cost, and evidence of when councillors were first told. The council took over two months to respond, and released only a handful of lease clauses.

At the Strategy and Resources Committee on 27 January, Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) pressed Dallen, as chair, on why the decision had been kept confidential and whether a public-interest test had ever been carried out. Dallen confirmed he had supported both the decision and its confidential status, then closed the matter down: "It is my meeting… I have made a decision there is going to be no further comments."

The survey that two accounts can't both describe

A letter to this paper from Cllrs Ames and **James Lawrence** (Independent College), following the Audit and Scrutiny Committee's March meeting, surfaced a direct conflict in how the council has characterised the pre-handover survey. The Assistant Director for Corporate Services told that committee that consultants Carter Jonas had been commissioned to carry out "a very detailed survey of the whole leisure centre." But in June 2025, recommending the Places contract to the Strategy and Resources Committee, the same officer described the exercise as a stock condition report commissioned merely to "inform the procurement process," on the basis that the council "has been very satisfied" with how the centre had been run and that it was, "overall," in good condition.

Both descriptions cannot comfortably be true of the same piece of work — and neither sits easily with the Urgent Decision document's own characterisation of the survey as "not an invasive analysis." This paper has been unable to establish which account is accurate, because the council has refused to release the survey itself, citing legal professional privilege.

April and May: an election as a shield

As the 7th May East Surrey Unitary Council elections approached — in which Dallen was himself a candidate — the council declined to answer a detailed list of questions this paper put to him on 24 March, citing Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986, which bars councils from publishing material designed to influence political support. Independent expert opinion obtained by this paper, from **Nathan Elver**y, former Chief Executive of Croydon Council, concluded the questions posed were "factual in character" and that a response "would not constitute political publicity within the meaning of the Act" — the council, he noted, was "not being asked to promote a political position; it is being asked to account for its stewardship of public funds." Cllr **Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) relied on the same provision to avoid unrelated questions about a separate governance matter.

A subsequent FOI request established that the decision to invoke Section 2 in Dallen's case involved the Chief Executive, the Monitoring Officer, senior communications officers, and Dallen himself — yet the council said it held no record of the legal or governance advice behind that decision. The guidance document it pointed to as its basis, meanwhile, explicitly permits councils to continue normal business and to publish factual information during an election period.

Dallen finally responded on 18 May, twelve days after polling. The response answered none of the substantive questions this paper had posed two months earlier about how the dilapidations arose; it repeated that "details relating to terms and financial arrangements are commercially sensitive."

June: privilege claimed, release refused

On 18 June the council upheld its refusal to disclose the 2025 inspection report or any related backlog, dilapidation or financial exposure documents, now citing Section 42 of the Freedom of Information Act — legal professional privilege — on the basis that litigation was "a live issue" and the council was "already talking to our lawyers." This paper's request for internal review had argued the exemption was being applied as a blanket, rather than document by document, and that routine inspection and survey material does not become privileged merely because litigation is later contemplated. The council's review upheld the original refusal in full. This paper is now preparing a complaint to the Information

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Commissioner's Office.

29 June to 6 July: the same six questions, and no answers

With the election well behind it, this paper wrote to Dallen again on 29 June, posing six direct questions: did GLL hide the dilapidations; did the handover survey fail to report them accurately; is the scale of the dilapidations agreed by the council; did they arise in the gap between survey and occupation; is there another explanation; and which parties are under consideration for legal action. The council's communications team acknowledged the request that evening and asked for a deadline — a response was received on 6 July, attributed to Dallen. It addressed none of the six questions. It described the transfer as "the beginning of an exciting new chapter," referenced planned investment in the gym, studios and changing rooms, and reiterated that financial arrangements remain commercially sensitive.

Ames states: ""The holes in the administration's story are so big they do not need an expert survey to locate them. It is obvious that it used the urgent decision process to cover up its own incompetence and negligence and that it has continued the cover-up ever since. When the issue comes before the Audit and Scrutiny Committee next week, I expect the administration to use every trick in the book – plus a few new ones – to hide the truth from residents, but I and other councillors are determined not to let this happen."

Where this stands

Four explanations remain on the table for how a "very detailed" — or, on the council's alternative account, non-invasive — pre-handover survey and an uneventful transfer became a £500,000 liability within three months: that GLL was not straight about the building's condition; that the council failed to inspect or enforce its rights as landlord across more than two decades; that the survey's scope was too narrow to catch what mattered; or that Places has overstated what it found. Each implicates a different party, and each is precisely why the underlying documents matter.

What is not contested is the pattern: a councillor who authorised the spending, chaired the meeting where it was challenged, and has since given two different procedural reasons — commercial sensitivity, then election law — for not answering the same six questions about how it happened.

Residents who ultimately fund the shortfall are still waiting for a plain account of why.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Related reports:

Epsom & Ewell Council blocks release of Rainbow Leisure Centre condition papers – 2 July 2026

Epsom Council Rainbow Centre secrecy row deepens over "pre-election silence" advice – 23 June 2026

No end to Epsom's Rainbow Leisure Centre controversy – May 2026

Dalton and Dallen double-down disclosure denial – 30 April 2026

Epsom and Ewell Council transparency row erupts as council backs publication of urgent decisions – 17 March 2026

"It's my meeting": Cllr Dallen stops questions about his role in alleged Rainbow "cover-up" – 23 February 2026

Cllr Dallen accused of £1/2m Epsom & Ewell Council cover-up – 14 January 2026

Free bus travel for children across England this August

21 July 2026



Children aged five to 15 in England will be able to travel free on local buses throughout August as part of a Government summer cost-of-living support package.

The free travel offer will run from 1 August to 31 August and is intended to help families reduce the cost of summer holiday journeys to parks, museums, beaches, cinemas, theatres and other attractions.

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The Department for Transport says the scheme will apply to local bus services in England. Families are already able to benefit from free travel for children under five across the main bus operators.

Roads Minister Simon Lightwood visited Bath on Thursday 9 July to meet local leaders and bus companies ahead of the scheme's launch.

The measure forms part of the Government's "Great British Summer Savings" scheme, which also includes temporary reductions aimed at cutting the cost of children's meals, cinema and theatre tickets, and admission to family attractions such as theme parks, adventure centres and soft play venues.

Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander said:

"Great British Summer Savings means more people can be excited about getting out and about this summer, whether it's seeing the Roman Baths, learning something new at the Science Museum, or falling asleep on the bus ride home after a day riding rollercoasters at Alton Towers.

"I know that the cost of living is a concern for households across the UK, which is why we're cutting the cost of the day-to-day, with free bus travel for children this summer and the £3 bus fare cap helping more families make the most of the small plans that make life enjoyable."

The Government says the free children's travel offer comes alongside the extension of the £3 bus fare cap until March 2027, and follows the first rail fare freeze in 30 years.

Ministers say they are also investing £3 billion nationally to improve bus services and support local leaders and operators in delivering more reliable services.

Helen Godwin, Mayor of the West of England, said:

"I am so excited that Kids Go Free is back again. We know what a massive impact this has had for families in the West, helping kids explore the best of the West and putting money back in parents' pockets.

"I am thrilled that the Government has seen how successful our scheme has been, and that Kids Go Free is going national for August. This will give West Country families the chance to explore even further."

VisitEngland Director Andrew Stokes said:

"It's fantastic to see free bus travel for children as the summer holidays get underway, supporting families to get out and explore the outstanding attractions and destinations across England in a stress-free and environmentally friendly way.

"Whether enjoying a trip to our stunning seaside destinations, beautiful countryside or our vibrant city attractions, there is so much to discover during the summer across England. I know our tourism and hospitality businesses will be very pleased to see you."

Editor's note:

The free bus travel scheme applies to children aged five to 15 in England during August 2026. It should be checked locally whether any particular operator or route is excluded before travel.

Surrey's Cathedral to get CCTV protection

21 July 2026



Guildford Cathedral has been granted permission to install security cameras around its listed premises through a fund to protect places of worship from violent attacks.

The cathedral will place 16 new security cameras both inside and outside its main building, which was made possible by the Home Office's Places of Worship Protective Security Scheme.

Guildford Borough Council has now granted planning permission, giving the green light for these cameras to be installed across the Grade II* listed cathedral.

Planning documents submitted to the council read: "Due to the level of threat of terrorism in the UK remaining substantial, it is perceived that increasing the number of security cameras will help deter attacks on the premises of Guildford Cathedral.

"This work has been advised by the UK government and they are funding the work."

It comes after new legislation requiring premises to ramp up their security measures to safeguard against potential terror attacks was passed into law last year.

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The Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill is also known as Martyn's Law – named after Martyn Hett, who was killed in the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing.

A cathedral spokesperson told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) they "welcome this investment" into these security systems, which comes as part of its response to this changing legislation.

They said: "We are grateful to the Home Office for awarding Guildford Cathedral funding through the Places of Worship Protective Security Scheme, which will enable us to install additional CCTV across the cathedral site.

"The improvements will support our ongoing commitment to providing a safe, secure and welcoming environment for everyone who visits the cathedral."

The colours of the new cameras were chosen to be as discreet as possible, according to planning documents, and will broadly match the render of the walls.

"Whilst measures have been taken to specify discreet cameras and place them in discreet locations, to anyone looking carefully at the cathedral's fabric some will still be visible," the documents say.

"However, their visual impact is of little significance when considered against the possibility of damage of which the cameras will help prevent."

Council planning officers wrote in their approval that the cameras "would not have any adverse impact on the listed building".

They added: "The proposed development, due to its scale and nature, coupled with the site's location away from any other sensitive properties, would have no unacceptable impact on neighbouring amenity, in terms of loss of light, loss of privacy or overbearing impact."

The UK terrorism threat level was raised from "substantial" to "severe" in April – meaning a terrorist attack is deemed highly likely within the next six months.

This designation came following the stabbing of two Jewish men in Golders Green, North London.

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

Guildford Cathedral (Credit: Google Maps)

The Chinese State is watching us on Surrey Council's cctv?

21 July 2026



Surrey County Council is deploying CCTV cameras from a Chinese manufacturer which has been banned from government departments over national security concerns.

Cameras made by Hikvision, a company partly owned by the Chinese state, are in use in council libraries in several towns and villages across Surrey.

These include sites in Guildford, Ash, Chertsey, Cobham, Farnham, Merstham and New Haw, according to a Freedom of Information response to the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS).

Chinese law dictates that any companies operating within China must hand over data to the government in Beijing on demand, which prompted the UK to stop the installation of Chinese-made surveillance cameras in "sensitive sites" across Westminster in 2022.

However, this directive does not apply to local government and other public sector bodies at present.

A Surrey County Council spokesperson told the LDRS that its library cameras operate as closed systems, meaning they are not connected to any corporate networks or the internet.

They said: "As a result, the primary risks normally associated with these devices – such as remote access or cyber vulnerabilities – do not apply in this case. The main residual risk would be physical access. However, all units are located within staff-only areas and are appropriately secured. Therefore, the risk level is considered low and appropriately managed within the current setup."

Hikvision has also faced criticism over its alleged links to the mass repression of Uyghur Muslims in China's Xinjiang region, where the company's surveillance technology has been reportedly deployed. Hikvision denies any direct role in

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human rights abuses.

In 2022, a report by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that “serious human rights violations” had been committed against the Uyghur people of Xinjiang.

As many as one million Uyghurs are believed to have been detained in camps and across the region since 2017. The Chinese government denies human rights abuses, and claims the camps are for educational and training purposes.

But analysts have pointed to reports of forced labour and torture inflicted upon the Uyghurs, and have urged authorities in the UK to review their policies towards Hikvision.

Senior Policy Director at the China Strategic Risks Institute Sam Goodman told the LDRS: “After several years of public reporting regarding allegations of Hikvision’s links to human rights violations in Xinjiang and the government banning Hikvision from Whitehall citing national security concerns, there really isn’t an excuse for councils like Surrey County Council continuing to use these cameras.”

A Hikvision spokesperson told the LDRS their products meet “strict security requirements” and “comply fully” with UK laws and regulations.

They added: “Our position on human rights is a matter of public record. We have never knowingly or intentionally committed human rights abuses, and we never will. Hikvision has joined the UN Global Compact, committing to its Ten Principles on human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption.”

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

Image: Hikvision CCTV camera (Credit: Pixabay)

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Calling for new Guildford railway station

21 July 2026



Guildford’s MP has reiterated calls for a third railway station to be built in the town, saying public transport infrastructure “must be delivered” alongside new house building.

Zöe Franklin has urged the government to revive plans for a Guildford West train station, which would be located in the Park Barn area.

Plans for the new station have been floated as far back as the 1990s, but have yet to materialise despite advocates arguing it would boost connectivity to Royal Surrey County Hospital and the University of Surrey.

Ms Franklin told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS): “The western part of Guildford is growing rapidly.

“New housing developments will bring thousands of new residents to an area that’s already under-served by public transport.

“We must join up housing, transport and economic growth alongside infrastructure, not try to retro-fit it, when congestion and other problems have become ingrained and it becomes, I would argue, a much bigger project.”

If fully realised, Guildford West station would operate on the North Downs Line – which runs from Reading through Guildford and links up to Gatwick Airport.

In 2019, it was reported that the station could be on course to open by 2025, but the project is still yet to materialise.

Surrey County Council reportedly set aside hundreds of thousands of pounds for the project over the years.

Surrey Live reported in January that the authority’s ambitions for the project remain unchanged, although further national funding would be needed for it to proceed.

Ms Franklin, who had been a Guildford Borough councillor before her election as an MP, added: “By providing a realistic alternative to car travel for thousands of existing and future residents, a new station could help reduce traffic-related emissions, supporting both local environmental objectives and national net-zero goals.”

She further said that Guilford’s high housing costs mean many of the town’s workers cannot afford to live locally, and that improving rail links would broaden the labour market for businesses.

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"I've been supporting this project since I was first elected as a councillor to Guildford Borough Council nearly 20 years ago," she said.

"Now representing Guildford as MP, it's given me more opportunities and a louder voice to work on this in earnest."

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

Zöe Franklin At London Road Station (Credit: Zöe Franklin)

Surrey vehicle theft charge rate among lower-performing forces, figures show

21 July 2026



Surrey Police recorded 1,551 thefts or unauthorised takings of motor vehicles in 2025, with charges or summonses recorded in 34 cases, according to Home Office figures analysed by the Liberal Democrats.

That represents a charge or summons rate of 2.19 per cent. In 1,150 cases — 74.15 per cent of the total — the recorded outcome was that the investigation had been completed with no suspect identified.

The figures put Surrey in the lower half of police forces in England and Wales for the proportion of vehicle-theft cases resulting in a charge or summons, but not at the very bottom.

Excluding the British Transport Police, Surrey's 2.19 per cent rate was the 12th lowest among 43 territorial police forces. The overall England and Wales rate in the data was 2.45 per cent.

Surrey was also among the worse-performing forces for cases ending without a suspect being identified. Its 74.15 per cent figure was the eighth highest of the 43 territorial forces, although it was slightly below the England and Wales overall figure of 75.90 per cent.

In terms of the number of vehicle thefts, Surrey sat around the middle of the national table: its 1,551 recorded offences made it the 20th highest force area out of 43. The highest totals were recorded by the Metropolitan Police, with 31,534 offences, followed by West Midlands Police with 12,979.

Among Surrey's neighbouring and nearby force areas, Sussex had a lower charge rate of 1.47 per cent, Hampshire 1.80 per cent and Hertfordshire 1.91 per cent. Thames Valley recorded 2.45 per cent and Kent 2.46 per cent. Surrey's proportion of cases with no suspect identified was higher than in Thames Valley, where the figure was 64.22 per cent, and Kent, at 70.48 per cent, but lower than Sussex's 80.02 per cent and Hertfordshire's 77.42 per cent.

Helen Maguire, Liberal Democrat MP for Epsom and Ewell, said the statistics showed that too few vehicle thieves were being brought to justice.

She said: "Across Surrey, people rely on their cars to get to work, take their kids to school, and get themselves to the doctors and other essential services. It is completely unacceptable that 1,551 individuals and families in our county have had their vehicles stolen, with so few of those responsible ever brought to justice.

"How can we expect to deter would-be thieves from stealing people's cars when so few criminals are actually being charged by Surrey Police? The Government is asleep at the wheel and people in Surrey are paying the price.

"We urgently need to restore proper community policing to tackle car theft. For too long forces have been left overstretched and underfunded, without the resources they need to respond."

The Liberal Democrats are calling for more neighbourhood policing and for a specialist National Crime Agency team to bring together automatic number plate recognition data, insurance records, border intelligence and information from police forces to target organised vehicle-crime networks.

The figures relate to the offence category "theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle". A charge or summons is one recorded outcome; cases may also have other outcomes not shown in the comparison.

Sam Jones – Reporter

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Epsom Council leader’s delayed response to additional local government layer initiative

21 July 2026



Dalton says Surrey devolution letter was non-binding and rooted in Council’s 2025 vote

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council leader Councillor Hannah Dalton has said her decision to sign a letter supporting exploration of a new Surrey-wide “Foundation Strategic Authority” was based on the Council’s previous backing for local government reorganisation and the prospect of a future mayoral strategic authority.

The explanation follows questions raised by Epsom & Ewell Times over why Cllr Dalton signed the Expression of Interest without the matter first being referred back to the full Council.

Earlier attempts to obtain an answer were met with references to election-period restrictions, prompting criticism that the Council was avoiding a straightforward question about the authority under which its leader had acted.

In a response supplied to EET, and attributed to Cllr Dalton, the Council said the background lay in the Government’s English Devolution White Paper, published on 16 December 2024.

It said that, at a full Council meeting on 6 May 2025, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council agreed to support a proposal for local government reorganisation in Surrey. The proposal envisaged a future Mayoral Strategic Authority for Surrey, led by an elected mayor and intended to unlock the Government’s wider devolution offer.

Cllr Dalton said the Council and other Surrey authorities were now working on the reorganisation process and had recently been invited by the Government to explore a possible Foundation Strategic Authority.

The Council describes this as an intermediate stage towards fuller devolution. It says the letter signed by Cllr Dalton was a “non-binding Expression of Interest”, intended only to keep open the possibility that the proposed new East Surrey and West Surrey unitary councils could later explore creating such an authority.

The response states: “It did not commit the Council, confer obligations upon it, or determine any future course of action.”

It adds that any formal decision would follow a statutory consultation.

The answer clarifies the Council’s position that Cllr Dalton did not require a new Council resolution before signing the letter, because the authority relied upon was the Council’s broad 2025 endorsement of a reorganisation proposal which contemplated a Surrey mayoral strategic authority.

However, it is likely to leave open the political question of whether that earlier approval was sufficiently specific to authorise support for this particular Government initiative, especially where the letter was signed in the name of the Borough Council rather than simply as a contribution to exploratory discussions between Surrey leaders.

A Foundation Strategic Authority is a proposed form of combined authority with devolved powers but without an elected mayor. It may be used as a stepping stone towards a fuller mayoral combined or strategic authority. The Council says discussions with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government continue, including the next steps and the scope and timing of any statutory consultation.

The Council has directed readers to its online democracy pages for the reports and minutes relating to the 6 May 2025 meeting.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Epsom’s Rosebery School has a foundation for students’ ambitions

21 July 2026



Rosebery School in Epsom has launched a new charitable foundation aimed at helping pupils pursue their ambitions regardless of their financial or personal circumstances.

The Rosebery Foundation has been established as part of the wider GLF Schools Foundation, supported by donations from former pupils including the family of Dianne Long, who joined Rosebery School in 1953.

Rosebery, which is part of the GLF Schools multi-academy trust, said the Foundation will help remove financial barriers which can prevent pupils from taking part in opportunities outside the classroom.

Its work will focus on five main areas: enrichment and opportunity; wellbeing and belonging; leadership and empowerment; networks and futures; and Rosebery Rewilding, which promotes wellbeing and personal development through nature and outdoor learning.

The Foundation will also seek to draw on the school’s wider community of former pupils, parents and partners to create mentoring opportunities, professional connections and new experiences for pupils.

One of its first major projects will be a summer visit to the European Space Centre in Belgium, intended to encourage girls interested in science, technology and maths.

The visit has been funded by Dianne Long and the Di Long family through a bursary established within the Foundation.

Holly Lowe, Assistant Headteacher at Rosebery School, is leading work on the Foundation. She said: “At Rosebery, our students are highly aspirational and achieve exceptionally well. Within school, we expect them to use their voice, take intellectual risks and see themselves as leaders. It is simply part of how we work day to day.

“The reality, however, is that all girls will encounter barriers beyond school. The wider world does not always reflect or reinforce those expectations in the same way. For disadvantaged students, these challenges can be felt more keenly, particularly where there is less access to enrichment, professional networks and the kinds of experiences that open doors and build confidence.”

The Foundation has already hosted an alumnae day as part of the school’s Student Futures Festival for Year 12 pupils.

Fifteen former Rosebery pupils returned to the school, representing a range of generations and careers. They took part in panel discussions, workshops, talks and an afternoon mentoring session.

The school said such events can help build confidence, widen horizons and raise aspirations, particularly for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Ms Lowe added: “Through the Rosebery Foundation, our focus is on making sure students are not only achieving highly, which they already are here, but are fully prepared for what comes next. Ultimately, it is about ensuring that all our students leave Rosebery ready not just to succeed, but to step into the world with the confidence and the connections to shape it.”

Sam Jones – Reporter



Photo of Rosebery’s first Foundation event, an alumnae day.

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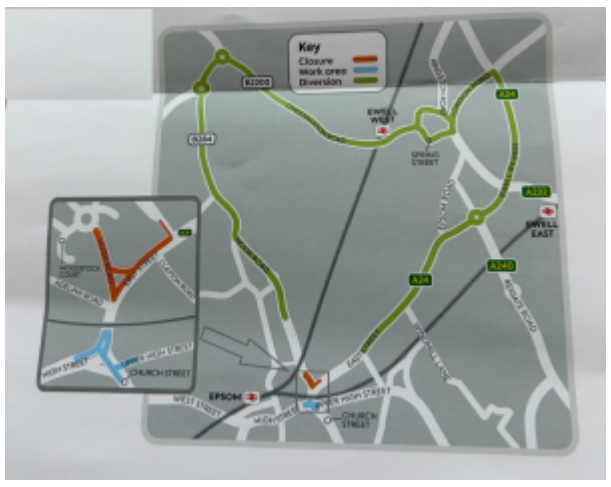
Six months of disruption ahead as major gas and traffic works set to hit central Epsom

21 July 2026



Businesses and residents voice concerns over diversion routes as SGN and Surrey County Council prepare for large-scale works at the East Street/Hook Road/Upper High Street junction

Central Epsom is facing up to six months of roadworks and traffic disruption following the announcement of a major joint gas infrastructure and traffic signal project by Southern Gas Networks (SGN) and Surrey County Council (SCC) Highways.

What's happening, and when

According to letters sent to residents and businesses this month, the works are being carried out to support new housing development in the area and to maintain the safety and reliability of the local gas network. SGN's contractor, JDT Utilities, will lay new gas mains in East Street and Hook Road, while SCC replaces the traffic signal system on High Street, Upper High Street and Church Street.

A clarifying email from SGN, seen by this publication, sets out the works in more detail than the resident letters managed to convey. The project will run in two phases:

- **Phase One** (planned duration: four weeks) will see SCC install a new urban traffic light system, with new light heads on Church Street, High Street and Upper High Street. Within this footprint, SGN will impose a lane closure — not a full closure — on East Street, to allow open-cut installation of two new mains running from outside The Big Yellow Storage on East Street through to Hook Road.
- **Phase Two** will follow, with Hook Road closed between Woodstock Court and East Street while SGN continues its open-cut works down towards the multi-storey car park entrance and Woodstock Court.

The resident letters state that engineering work is scheduled to begin on 18 July, with SCC's signal works starting on 23 July within the same traffic management setup. Go Epsom, the town's Business Improvement District, gives a fuller picture of the timeline, stating that works will run from 23 July through to 24 December — a span of roughly five months, and notably longer than the "completed by the end of the year" assurance given in SGN's own letter.

During the works, the multi-storey car park will remain open and accessible via Hook Road under traffic management, and a signed diversion route will be in place. SGN says access will be maintained for residents and businesses throughout.

Residents question the diversion plan

The announcement has prompted concern from residents about the adequacy of the traffic management plan. One resident, responding to the letter, said the accompanying diversion map was difficult to interpret and that the colour-coding "does not make a lot of sense," while the flyer gave no indication of where traffic would be diverted to rejoin the A24 on the far side of Epsom, nor any information on bus route changes.

The resident warned that Epsom's narrow residential streets are already prone to rat-running, and questioned whether roads such as Downs Hill Road and Worple Road — both narrow, and in the case of Worple Road affected by potholes — could safely absorb diverted traffic, including HGVs, without vehicles being forced onto pavements. They suggested a 20mph limit should be considered on any residential road used as part of the diversion, particularly given the number of children walking to and from school in the area.

The resident also raised concern about the six-month duration of the works and its potential impact on trade in Epsom High Street, and said they would be unable to attend either of SGN's public drop-in sessions this week.

Businesses seek pause over Christmas trading period

Go Epsom has echoed concerns about the scale and length of the disruption. In a message to local businesses, it confirmed the works are expected to run from 23 July to 24 December, warning of "knock on effects with diversions, parking bay suspensions and road closures." The BID says it is asking SGN and SCC to pause works over the November/December trading period, recognising the importance of the pre-Christmas period to town centre traders.

Businesses affected by the works may be eligible for support through SGN's small business compensation scheme, details of which are available at sgn.co.uk.

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Have your say

SGN is holding two public drop-in sessions this week for residents and businesses to raise questions directly with the engineering team, at the rear offices of 29 East Street:

- Wednesday 1 July, 4pm–7pm
- Thursday 2 July, 2pm–4pm

Project updates are expected to be published at sgn.co.uk/our-gas-works/major-planned-projects, and anyone with concerns about disabled access or specific needs during the closures is asked to contact SGN's customer service team on 0800 912 1700.

Lionel Blackman

Around 100 attend Epsom unity event after April far-right disorder

21 July 2026



Around 100 people gathered in Rosebery Park for a community event intended to promote unity and reject racism following far-right disorder in Epsom earlier this year.

The free event, held on Saturday 27 June and organised by Stand Up to Racism Epsom & Ewell, brought together families, faith representatives, local campaigners and politicians for music, speeches, food, children's activities and a community art project.

It followed events in April when Epsom attracted attention from far-right activists from outside the area after social-media discussion and misinformation surrounding an alleged rape. The subsequent disorder prompted concern among residents and community groups.

Saturday's gathering included speeches by Epsom and Ewell MP Helen Maguire, Reverend Catherine Hutton of Epsom Methodist Church, Labour councillor Kate Chinn and Green councillor Jonathan Essex. Messages of support were also shared on behalf of Epsom Mosque and the local Sikh community.

Those attending heard live music from Canada Hill, with DJ Amalgamation also performing. Children's face painting, food, stalls and a collaborative art activity were among the attractions.

A "Facts Not Fear" stall aimed to challenge misinformation and far-right narratives. The Epsom and Ewell Climate Network was represented, alongside members of Stand Up to Racism and local Green and Labour Party stalls. Organisers said the Conservative Party had been invited but had not responded.

Deborah Fish, of Stand Up to Racism Epsom & Ewell, said: "The response to our Unity Event showed that Epsom and Ewell rejects racism and division.

"There was a real sense of hope and solidarity in the crowd. People from many different backgrounds came together because they want to live in a welcoming, inclusive community and are determined to stand together against racism and the far right."

Reverend Hutton said Epsom Methodist Church would continue to provide "a space of safety and sanctuary for all".

Ms Maguire told the gathering: "We are here today because we choose to stand for something. We choose to say that racism has no home here. Disinformation has no home here and division has no home here.

"As your Member of Parliament, I will continue to stand up to racism."

Event host and organiser Ammo Sandhawalia said the turnout showed "Epsom and Ewell's true colours" were "warm, welcoming and united".

He added: "To see around a hundred neighbours come together with their families, their faith communities, their councillors and their MP, sharing food, music and art in our park, was simply joyous."

Stand Up to Racism Epsom & Ewell describes itself as a local group campaigning for inclusion, safety and unity across the borough.

Sam Jones – Reporter

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Photo: Reverend Catherine Hutton of Epsom Methodist Church

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Epsom rail passengers urged to travel only if essential as extreme heat disrupts services

21 July 2026



Rail passengers using Epsom station are being urged to avoid all but essential journeys on Wednesday and Thursday as extreme heat is expected to bring disruption across Surrey’s rail network.

Southern, which runs services through Epsom towards London Victoria, Sutton and Dorking, has warned that it will operate a reduced timetable as trains are required to run more slowly in the exceptional temperatures.

The warning also applies to South Western Railway services from Epsom towards Wimbledon and London Waterloo. SWR has told passengers to check before travelling on Tuesday and to make journeys on Wednesday and Thursday only where absolutely necessary, warning that services may be altered or cancelled at short notice.

The Met Office has issued a rare Red Extreme Heat Warning covering much of southern and central England. Conditions are expected to be most severe on Wednesday 24 June and Thursday 25 June, with very high daytime temperatures and little overnight relief.

Southern’s parent company Govia Thameslink Railway said fewer trains would operate across its Southern, Thameslink and Great Northern networks, with journeys taking longer and trains likely to be busier.

Passengers are being advised to consider postponing trips until later in the week, or to travel earlier or later in the day where possible.

South Western Railway has issued similar advice for its network, including routes serving Surrey. Its current travel notice says that hot weather may lead to short-notice timetable changes and cancellations between Tuesday and Thursday.

The disruption is linked to the effect of extreme heat on railway infrastructure. Steel rails expand in high temperatures and can buckle, while overhead wires, signalling equipment and train systems can also be affected.

Network Rail says rails in direct sunshine can be substantially hotter than the surrounding air temperature. It may therefore impose temporary speed restrictions during the hottest parts of the day to reduce the risk of track damage and keep services operating safely.

Jenny Saunders, Customer Service Director for Southern, Thameslink, Great Northern and Gatwick Express, said passengers should think carefully before travelling.

She said: “With such extreme temperatures forecast, we have to run fewer trains, more slowly to keep services safe.

“I’d really urge our customers to think about what’s best for them and to travel only if absolutely necessary on Wednesday and Thursday.”

Passengers who do need to use trains are advised to allow extra time, carry plenty of drinking water, use sunscreen and wear a hat. They should also have a backup plan in case their service is delayed or cancelled.

Southern has said that passengers with tickets dated Tuesday 23, Wednesday 24 or Thursday 25 June who decide not to travel may be eligible for a full refund from their point of purchase.

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SWR also advises customers to carry water, avoid standing on exposed platforms in the middle of the day where possible, and leave the train at the next station if they feel unwell so that assistance can be arranged.

Epsom passengers should check the Southern and South Western Railway journey planners shortly before setting out, as the position may change during the day.

Southern, Thameslink and Gatwick Express passengers can check updates through the operator's website or National Rail Enquiries. South Western Railway passengers can check its live journey planner and service updates online.

The advice is likely to affect commuters, visitors travelling into London, and passengers heading towards Surrey's towns and leisure destinations during what is expected to be one of the hottest periods of the year.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Rain, royalty and recovery at Epsom Derby

21 July 2026



Epsom Derby Day drew its biggest crowd since 2022 as The King and Queen joined more than 28,000 racegoers at Epsom Downs on Saturday 6th June.

The Jockey Club confirmed that **28,557** people attended Betfred Derby Day, a marked improvement on last year's modern low and part of a two-day Derby Festival attendance of **48,261**.

That total was **10,662 higher than last year**, an increase of **28%**, and will be seen by Epsom Downs Racecourse as evidence that the first year of its five-year revival plan has made a positive start.

However, the Derby Day figure remained below the 40,000-plus crowd that had been hoped for in some pre-meeting reporting and well below the historic crowds once associated with Britain's most famous Flat race.

The 2025 Derby Day crowd had fallen to just **22,312** in the paid enclosures, described by the Racing Post as the lowest number in modern history. This year's figure therefore represents a recovery of more than 6,000 on Derby Day, but not yet a return to the scale of attendance seen in earlier decades.

The Jockey Club said there had been a sold-out Queen Elizabeth II Stand and Grandstand Enclosure, with thousands more across the racecourse, DerbyFest and The Hill.

The presence of Their Majesties gave the day added national profile. The King and Queen arrived after attending the wedding of Peter Phillips and Harriet Sperling in the Cotswolds, and their attendance was widely reported by national racing and news outlets.

The weather was less helpful. Rain fell overnight and for much of Saturday, with the ground officially changing from good-to-soft to soft before the Derby. The Guardian's live coverage described the event as rain-soaked, and images from the day showed racegoers sheltering under umbrellas.

On the track, Christmas Day won the 247th running of the Derby, ridden by Ronan Whelan and trained by Aidan O'Brien. The victory gave O'Brien a record-extending 12th Derby win and his 50th British Classic success.

The race was not without controversy. Favourite Benvenuto Cellini, also trained by O'Brien, finished the race but was later declared a non-runner after a stewards' inquiry found that he had been denied a fair start when his hind leg became caught in the stalls.

For Epsom, however, the wider question was whether the meeting itself could begin to recover its place as one of the great public sporting occasions of the year.

The Jockey Club has embarked on a £6 million, five-year plan to revive the Derby Festival. This year's changes included increased prize money, free admission for under-18s, free parking, the new DerbyFest area on The Hill, entertainment partnerships and efforts to reconnect the event with the local community.

Ahead of the meeting, Epsom Downs general manager Jim Allen said more than 22,000 people had registered for DerbyFest over the two days, and that the racecourse was expecting more than 60,000 people across the Festival.

The final total of 48,261 fell below that aspiration, but still marked a substantial improvement on 2025. The Jockey Club's own post-event assessment was upbeat.

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Jim Allen said initial feedback on the changes to the customer experience had been “extremely positive”. He said selling out the standside enclosures in advance was testament to the continuing appeal of the race and to the work of the Epsom and wider teams.

He added: “Clearly the weather did not get the memo, but ultimately when you run an outdoor event in this country, you are always slightly in the lap of the gods.”

Mr Allen described 2026 as “year one of a five-year journey” and said the racecourse would be guided by customer feedback before making decisions for future years.

The Jockey Club’s use of open-top buses and community-facing measures formed part of the attempt to restore the Derby’s traditional local character. At present, however, no published figures appear to isolate the effect of those buses or say how many additional attendees came specifically through local community group involvement.

The fairest conclusion is therefore that the 2026 Derby was neither a full return to former glories nor another year of decline. It was a measurable recovery: helped by royal attendance, a stronger entertainment offer and sold-out principal stands, but held back by rain and still some distance from the crowds Epsom once took for granted.

For a racecourse seeking to rebuild the Derby as both a world-class sporting occasion and a people’s festival on the Downs, Saturday was a step forward. The test will be whether that recovery can be sustained — and expanded — in 2027 and whether a change of day in the week should be tested.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Photo: Grandstand and Racecourse at Epsom Derby Day at 14:15pm

Related reports:

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Should Epsom’s Derby revert to Wednesday?

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