

Surrey County Council LGR leaflet misleading claim

20 October 2025



Claims of potential corruptions of due process have been levelled at key figures linked to Surrey County Council’s **local government reorganisation** (LGR) plans. The charges were put in a letter to the Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness by the borough council leader at Surrey Heath. It surrounds a publicity leaflet issued by the county council and sent to householders across Surrey. The advert featured the signatures and logos of leading public bodies and figures in the county including Surrey Police, the fire and rescue service and the police and crime commissioner – and publicly backs Surrey County Council plans to merge with its 11 boroughs and districts to form two mega councils.

They did so, he said, before a final alternative position for three new councils had been finalised – meaning it was impossible to know all the options. Councillor Shaun Macdonald has since asked the ministry whether there were reasonable grounds to test whether public bodies, civil servants and elected officials broke impartiality guidelines and due process. He says senior figures, whose roles should be politically neutral, worked together, and spent public money, to push for Surrey’s two mega councils plan.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government said the statutory consultation set out information about both proposals, and was available on gov.uk. It added that councils are required to have regard to the publicity code and any concerns should be raised with the council concerned. Surrey County Council leader Tim Oliver said they engaged with their Surrey partners about Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) throughout the process of compiling their recommendation “as government, stakeholders and residents would rightly expect”. He added that many felt the proposal for two unitary councils was the best possible outcome for the county, “which will simplify the system, save money and strengthen community engagement” and that their partners “followed their own governance processes in formally acknowledging their support for the two unitary proposal.” He said: “Importantly, all councils across Surrey have communicated with residents throughout LGR, and will continue to do so, using various channels to ensure people have access to information and given every opportunity to engage with the process.”

A decision on whether to create two or three new councils was expected earlier this month but the Local Democracy Reporting Service understands this has been delayed to give further consideration to the three-council model. A formal decision is expected at the end of this month. Delays to the announcement create a tighter window on the opposite side ahead of next May’s shadow elections.

Surrey Police said it was consulted by the county council over the two unitary councils and that it backed the move as it reflected structures the force already had in mind “before, and independently of, any plans for LGR within Surrey”. A spokesperson for the force said: “Since the proposals reflected the existing ideas of the force as to our likely future structure, it was natural for us to support them. Surrey Police will continue to work closely with our partners to understand how this proposal and any subsequent decisions might affect our own operating model now or in the future.”

Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend said she set out her support for a proposed two-unitary model of local government in a letter to the leader of Surrey County Council in May. She added: “This was subsequently included as part of the submission to Government who are currently considering what option will be implemented here in Surrey. I believe a two unitary model will not only be a simpler and more cost-effective structure for local residents but it would also be better placed to support the efficient policing of Surrey in the future. Nothing outlined in the three-unitary proposal has caused me to change my mind. The two unitary model fits well with Surrey Police’s emerging plans for a revised policing operating model – work on which had begun long before the white paper for local government reform was even on the table. My office were not consulted directly by Surrey Heath Borough Council during this process. My Chief Executive was approached by another council Chief Executive who requested feedback to help inform the development of the three-unitary proposal and we were very happy to engage in this discussion. I do not consider my support for the two unitary model to be a political decision. My views on this topic are informed by what aligns best with the future plans for Surrey Police and what I believe is right for the Force and the people it serves.”

Part of Cllr Macdonald’s letter read: “Objectivity requires ‘holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias’. It is my view that a reasonable person would not accept that writing a letter of support prior to the publication of final proposals and the start of the statutory consultation process meets the Nolan Principle of Objectivity, as due diligence in the assessment of ‘best evidence’ had not been completed. A safer position for a public body would be strictly balanced, factual information about impacts across all final options as part of the statutory consultation. Police officers, in serving the Crown, are prohibited from engaging in political activity and must remain impartial. Publicly endorsing a specific governance option (e.g. an SCC-led ‘two unitary’ model) or allowing the force’s crest to be used in a marketing campaign risks breaching those duties, even if the issue is ‘cross-party’. He added: “I do request that in assessing all statutory responses due note is taken of the potentially corrupted process and biased publicity resulting from the undue influence of Surrey County Council over these public officials and bodies, and their inputs disregarded to avoid the potential risk of judicial review.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

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Epsom Downs leftovers

20 October 2025



Heaps of leftover racing dirt and old equipment have been abandoned on Epsom Downs, prompting criticism of the "weed-infested eyesores".

Epsom Civic Society has raised the alarm over soil heaps and discarded equipment left on the beauty spot. The group claims that in some cases, the rubbish has been dumped on the Downs out of convenience rather than necessity.

The most recent example, at the junction of the path at the top Ebbisham Lane and the lower gallop track, was supposed to be removed a year ago after a new horse slipway was completed.

But it is still there, according to the society, and now adorned with discarded plastic rails.

"It's difficult to say that these are just there because they're needed for operational reasons," said Nick Lock, from the civic society at a Epsom and Walton Downs Consultative Committee meeting at Epsom and Ewell Borough Council on October 13. He said: "They're just there for convenience of not taking it somewhere else."

Other spoil piles have been spotted at the 7th Furlong car park, behind the Derby Start of the main racecourse and near the bottom of Six Mile Hill.

The materials vary from soil and chippings to old water containers and tractor equipment. All this contributed to a cluttered, unsightly scene on what should be a natural scenic area, the civil society claims.

The Downs Conservators, who manage the site, say the area is a working environment for racehorse training, and some spoil heaps are awaiting future projects.

Cllr Steven McCormick told the Epsom and Walton Downs committee meeting he will go around the site with the Jockey club and identify the mounds to see what they are there for or not there for.

But Cllr McCormick added there is a "balance" between the council's responsibility in protecting the Down's natural beauty and the function of the site as a working training ground. He added the council would also have to find a budget to move the spoils as it will cost money and resources.

Some progress has been made, the committee acknowledged. A large pile from resurfacing the bottom nine-furlong gallop was removed following Civil Society pressure, and most reported flytipped material has also been cleared.

But Mr Lock said more needs to be done. "It still does look quite a mess up there," he told the committee. "It seems a bit of a shame if you're sitting looking at the nice view from the grandstand and the grounds and the downs and you're sitting next to all these piles of rubbish."

Nigel Whybrow from the Training Grounds Management Board confirmed that current materials in the car park are earmarked for planned projects, and redundant equipment will be removed over the winter with some hoped to end up in a museum.

For now, the Civic Society is urging the Conservators to adopt a clear policy: reusable spoils should be stored neatly in designated areas, and all other material should be removed from the Downs promptly.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Image: Dumping of material on the Downs. (Credit: Epsom Civil Society/ Epsom and Ewell Borough Council documents)

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Annual Report

20 October 2025



EEBC publishes an Annual Report amid some questions over priorities and spending.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has released its *2024/25 Annual Report*, showcasing a range of achievements over the past year — but opposition councillors have questioned both the purpose and timing of the publication.

The report, available on the council's website, highlights milestones such as a balanced budget for 2025/26, the allocation of over £2 million in Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding to neighbourhood and strategic projects, and a 100% success rate in determining major planning applications within statutory deadlines. It also notes environmental achievements, including Epsom Common's eighteenth consecutive Green Flag Award and new solar panels installed at the Rainbow Leisure Centre.

Chief Executive **Jackie King** said she was "proud to present Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's 2024/25 Annual Report which reflects the dedication and impact of our teams on the borough over the last financial year."

She praised the efforts of the council's 280-strong workforce, highlighting the Waste Services team's 99.9% on-time bin collection rate and the Planning Policy team's award-winning work at the Royal Town Planning Institute's South East Awards for Planning Excellence.

"I am grateful for the hard work and dedication of everyone at Epsom & Ewell Borough Council and I know we are in a good position to meet the challenges ahead," said Ms King. "I look forward to continuing to deliver the council's new strategic priorities and working towards local government reorganisation - whilst continuing to provide the high-quality services our residents depend upon."

However, some opposition councillors have some reservations about the report.

Cllr Alex Coley (Independent - Ruxley) said: "I wonder who the audience is for this brochure and what the staff resource was for this work at a time when the Council is already struggling to deliver work on its strategic priorities. I also wonder who decided to do this piece of work."

Cllr James Lawrence (Liberal Democrat - College) drew attention to ongoing financial pressures, particularly on housing budgets: "It is worth noting that at the same time this report is being published, an £875k overspend on temporary accommodation by the end of the financial year is being predicted. This is due to a combination of an increase in temporary accommodation need, and a substantially too optimistic budgeting of 71 temporary accommodation spaces when for the past year and a half approximately 90 spaces have consistently been required. It would not be accurate to describe the current 2025/26 budget as balanced."

Neither the Labour nor Conservative parties, both with small representations on the Council, offered comment.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council continues to be run by the borough's network of Residents' Association councillors, who hold the majority of seats.

Image: Cover page of the EEBC Annual Report. © EEBC

Sam Jones - Reporter



Defibrillators delivered by drone?

20 October 2025



A groundbreaking project testing how drones could be integrated into the UK’s 999 emergency response system to deliver defibrillators to out-of-hospital cardiac arrest patients has been launched by the **University of Surrey, Air Ambulance Charity Kent Surrey Sussex, and the South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SECamb).**

Funded by the **National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR)**, the 16-month initiative will explore how drones can rapidly deliver Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) to the scene of an emergency — potentially saving lives where every second counts.

The research will take place in two phases. The first will simulate 999 call handling, Air Traffic Control coordination, ambulance dispatch, and drone operations to develop and refine delivery procedures. The second will involve interviews with out-of-hospital cardiac arrest survivors, family members, emergency responders and members of the public to assess perceptions of drone technology, ease of use, and any concerns.

Dr Scott Munro, Lecturer in Paramedic Practice at the University of Surrey and project co-lead, said:

“This research is the first step towards integrating drone technology into our emergency response systems. Our ultimate goal is to develop and test the procedures needed to seamlessly introduce drone delivery of AEDs into the 999-emergency system.”

Professor Kevin Munro, Director of the NIHR Research for Patient Benefit Programme, added:

“Using drones to deliver defibrillators could help emergency teams reach patients faster, improve survival after cardiac arrest, and bring cutting-edge technology directly to the NHS frontline.”

Dr Craig Mortimer, Research Manager at SECamb, said:

“Rapid intervention is vital in managing out-of-hospital cardiac arrests. Integrating this technology into future healthcare systems represents real progress in strengthening the chain of survival and giving patients the best chance of a positive outcome.”

With UK survival rates for out-of-hospital cardiac arrest currently below 10%, the research aims to tackle one of the biggest challenges in emergency care: getting a defibrillator to the patient in time.

About NIHR

The **National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR)** is the UK’s largest funder of health and social care research. It invests in high-quality studies that benefit the NHS, public health and social care, supports researchers and facilities, and partners with patients and communities to improve outcomes both in the UK and globally.

Surrey University



Surrey Uni to open in India after UK PM’s visit

20 October 2025



Surrey joins new UK Universities in India Alliance while on UK trade mission to India

The UK’s universities can be a “skills and research accelerator” for the potential of the strengthening UK-India trade

partnership, which was the focus of Sir Keir Starmer’s trade mission this week. This is according to Professor Stephen Jarvis, newly appointed President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Surrey – and a participant in the trade mission.

On his return from India, where the multi-sector delegation met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Professor Jarvis highlighted the strong fit of the University of Surrey’s ‘purpose-driven’ approach to education and research, and the importance of the new Universities in India Alliance, which Surrey was proud to become a founder member of during the trip.

During the visit, the University of Surrey was presented with approval in principle from IFSCA (International Financial Services Centres Authority) to proceed with opening a new International Branch Campus at GIFT City, in Ahmedabad, Gujarat State.

On the trip, the University also celebrated its network of research and education partnerships with Indian universities – including its partnership with the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru (IISc) – which will see both institutions partner to drive research and innovation in semiconductor chip design and medical research, with a particular focus on human health and veterinary medicine.

Professor Stephen Jarvis said:

“I was honoured to be invited to join the Prime Minister on his visit to India to celebrate the enormous potential for UK higher education to partner and collaborate in India to drive international skills development and research to solve global challenges. India is an economic and skills superpower – it has its own thriving higher education sector, but also recognises the value that Britain’s globally recognised higher education sector can bring to meeting the extraordinary growth in demand for quality education in India.

“As we move towards opening our new campus in GIFT City, we’re delighted to have been invited to become founding members of the nine-strong UK Universities in India Alliance. Education is an immensely important export industry for the UK, and Surrey is proud to be standing shoulder to shoulder with our fellow universities, bringing our own unique brand of purposeful education, as we seek to expand the potential for higher education to be a skills and research accelerator, benefitting both the UK and Indian economies.”

Alison Barrett MBE, Country Director India, British Council, said:

“Congratulations to the University of Surrey on receiving approval in principle from IFSCA (International Financial Services Centres Authority) to establish its International Branch Campus in GIFT City, Ahmedabad, India. This reflects the UK’s commitment to accessible, innovative, and inclusive education, but also demonstrates the positive impact of the National Education Policy 2020. Aligned with the shared ambition outlined in the India-UK Vision 2035, bringing Surrey’s expertise to India will create exciting new opportunities for students and equip them with the skills needed to thrive in the future.”

Surrey University



Image: 09/10/2025. Mumbai, India. Prime Minister Keir Starmer meets Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a bilateral meeting at the Raj Bhavan. Picture by Simon Dawson / No 10 Downing Street

Not MPs’ expenses again!?

20 October 2025



Some Surrey MPs have racked up thousands of pounds in hotel stays or London rent, despite their constituencies being within commuting distance of Westminster.

The rules allow MPs who live outside London to rent a property or book hotels if late-night votes or early starts make the journey “unreasonable”. Hotel bills are capped at £230 a night in London. But many Surrey residents might see the

distances involved as a “normal” daily commute.

According to the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA), **Zöe Franklin (Liberal Democrat)**, MP for Guildford, has claimed £3,919.42 for 18 nights in London hotels between September 2024 and April 2025 – roughly two stays a month. **Dr Al Pinkerton (Liberal Democrat)**, MP for Surrey Heath, has claimed £4,543 for 22 hotel stays in the same period, including a four-night stint last October costing £780 and five separate nights this April. **Will Forster (Liberal Democrat)**, MP for Woking, spent £367.84 on a two-night stay in February after returning from a parliamentary trip to Ukraine.

Meanwhile, some of their Conservative colleagues have other arrangements. **Greg Stafford (Conservative)**, MP for Farnham and Bordon, has reportedly spent £9,592.52 on accommodation over five months, including nearly £8,000 to rent a London property between November 2024 and March 2025, excluding council tax and utility bills. Travelling from Mr Stafford’s constituency office in Farnham and Bordon takes on average 1 hour 25 minutes by car or 1 hour 50 minutes by train. Mr Stafford has been approached for comment.

Under IPSA rules, MPs can claim expenses for renting or staying in London when parliamentary business requires it. Up to £31,800 a year is available for MPs’ accommodation budgets in such cases.

Other Surrey MPs take a different approach. **Jeremy Hunt (Conservative)**, MP for Godalming and Ash, owns a London property, while **Claire Coutinho (Conservative)**, MP for East Surrey (Tandridge area), has her own London flat. Neither claims rent or hotel expenses.

A spokesperson for Zöe Franklin said: “Zöe has stayed in overnight accommodation in London after late night sittings in Parliament. This is in line with IPSA guidance. Zöe will continue to focus on working hard and delivering for the people of Guildford constituency.”

A spokesperson for Will Forster said: “Will stayed in a London hotel for two nights in February 2025 following his return from Ukraine as part of a parliamentary delegation to mark the third anniversary of the Russian invasion. Debate in the Commons on the following day extended late into the evening.”

A spokesperson for Dr Al Pinkerton said: “As Surrey Heath is classed as an out-of-London constituency, Dr Pinkerton is entitled under IPSA rules to claim accommodation costs in London when parliamentary duties require it. Rather than renting a permanent flat, he has chosen to use hotel accommodation on an occasional basis – for example, when late-night votes or early morning meetings make commuting impractical. This approach provides flexibility and ensures costs remain within IPSA’s set limits. It also enables Dr Pinkerton to maximise his effectiveness as Surrey Heath’s representative by being present and fully engaged in parliamentary business while avoiding unnecessary expenditure.”

Emily Dalton LDRS

From **top left going clockwise**:

1. **Zöe Franklin** (Liberal Democrat, Guildford)
2. **Dr Al Pinkerton** (Liberal Democrat, Surrey Heath)
3. **Greg Stafford** (Conservative, Farnham and Bordon)
4. **Will Forster** (Liberal Democrat, Woking)

Photos from UK Parliament

Poll points to further Conservative decline in Surrey

20 October 2025



Reform UK is in line to win its first Surrey seat, according to a major YouGov poll. The survey of 13,000 people’s voting intentions suggests three Surrey MPs would lose their jobs with the Liberal Democrats being the largest beneficiaries in the county – if a General Election was called today.

Nationally, the polls say the United Kingdom is headed for another hung parliament with Reform, the Nigel Farage led party that succeeded UKIP after Brexit, emerging as the largest party. In Surrey voters are leaning a different way.

The three Surrey seats that would switch allegiance would be Spelthorne, Farnham and Bordon, and Godalming and Ash. All three seats are currently held by the Conservatives with Lincoln Jopp, Greg Stafford and Jeremy Hunt projected to lose their jobs as the Tories crumble to just 45 MPs.

Projected to take their places would be two Liberal Democrats and Surrey's first Reform MP. If the voting patterns held true Dorking and Horley, Woking, Guildford, Esher and Walton, Godalming and Ash, Epsom and Ewell, Surrey Heath, and Farnham and Bordon, would all go to the Liberal Democrats to give them eight MPs.

The Conservatives would hold East Surrey, Reigate, Runnymede and Weybridge, and Windsor, to give them four MPs. While Reform UK with 27 per cent is expected to edge out the Conservatives on 25 per cent and the Liberal Democrats on 20 per cent to win Spelthorne.

Nationally YouGov's seat-by-seat analysis indicates Reform UK would secure 311 seats in the Commons, short of the 326 required to demand a majority but far and away the largest party - and 306 MPs more than it currently has. The poll has Labour dropping from its 411 landslide victory in 2024 to 144 with the Lib Dems on 78 and the Conservatives which had been in Government for 14 years prior before losing last year would slip to 45 seats.

YouGov says its seat projections come with uncertainty and that volatility is now the norm in British electoral politics. They say Reform UK would win at least 82 seats by less than five percentage points and that there was a possibility it could lose them all, leaving the party well short of a parliamentary majority rather than within touching distance.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Businesses get £2 million boost in Surrey

20 October 2025



An economic boost worth millions, scores of new jobs and hundreds of local opportunities will be delivered thanks to funding awarded to dozens of businesses by Surrey County Council.

From vineyards and biotech to manufacturing and AI firms, a diverse range of organisations from across the county have been awarded grants in the first round of the Surrey Economic Growth Fund.

The scheme, launched by the council in April, brings together pooled funding streams including the government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund. Following a highly competitive process, close to £2 million has been awarded to dozens of recipients, unlocking significant match funding and private investment.

The successful bids are collectively estimated to grow Surrey's economy by £9 million, create or safeguard 300 jobs and bring 1,350 residents into employment.

Local firms supported

Among those receiving funding is Aero Sensor, a technology firm at Dunsfold Industrial Park in Cranleigh, led by former F1 engineer Dr Barney Garrod. The company is one of only three globally developing new aerodynamic measurement probes for automotive and aerospace applications.

The grant will support the creation of a new wind tunnel facility to test its designs, creating highly skilled jobs in the process.

Dr Garrod said:

"The grant enabled us to fully kit out the wind tunnel with the tools and instruments we need. We'll also be hiring new staff and technicians. Having our own wind tunnel means we can halve our turnaround time and massively accelerate our development. It's moved the business forward by about a year."

Other successful bids include Woodlark Nurseries in Hersham, which is creating a new horticultural facility, while Upper Birtley Farm Partnership near Bramley will establish a premium glamping and outdoor education site in the Surrey Hills.

In Godalming, Sammi-Select will develop a 'practice interview' tool adapted from an AI platform to support marginalised jobseekers such as young people not in education or training and those who are digitally excluded.

County-wide initiatives

There are county-wide projects too, including the Surrey Venture Studio scheme, a collaboration between Surrey's three universities to support start-ups, and Source in Surrey, led by the county's Chambers of Commerce, encouraging larger businesses to 'buy local'.

Both are expected to complement existing work through the council's Business Surrey initiative.

Councillor Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth, said:

“The new Economic Growth Fund has generated a huge level of interest from across Surrey, demonstrating the real appetite from our amazing business community to drive innovation, growth and job creation in our county.

“Round one was highly competitive and we’ve only supported the highest quality bids which fully met the criteria. This ensures every pound invested delivers genuine growth, meaningful jobs and positive outcomes for Surrey’s communities.

“Our ambition is to position Surrey—which already contributes £50 billion to UK plc every year—as one of the UK’s leading regional economies, and this fund is one of the ways we’re building the foundations to achieve that.”

Next round

Round Two of the Surrey Economic Growth Fund is due to launch in October, focusing on Business Growth Grants. Applicants can expect a streamlined, one-stage process supported by a guidance handbook.

For full details visit: businesssurrey.co.uk/innovate/economic-growth-fund

Epsom and Ewell Times reporter adds Epsom winner Lesh Wear (or Lesh), is a maternity and nursing wear company focused on creating comfortable, leak-proof products for mothers, such as their FREEFLO nursing bra, aiming to reduce the use of disposable breast pads. The company, also known as Lesh Wear Ltd, was incorporated in March 2022 and is headquartered in Epsom, Surrey, with the primary goal of making the breastfeeding journey easier.

Recipients of Round One funding

A total of £1,979,982 has been awarded to the following organisations:

- Dorking Distillery, Dorking
- Halt Glass, Guildford
- Emilia JH, Reigate
- Sammi-Select, Godalming
- Molecular Medical, Guildford
- Bonovate, Camberley
- Woven Bio, Woking
- Streetwise Technology
- The Good Bacteria Company, Farnham
- UKIOT, Weybridge
- Lesh Wear, Epsom
- Woodlark Nurseries, Hersham
- Aero Sensor, Dunsfold
- Rhizo PTX, Guildford
- Cambertronics, Cranleigh
- Misty Moon Cider, Farnham
- DIREK, Guildford
- Tiontech, Guildford
- Raw Honey Distillery, Fetcham
- Whitespace Work Software, Godalming
- LenziQ, Horley
- GT Joinery, Molesey
- Source in Surrey (via Surrey Chambers of Commerce)
- Surrey Venture Studio
- Surrey Innovation Board (via the University of Surrey)
- Blakes Lane Farm, Guildford

- Upper Birtley Farm Partnership
- Ivelle Farm, Waverley

Image: Matt Furniss, Exec Member for Growth, with Barney Garrood of Aerosensor

Surrey County Council



Surrey gets a sinking feeling over cost of its holes

20 October 2025



Has Surrey become Britain's sinkhole capital? Well, the figures certainly point in that direction.

Surrey County Council is on track to spend a staggering £1.6m fixing the collapsed 65ft hole in a section of Godstone High Street - a bill that dwarfs what most local authorities spend on sinkholes.

Figures obtained through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests show councils across the UK have spent more than £6.2m tackling over 7,000 sinkholes since 2020. But Surrey alone accounts for almost half of that total, shelling out over £3.1m making it by far the country's biggest spender.

The Godstone collapse, which first appeared in February, has left the part of the High Street shut for months and businesses struggling.

Surrey County Council has already spent £850,000 on emergency responses, surveys, roadworks and consultancy fees, including £360,000 on just site establishment.

Another £800,000 is forecast for stabilisation work, filling in the mine tunnels, and further repairs - taking the final bill to £1.65m. This will amount to just over a quarter of the total UK bill on sinkholes for the last five years.

What is driving the cost?

The British Geological Society has stated that Surrey is particularly prone to sinkholes due to the underlying sands in the county, which are weakly cemented.

According to council documents, the ground beneath Godstone sits on the Folkestone Sandstone Formation - a weak, sandy foundation that made the area vulnerable to collapse. CCTV images provided under FOI request confirm the collapse was worsened by an old sand mine tunnel running beneath the High Street.

While the council insists the road should reopen by December 16, locals are not holding their breath. Residents have been struggling for months with the road closure, diversions, fall in trade and general feel of chaos. That being said, an official report shown to SurreyLive by the council does state that the project is tracking towards a final inspection date of December 16th.

A Surrey County Council spokesperson said: "This continues to be a highly complex incident involving a number of investigations led by our Highways Officers and other agencies, including specialist teams and utility companies.

"Work is underway to reconstruct the final footpath affected by the collapse and we're now planning how we stabilise the collapsed area and fill in the tunnel network.

"We are updating local residents and businesses as we progress through each stage of the process and expect the final two residents to be back in their properties by the end of September.

"Once our stabilisation work and the SES works to reconnect and relay the mains through the collapse area are completed, the area will be refilled and repaired permanently. We are currently planning to complete our repairs and reopen the High Street during December."

A nationwide problem

The Godstone collapse may be dramatic, but it's part of a wider and growing problem. Since 2020, sinkholes have been recorded everywhere from Reading to Scotland, with councils spending millions to patch them up.

The top spenders after Surrey include Reading (£976,500), East Sussex (£767,238) and Transport Scotland (£602,000). If you take away the Godstone sinkhole expenditure, Surrey still comes up top with over £2.2m being put towards sinkholes.

Lloyd Allen, Infrastructure Team Manager for Surrey County Council, on Godstone high street. (Credit: Surrey County

Council).

Emily Dalton LDRS

Additional reporting from Sam McEvans

Related reports:

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Godstone "Sink-hole" residents to return

Surrey sink-hole major incident

Redhill care home put under special measures

20 October 2025



A supported living service in Redhill has been rated "inadequate" and put into special measures after inspectors said they uncovered six legal breaches.

The health watchdog slammed the service as putting "unnecessary stress" on people by only giving 28 days' notice when required to move out.

Threeways Dom Care, on Brighton Road, which supports adults with learning disabilities, was inspected by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in July 2025.

The watchdog found "serious leadership failings" which it said left people without dignity, independence or self care.

Roger James, CQC's deputy director for Surrey, said: "Our inspection of Threeways Dom Care exposed serious leadership failings that were denying people dignity, respect, and independence in their care."

Inspectors flagged problems across the board, including poor record-keeping, lack of staff training, and a failure to manage basic health needs like nutrition and epilepsy.

Some staff were found to be unkind, while others ignored health and safety basics. One care staff member was found wearing flip flops which could bring in dirt, and others were discovered to raise their voice at people or ask them to be quiet in what is meant to be their home.

The CQC report also criticised leaders for mishandling the closure of the home. Just one day after the inspection, residents and their families were told the service was shutting and given 28 days to move out.

Mr James, CQC's deputy director for Surrey, added: "Threeways ignored people's voices, failed to inform them or their relatives of their rights as tenants, and put an enormous amount of unnecessary stress on people as well as making the transfer to a new care service for them more difficult."

He added the service did not promote an open or honest culture, with safeguarding concerns often missed or ignored, leaving people at risk of harm.

But Threeways management has hit back, accusing the regulator of ignoring their side of the story. A spokesperson for the service said: "Families have always been happy with the service and we've had positive feedback from professionals. The service will close once commissioners confirm a move date, and in the meantime, we're doing our best to ensure a smooth transition."

Despite those reassurances, the CQC has placed the service into special measures, meaning it will be closely monitored and expected to make urgent improvements if it wishes to continue operating.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Adult social care stock image. Credit Eduardo Barrios on Unsplash

From Epsom to the Big Screen

20 October 2025



Dean Puckett Returns Home with His Debut Feature *The Severed Sun* for a Special Screening and Q&A next week Wednesday 8th October!

A special homecoming event is set to light up the screen at Epsom Picturehouse as local filmmaker Dean Puckett returns to share his debut feature film, *The Severed Sun*. Dean, a former student of Glyn High School and UCA Farnham, moved from London to Surrey as a teenager before embarking on a filmmaking career that has taken him to major international festivals. Now, he returns to Epsom for a screening and Q&A celebrating the launch of his haunting British folk horror debut.

Set in an isolated church community gripped by paranoia and superstition after a brutal murder, *The Severed Sun* is a chilling tale of faith, fear, and folklore. The feature marks the first full-length film from Puckett — produced by Rebecca Wolff (Grasp the Nettle Films) and Jude Goldrei (Lunar Lander Films) — and had its world premiere at Fantastic Fest 2024.

Following screenings at Picturehouse cinemas across the UK, this special Epsom event will feature a post-screening Q&A with Dean, who will share insights into the creative process, behind-the-scenes stories, and what it takes to bring a first feature from script to screen.

“I discovered my love for filmmaking in a small cupboard at Glyn High School in Epsom. This was entirely thanks to one exceptional teacher, Mr Ramasami, who believed in me. Despite struggling academically, he saw that I had a flair for visual storytelling. I lived in Worcester Park from the age of 12 and took countless trips to the cinema in Epsom during my youth, so it’s incredibly gratifying and moving for me to return now with my own feature film. “

— Dean Puckett, Director of *The Severed Sun*

“It’s a real privilege to work with homegrown talent like Dean and to share his debut feature with the community that helped shape his creative journey. Events like this are not only exciting cinematic moments, they’re also a chance to show aspiring filmmakers that it is possible to follow your passion and make something special. Community is at the heart of what we do at Picturehouse, and hosting screenings like this — which bring people together and celebrate local success — is exactly what our cinema is all about.”

The screening is a chance not only to experience one of the most distinctive new British films of the year but also to celebrate a hometown success story — and discover what it’s really like to turn a dream into a debut.

Event Details:



Epsom Picturehouse, Epsom Square, Epsom, KT19 8AG

The Severed Sun: followed by a Q&A with Dean Puckett and filmmakers



Tuesday 8 October, 6:30pm



Tickets: www.picturehouses.com/epsom

Image of Dean Puckett

Bookham to get new community centre

20 October 2025



After six years of waiting and false starts, Bookham is finally getting a new community centre.

The old Bookham Youth Centre on Lower Road shut its doors in 2019 after falling into disrepair, leaving the area without a dedicated youth and community hub.

Members agreed to spend £2.8m of existing capital funds to knock down the old building and replace it at a Surrey cabinet meeting on September 24. Councillors said they hope the new multi-purpose building will be ready by March 2027.

Cllr Clare Curran, Conservative member for Bookham and Fetcham West said: "There is real excitement in Bookham that a new centre is going to be delivered.

"This is not just a youth facility [...] The former centre was used by a huge range of community users from everything from the University of the Third Age to challenges with disabled children and an early years provider."

The new centre is set to take the place of three lost facilities - the former youth centre, The Bridge in Leatherhead (closed after RAAC was found in the roof) and the Bookham Family Centre. Day-to-day running of the centre is expected to be handed to a third-party provider, meaning no additional ongoing costs to the council or future unitary authority.

"It has taken some time to get to this point," said Cllr Clare Curran who represents Bookham. "We've had a few false dawns on the journey."

In 2021, councillors promised a shiny new building on the Lower Road Reception Ground, at the cost of £2.5m, with homes alongside to help pay for it. But that plan was scrapped after tougher planning rules on the Green Belt and new biodiversity requirements meant the recreation ground scheme was no longer possible.

Instead, Surrey County Council has shifted its focus back to the old youth centre site. But housing that was meant to come alongside the scheme has been kicked into the long grass, with any decision on new homes delayed until after 2027.

Public consultation and planning approvals are still to come so residents still have an opportunity to have their say.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Bookham Community Centre on 164 Lower Road. (Credit: Google Street View)

Epsom and Ewell's NEScot plumbs the heights

20 October 2025



Nescot's gas and plumbing apprenticeship provision has been awarded a City & Guilds End Point Assessment (EPA) plaque for excellence in apprenticeship delivery.

Elizabeth Akinlaja, City & Guilds Business Development Manager for London, Kent & Sussex, officially presented the award to Principal and CEO, Julie Kapsalis and the plumbing team at the college this week (Monday 22 September). She said: "Congratulations Nescot, it was a pleasure presenting the City & Guilds EPA Excellence plaque to the apprenticeship team. This award is for their dedication and commitment in supporting learners on their Building Services Engineering (BSE) apprenticeship provision, which has resulted in outstanding first-time pass rates, especially in plumbing, an area facing significant skills shortages. Well-done to everyone involved for making such a positive impact!"

Learners on the gas engineering apprenticeship, part of the plumbing apprenticeship department at Nescot achieved a 94% first time pass rate.

The award recognises excellence in Nescot's EPA delivery, which is the final stage of an apprenticeship designed to validate an apprentice's knowledge, skills, and behaviours against the required apprenticeship standard. It signifies the high quality and standard of the college's apprenticeship training, and celebrates the plumbing apprenticeship department's successful and impactful EPA achievements.

Liz Crawley, Head of School, Construction, Engineering & Automotive at Nescot, commented: "It's fantastic to receive such amazing feedback from City & Guilds. Our plumbing team work really hard to ensure the best possible outcomes for our apprentices and local employers."

Sarah Keith, Head of Apprenticeships at Nescot, added: "I am so proud of the teamwork at Nescot across all apprenticeships. This award is a testament to the benefits of working in a strong team that supports our apprentices, employers and each other. It means that our students are fully qualified and industry ready. Well-done to the plumbing team, and everyone involved in apprenticeships at Nescot."

The EPA Excellence award showcases Nescot's commitment to apprentice success and industry standards and reflects the wide range of apprenticeship training available at the college. At Nescot, we offer apprenticeships in carpentry and joinery, commercial catering, gas engineering, plumbing and heating, electrical installation, business administration, customer service, team leading and management, marketing executive, hairdressing, early years, health play specialists

as well as laboratory scientists.

Explore the range of apprenticeship courses available on the Nescot website.

Photo: (centre left to right): Nescot Principal and CEO Julie Kapsalis receiving the City & Guilds EPA Award plaque from Elizabeth Akinlaja, City & Guilds Business Development Manager for London, Kent & Sussex along with the Nescot Plumbing team. Credit NESCOT

An EPA Plaque from City & Guilds is an award given to colleges and training providers to recognise their high-quality apprenticeship delivery and the success of their apprentices. The plaque highlights consistent excellence in End-Point Assessment (EPA) performance, based on factors like high pass rates and a large number of Distinction grades achieved by apprentices. It is also a recognition of staff dedication, guidance and support offered to learners.

NESCOT



Big housing development coming to Guildford

20 October 2025



Guildford could soon see one of its biggest housing developments in decades, with fresh plans submitted to build up to 1,800 new homes at Gosden Hill.

Developers Martin Grant Homes want to transform farmland off the A3 into a new neighbourhood complete with schools, shops, sports pitches, and even a Park and Ride.

The outline applications sets out a long-term vision for the site, which would include:

- Up to 1,800 homes, including 40 per cent affordable housing
- Six Gypsy and Traveller pitches
- A new local centre with shops, health and community facilities
- Land for both a primary school and secondary school
- Around 10,000sqm of employment floorspace
- A 250-space Park and Ride near the A3
- Large areas of green space, including allotments, play areas, and a new woodland walking route

Developers say the project would create a “gateway for Guildford” for drivers coming off the A3. The site, covering more than 130 hectares of farmland and woodland, sits between Burpham and the A3. If approved, the first phase 150 homes would be built with access from Merrow Lane.

The bulk of the site will be housing in a mix of family homes, apartments and some specialist accommodation. Planning documents detail the homes will be built in phases including a mixture of sizes from smaller flats to larger family homes, around 720 affordable homes, space for self-build plots and some elderly care housing.

Most of the higher density housing, like apartment blocks, would sit around the centre and the main street of the new community, while the rest of the site would focus on family housing with gardens.

Not everyone will welcome the idea of more traffic but the scheme includes a new A3 junction, cycle paths, and upgraded bus services to ease the pressure on local roads.

About 34 hectares of open space is planned including a big new woodland walking area at Cotts and Frithy’s Wood. Developers say overhead power lines will be buried underground and much of the existing woodland kept to help the site blend in with the landscape.

Guildford Borough Council cannot currently meet government housing supply targets so the developers argue the project

should be green-lit to help tackle the housing shortage.

If given the green light, Gosden Hill would become home to thousands of people, with the developer promising it will be a “healthy, happy and sociable” place to live.

Only eight people have objected to the scheme so far with the majority of comments slamming the construction traffic plan as “wholly inadequate” for the road and likely to cause “intolerable disruption”.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Outline of the proposed development on Gosden Hill Farm. (Credit: Guildford Borough Council/ Martin Grant Homes)

Big improvements required of Epsom care home

20 October 2025



An Epsom care home has been told it needs to make big improvements after inspectors found residents were being left to lead “very isolated lives.”

Fir Trees House, a residential home in Epsom for up to seven adults with learning disabilities, was inspected between October 2024 and July this year following concerns about the quality of care and facilities. At the time of the assessment, only four people were living there – most with long-term mental health conditions and several being assessed for autism.

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) said the home was “not always safe” and “not well-led,” warning that some residents were at risk of harm. Inspectors branded the care homes as ‘requiring improvement’ in key areas.

Inspectors said the service “wasn’t always meeting” standards set out under national guidance on supporting people with learning disabilities and autism. In particular, they found staff often focused on tasks rather than encouraging residents to live more fulfilled, independent lives.

One resident told inspectors they were happy at the home, but others described their care as “unsympathetic” and even disrespectful. One person told inspectors: “They went on to recall their first day at the service, saying, “Staff laughed at me as I tried to get up the stairs, I felt very unwell. I had to rest on the stairs, I thought I was going to lose consciousness, my head was spinning and they were laughing.”

The CQC also criticised the service for failing to learn from mistakes. In one case, a resident was moved out after a court ruled they weren’t getting the support they needed. But no managers investigated what went wrong.

The report highlighted a lack of staff at night, meaning people’s safety could not be guaranteed in an emergency. Staff also admitted they weren’t sure which outside organisations they should contact if they had safeguarding concerns.

On top of that, the report said residents were not being encouraged to eat meals together, socialise, or take part in the local community – leaving them at risk of isolation.

However, inspectors did note some positives. Medication was managed safely, refurbishment work had started – including installing a stair lift – and staff spoke positively about the management team.

Inspectors said the home itself needed work. Kitchens and bathrooms were not always clean, and some areas were in poor condition. Since then, refurbishments have begun, with new flooring, a wet room and plans for a stair lift to help people with mobility needs.

The Care Quality Commission said Fir Trees House remained in breach of legal rules around person-centred care and governance.

Fir Trees House has been approached for comment.

283 Fir Tree Road, Epsom, Surrey. (Credit: Google Street View)

Epsom’s Milly to share spotlight with West End star Kerry Ellis

20 October 2025



Local talent will step into the limelight at the Epsom Playhouse this Thursday, when Stagecoach Epsom student **Milly Playle** performs alongside one of Britain's most celebrated West End stars, **Kerry Ellis**, in the opening concert of Ellis's new UK tour.

Milly, who has already appeared in the West End production of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* and featured in several television commercials, was selected from hundreds of young hopefuls to join Ellis on stage. She has trained for years at Stagecoach Epsom in singing, dancing and acting, building the skills that have brought her to this special opportunity.

Adding a further Epsom connection, both Stagecoach Principal **Rachel** and Milly's mother, **Emma**, trained at Laine Theatre Arts - the same renowned performing arts college attended by Ellis before her career took flight.

Ellis is a household name in British theatre. She made her West End debut in *My Fair Lady* before achieving international fame as the original British lead in *Wicked*, playing Elphaba both in London and on Broadway. She has starred in *We Will Rock You*, *Oliver!*, *Les Misérables* and *Cats*, and is a long-time collaborator of Queen guitarist **Brian May**, with whom she has toured worldwide. Her acclaimed solo albums and sell-out concert tours have cemented her reputation as one of the UK's leading musical theatre performers.

The Playhouse concert is being staged by **Perform Ready Events**, which creates unique performance opportunities for young people across the country. At every stop on Ellis's tour, a young performer will share the stage - and for the first night, it is Epsom's very own Milly.

Rachel, Principal of Stagecoach Epsom, said:

"We are so proud of Milly and thrilled that she'll be representing Stagecoach Epsom on stage with such an incredible performer. It's a wonderful opportunity not only for her, but also for our community to celebrate local young talent."