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26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

Epsom’s UCA hosts delegation from Nigeria

23 March 2026



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

University for the Creative Arts

Photo: Nigerian delegation at The Wells, UCA in Epsom

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ISSN 2753-2771

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

23 March 2026



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

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

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

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

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

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

What was actually agreed?

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

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

Some concerns raised

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

Cllr **Lucie McIntyre** (RA West Ewell) , however, said taking time to get the details right was essential and a working group would be the best means of doing so. Cllr **James Lawrence** (LibDem now Independent – College) agreed, and said the councils should know what it is endorsing.

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

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

Emily Dalton BBC LDRS

Related reports:

Appeal to twin Epsom with Bucha in Ukraine

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ISSN 2753-2771

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

23 March 2026



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cllr **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley EEBC and Surrey County Councillor) delivered a tongue-in-cheek poem suggesting the name had effectively already been decided. He said: “So toast to the history of Spelthorne’s old soul, while West Surrey wagons begin their first to roll.” Cllr Edward Hawkins joked confusion over boundaries left them unsure “which way to go” on the vote.

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

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

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

Emily Dalton LDRS

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ISSN 2753-2771

Local LibDem leader slams Helen Maguire MP in shock resignation

23 March 2026



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

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

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

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

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

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

Resignation letter of Cllr James Lawrence

Dear Resident

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

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

While I have been doing all I can to serve our community, I have unfortunately been undermined by both the national and local Liberal Democrats Party. Under Ed Davey's leadership, the Party has become rudderless. What do the Liberal Democrats stand for? I wish I could tell you. Davey's Mr. Tumble-style stunts cover up a lack of direction, policy, and commitment to seriously engage with the challenges this country faces, particularly the economy. As the two-party system collapses, the Liberal Democrats should stand to benefit. But Davey's Party is incapable of taking advantage, and given its purposelessness, that's probably a good thing.

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

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

James Lawrence

In response Helen Maguire has issued the following statement:

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ISSN 2753-2771

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

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

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

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

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

Helen Maguire MP

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

Prominent Residents Association Councillor leaves the fold

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Ash dieback keeps Thames island closed

23 March 2026



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

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

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

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

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

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

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ISSN 2753-2771

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

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

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

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

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

Emily Dalton LDRS

Penton Hook Island – Google Maps

Sun sets on Residents’ Associations’ cherished Parishes for Epsom and Ewell

23 March 2026



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has formally abandoned plans to create parish-style community councils after a public consultation produced overwhelming opposition, bringing to an end a controversial review that has cost about £70,000.

The decision was taken at a full council meeting on 12th March following a debate that exposed sharp political divisions and prompted renewed criticism of the Residents’ Association administration that initiated the review.

Councillors ultimately accepted a report concluding that the consultation “does not demonstrate sufficient public support for the proposals”, after residents rejected the idea of creating two community councils covering Epsom and Ewell.

But the debate revealed tensions over the purpose of the consultation itself, the cost of the process, and the future of local representation in Surrey after local government reorganisation.

Beckett: residents “have spoken” but warns of democratic deficit

Introducing the report, Councillor **John Beckett** (Auriol), who led the Community Governance Review (CGR), said the council had carried out extensive engagement with residents and should be proud of the exercise.

He told councillors that more than 2,200 responses had been received, making it one of the council’s most widely responded-to consultations in recent years.

Beckett said the consultation was justified because residents across Surrey had not been properly consulted about the government’s decision to reorganise local government. He argued the borough had taken a different approach by asking residents directly what they wanted.

However, he acknowledged the result left the council with little option but to halt the plan. “Our residents have spoken on this matter, and with 82 per cent opposed to the idea of community councils, the recommendation of this report is not to proceed with CGR,” he said.

Despite accepting the result, Beckett used both his opening speech and his closing remarks to warn that the new local government structure could weaken local representation.

He questioned how the proposed neighbourhood committees expected under the new unitary structure would address local issues. “How the non-funded, non-decision-making neighbourhood committees will miraculously deliver those local issues facing our residents,” he asked, warning they may not resolve the democratic deficit created by large unitary councils.

In his summing-up he said the future system could leave a patchwork across Surrey of areas with and without meaningful local representation.

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Opposition: “self-serving” and a “vanity project”

Opposition councillors were sharply critical of the review and its purpose. Labour councillor **Chris Ames** (Court) said the administration had been warned not to embark on the process. “The Residents’ Association administration was warned not to take the council into this shambolic, costly and self-serving process,” he said.

Ames argued the public had rejected what he described as an RA “vanity project”. “The public saw through it. It’s clear that the residents rejected the RA vanity project,” he said, adding that residents also resented the idea of another layer of taxation.

He criticised the consultation structure, saying residents were effectively offered only one option. “It’s laughable to present giving residents a choice of unwanted parishes or nothing at all as a choice,” he said.

He also asked where accountability lay for the £70,000 cost of the review. “Seventy thousand pounds later, where does the CGR shambles leave us?” he asked.

Claims the review was about creating roles

Councillor **Julian Freeman** (Liberal Democrat, College) argued there had never been a public demand for parish councils in the borough. “There’s never been any demand for it,” he said. Freeman suggested the proposal had been linked to the approaching abolition of borough councils. “It was a way of trying to carve out some kind of role for soon-to-be former Residents’ Association councillors,” he said.

He added that residents reacted strongly once they realised the potential council tax implications. “People saw that it was going to cost an extra £50 plus on their council tax bill and quite rightly said, what on earth do we want to pay for another layer of government for?”

Criticism of consultation design

Several councillors criticised the structure of the consultation. Councillor **Bernie Muir** (Conservative Horton) said residents had not been offered alternative governance models. “We were given one option or nothing,” she said.

She added that neighbourhood area committees proposed under Surrey’s local government reorganisation had not been presented as an option. “Those committees should at least have been given a chance to see if they worked,” she said.

Another councillor said the consultation had effectively framed the issue as a choice between parish councils or losing local influence entirely.

Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative Horton) reminded the Chamber that the proposed Parishes would only manage a handful of allotments that residents grow fruit and vegetables in.

Administration defends consultation

Residents’ Association councillors strongly defended the review as an exercise in democratic engagement.

Councillor **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) said the borough had done what central government had not done during the reorganisation process. “We had the courage to ask our residents what they wanted,” he said.

He added that the council was respecting the outcome. “They’ve quite clearly said that they don’t want parish councils, and we will act upon that advice.” He claimed, wrongly as it transpired, that Epsom and Ewell would be the only area in the County without any parishes. See Epsom and Ewell Times table below.

Councillor **Rachel King** (RA, Town) also defended the cost of the consultation. She said the £70,000 spent equated to less than £1 per resident. “We’re talking about less than a pound per person for two full consultations,” she said.

King said the aim had been to explore how residents might retain local representation once the borough council disappears in 2027.

A consultation that defeated its own proposal

The consultation outcome – around 82 per cent opposition – effectively forced the council to abandon the idea it had been exploring.

But the debate highlighted a paradox. While the Residents’ Association leadership defended the consultation as a democratic exercise, several councillors argued the process appeared designed primarily to test support for parish councils rather than explore a range of possible governance models.

Critics pointed to the absence of alternatives such as neighbourhood area committees and the framing of the consultation around the creation of community councils.

At the same time, Beckett’s own speeches emphasised his belief that parish councils would have helped address what he described as the democratic deficit created by large unitary authorities.

End of a £70,000 process

The Community Governance Review had been one of the council’s strategic priorities for 2025–27. It involved two rounds of consultation, public meetings, publicity campaigns and engagement activities.

Despite the extensive engagement programme, the consultation produced a clear rejection of the proposal.

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ISSN 2753-2771

For now, Epsom & Ewell will remain without parish councils even after the borough council disappears under the planned Surrey reorganisation.

Parish councils across Surrey

Although Epsom & Ewell currently has none, several Surrey districts contain parish or town councils. In many cases these cover only parts of the district rather than the entire area.

District / Borough	Parish or Town Councils (examples)
Epsom & Ewell	None
Elmbridge	None
Guildford	Ash, Normandy, Pirbright, Shalford, Send, Worplesdon
Mole Valley	Capel, Charlwood, Newdigate, Ockley
Reigate & Banstead	Horley Town Council; Salfords & Sidlow Parish
Runnymede	Englefield Green; Egham Town Council
Spelthorne	None
Surrey Heath	Bisley, Chobham, Windlesham
Tandridge	Numerous including Bletchingley, Burstow, Caterham Valley, Lingfield, Oxted, Warlingham
Waverley	Cranleigh, Farnham, Godalming, Haslemere, Bramley, Chiddingfold, Elstead and others
Woking	Several parish councils including Bisley, Horsell, Pyrford and others

This means that even in districts with parish councils, significant urban areas often remain unparished.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Dorking gnome fails in bid to win property rights

23 March 2026



A Surrey couple have won a legal battle over a tiny strip of lawn outside their home after a neighbour tried to reclaim it by placing a garden gnome on the grass.

Expert gardener Elizabeth Dobson and her partner Andrew Pleming had spent years tending the eight-by-three foot patch outside their home on Pointers Hill in Westcott, near Dorking. They mowed it, raked it, planted herbs and wildflowers and even allowed their children to run across it as part of the garden, a tribunal heard. But the peaceful routine was disrupted when new neighbours Alison Unsted and Darren Unsted moved into the house next door in 2022 and decided the land

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ISSN 2753-2771

actually belonged to them.

Nine months later the couple removed plants the gardeners had grown on the small patch and installed a garden gnome in their place, sparking a full-blown legal dispute over the tiny triangle of grass between the two properties. The disagreement eventually reached the Upper Tribunal in London and centred on the legal principle of adverse possession, sometimes referred to as “squatters’ rights”, which allows someone to claim land if they have used it as their own for a sufficient period of time.

Ms Dobson and Mr Pleming argued that they, and the previous owners before them, had treated the disputed patch as part of their garden for many years. They told the tribunal they had mowed and maintained the grass just like the rest of their lawn, scarified the soil, replaced topsoil and introduced herbs and wildflowers. Their children had played on it freely and the couple used the strip as a route to push a mower and wheelbarrow between different levels of their garden. At one point they even embedded a sign displaying their house number in the soil.

Several former tenants of the neighbouring property supported their claim, telling the tribunal they had always assumed the patch belonged to number 29 and had never maintained it themselves. The case was first heard by the First-tier Tribunal, which ruled the couple had only clearly taken possession of the land from around 2018 when they turned it into a flower bed, leaving them short of the ten years required.

However, the gardeners appealed the decision. This week Judge Elizabeth Cooke overturned the earlier ruling at the Upper Tribunal, which sits at the Royal Courts of Justice, concluding that the couple had demonstrated clear possession of the land for many years. “The full picture is that, since the appellants bought the property, they have mowed, raked and scarified the lawn, replaced topsoil and turf, let their children play on the grass, used it to take the mower and barrow to the lower terrace, put a sign on it, and introduced herbs into the grass,” the judge said.

Looking at the nature of the small open-plan lawn, she said there was little more an owner could realistically do to demonstrate control of the land. “People do not generally mow their neighbour’s grass without their agreement,” she added. “Nor do they let their children play on it. Nor do they replace topsoil on it or plant herbs in it. Taken together it seems to me perfectly obvious that the appellants were in possession of the disputed land.”

The judge concluded that the couple and their predecessors had been in possession of the strip since at least 2002, long before the Unsteds arrived and attempted to reclaim it with the garden gnome. She ordered that the couple’s application to register the land should now proceed as if the neighbour’s objection had never been made, bringing the dispute over a patch of grass barely larger than a door to an end.

Emily Dalton LDRS

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Could you put Surrey Council’s empty buildings or land to good use?

23 March 2026



Surrey residents could soon have the chance to take over unused council buildings and land under a new policy designed to put more local assets into community hands.

Surrey County Council is drawing up a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) policy, which would set out how community groups can lease council-owned buildings or land if they can prove it will benefit local people. The draft policy was backed by councillors this week and will be sent to the county’s cabinet for approval in April 2026. Officers told councillors: “The community asset transfer policy has been intentionally designed to enable community participation in its simplicity.”

Essentially, the policy would allow local organisations – such as charities, sports clubs or community groups – to take on council properties that are underused or no longer needed for services. Instead of selling them off or leaving them empty, the council could lease the assets to community groups, sometimes at below market value, if the social benefit outweighs

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ISSN 2753-2771

the financial return. Council officers said the policy would give communities the opportunity to “reimagine, repurpose and reinvigorate” local spaces, meaning disused buildings could become youth centres, community hubs, sports facilities or spaces for local projects.

Under the proposed system, groups interested in taking over a building would first submit an expression of interest and, if the idea appears viable, they would then be asked to produce a business case showing they can run and maintain the asset long-term. Applications would be assessed against several criteria including the level of community benefit, the financial stability of the organisation and how the plans fit with the council’s wider priorities. If approved, transfers would generally happen through leases rather than outright sales, with community groups responsible for maintaining the building.

Council officers stressed the policy is intended to make the process clearer and fairer because, although transfers can already take place, there is currently no single framework guiding decisions. During the meeting councillors broadly welcomed the proposal but raised concerns about volunteer-run organisations taking on complex legal responsibilities and the potential financial risks of maintaining buildings or signing long leases.

Cllr Edward Hawkins said: “I still feel that we are exposing residents to a liability which some will understand, but some will not.” Another councillor suggested community groups should seek legal advice before committing to such arrangements. Officers responded that the council already provides hands-on support during the application process, including meetings and guidance, and would continue to help groups develop proposals. They added that every application would be carefully assessed to ensure organisations are capable of managing the asset before any transfer is agreed.

The CAT policy follows the approval of a motion by Cllr **Eber Kington** (RA Ewell Court, Auriol & Cuddington) to council on March 18, 2025.

Emily Dalton LDRS

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Grafton Stables to Remain Green Space

Shock as Surrey Council Puts Protected Woodland Up for Auction

Image: Grafton “Stables”

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Epsom and Ewell February crime and safety round-up

23 March 2026



Epsom and Ewell Times does not normally report individual crime incidents. However, as part of a trial we are publishing a monthly round-up of crime and community safety developments affecting the borough, drawing on information released by Surrey Police and local authorities.

Police operation in West Ewell results in three arrests

A police operation targeting antisocial behaviour and suspected drug activity in **West Ewell** led to **three arrests** during February.

Officers from the **Epsom & Ewell Safer Neighbourhood Team**, supported by the East Surrey Neighbourhood Enforcement Team and Special Constabulary, carried out patrols around the **Watersedge estate**. During the evening operation officers conducted **11 stop-searches and two vehicle stops**, while gathering intelligence relating to drug use, drug dealing and antisocial behaviour in the area.

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Police said the activity formed part of ongoing efforts to disrupt criminal activity in neighbourhood “hotspot” locations.

(Source: Surrey Police neighbourhood updates)

Missing Epsom man located safe and well

Surrey Police issued an appeal during February to help locate **Lee, a 63-year-old man reported missing from Epsom**.

Police later confirmed that he had been **found safe**, allowing the appeal to be cancelled.

(Source: Surrey Police)

Prolific thief targeting local businesses identified

Surrey Police also reported action against a **prolific offender who targeted businesses across Epsom and neighbouring areas**, including Sutton, Wallington, Cheam and Burgh Heath.

Police said the offender entered several premises and stole items including mobile phones during incidents affecting local traders.

(Source: Surrey Police neighbourhood update)

Safer Epsom & Ewell programme continues

The **Safer Epsom & Ewell** programme — a joint initiative between Surrey Police, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council and partner agencies — continued to develop during February.

The scheme focuses on areas including **Epsom town centre, Watersedge and Longmead**, using the Home Office **“Clear, Hold, Build”** approach to tackle organised crime, drug supply, acquisitive crime and antisocial behaviour. (democracy.epsom-ewell.gov.uk)

The programme combines targeted police enforcement with longer-term work involving the council and community partners to address underlying causes of crime.

(Source: Epsom & Ewell Borough Council / Surrey Police)

Crime trends in the borough

Police data for the area indicates that the **most commonly reported offences locally include violence and sexual offences, shoplifting, criminal damage and vehicle crime**. (surrey.police.uk)

Retail crime and antisocial vehicle use remain key policing priorities, with neighbourhood teams carrying out targeted patrols and working with businesses and community groups to address concerns.

(Source: Surrey Police neighbourhood statistics)

Community engagement and policing events

Neighbourhood officers continued their **“Meet the Beat”** programme during February, providing opportunities for residents to speak directly with police about local issues.

Sessions were held at locations including **Epsom Library at the Ebbisham Centre**, where residents were invited to raise concerns about crime, antisocial behaviour and community safety.

(Source: Surrey Police)

How to contact Surrey Police

- **Emergency (crime in progress or immediate danger): call 999**
- **Non-emergency police matters: call 101**
- **Online reporting and advice:** https://www.surrey.police.uk/contact/
- **Crimestoppers (anonymous information): 0800 555 111**

Residents are encouraged to report suspicious activity or information that may assist police investigations.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

January crime and safety round-up

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26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

Epsom and Ewell to ditch Parish Councils plan

23 March 2026



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has all but confirmed it will **not proceed with plans to create community councils** in the borough after consultation responses indicated a lack of public support.

The announcement follows an expensive Residents' Association led nine-month **Community Governance Review (CGR)** exploring whether the borough should introduce parish-style local councils – sometimes referred to as community councils – ahead of the planned reorganisation of local government in Surrey.

In a media statement issued on 4th March, the council said responses to the second phase of consultation showed residents did not support the proposals.

Consultation result halts proposal

Councillor **John Beckett** (RA Auriol) chair of the council's Standards and Constitution Committee, said the engagement process had asked residents both whether they wanted parish councils and, later, for views on a model dividing the borough into two areas.

The proposal would have created two bodies: **Epsom Community Council and Ewell Community Council**.

Beckett said: "Responses to the phase two consultation indicate that, at this time, residents do not support the proposals that were consulted upon. The recommendation that will be discussed at full Council is that the Community Governance Review is now concluded and will not be progressed further."

Councillors are expected to formally confirm the decision at a full council meeting scheduled for 12th March.

Threat of legal challenge

The decision comes after a **formal pre-action legal letter** warned the council it could face judicial review if it proceeded to create the councils.

Local resident and former senior local government chief executive **Nathan Elvery** wrote to EEBC chief executive Jackie King on 4th March raising concerns about the consultation process.

In the letter, sent under the judicial review pre-action protocol, Elvery argued the review process was procedurally flawed and warned that if the council made a reorganisation order creating the councils he would seek to have it quashed by the courts.

His challenge raised a number of potential grounds including:

• alleged flaws in the design of the first consultation survey
• reliance on a response rate of around **352 replies from roughly 57,000 electors**
• concerns that residents may not have been given full financial information about possible council tax precepts
• failure to present alternative governance models
• and consultation timing spanning the Christmas period.

He also submitted a series of **Freedom of Information requests** seeking internal documents, financial modelling and details of the consultation design.

Elvery requested the Council defer any decision until the issues were addressed and warned that proceeding regardless could lead to legal proceedings.

Experienced public sector leader

Elvery is a long-standing public sector leader with more than three decades of experience in local government transformation and finance.

He has served in senior roles including chief executive, chief operating officer and executive director across a range of councils and national public sector bodies, and now runs a consultancy advising councils and senior leaders.

Long-running debate

The CGR began in 2025 following Surrey's **Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)** plans, which will abolish the borough council and replace it with a new East Surrey unitary authority expected to take over services in 2027.

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ISSN 2753-2771

Supporters of community councils argued they could preserve a layer of local representation after the borough council disappears.

Critics, however, warned they would create a new tax-raising tier of government funded through an additional council tax precept.

Early council estimates suggested a precept of around **£43–£46 per Band D household**, though opponents argued the real cost could rise significantly depending on staffing and responsibilities.

Readers sceptical in Epsom and Ewell Times survey

An Epsom & Ewell Times reader survey on local government reorganisation gathered 112 opinions. The survey showed a big majority against the idea of new parish-style councils. The survey offered an opportunity for residents to express an opinion about alternative neighbourhood area committees. An option the Council had not provided in its consultation.

The survey results suggested readers were more concerned with maintaining effective local representation and protecting services during the transition to the new unitary authority.

Readers also expressed caution about adding an additional tier of governance funded by council tax.

And readers by a clear majority are against maintaining even a ceremonial mayoralty for the Borough.

The full survey results can be read here:

https://epsomandewelltimes.com/epsom-and-ewell-times-lgr-reader-survey-results

Elections in Epsom and Ewell to the new East Surrey Council are due to take place in May.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

Epsom and Ewell Times LGR reader survey results

Epsom and Ewell Parish councils decision looms amid questions over cost, timing and scrutiny

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Long serving Epsom Councillor blasts LGR and NACs

Parish power, democratic ideals — and the Residents’ Association dilemma

Public of Epsom and Ewell to be asked if they want two new Councils

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Surrey Space Institute could lead UK missions to the stars

23 March 2026



UK-led and UK-enabled space missions within this decade should be the hard-coded goal of the country’s space industry

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ISSN 2753-2771

at every level, says the Director of the newly launched Surrey Space Institute at the University of Surrey.

Professor Adam Amara, who is also on secondment to the UK Space Agency as Chief Scientist, is calling on the sector and government partners to "stop outsourcing ambition and have belief and pride in our capabilities to operate missions on a regular basis".

Professor Amara said:

"There is a real opportunity for 'middle powers', as Mark Carney put it, to partner together and compete with the established global superpowers. But this does not mean the UK space industry or the UK public should water down its ambition for what we could accomplish. It is in our gift to establish regular UK-led and operated missions.

"Mega-constellations, mega-primes, mega-states – these are the gravitational forces we feel in the world today. But the extraordinary capabilities held by the UK and our allies can be mobilised, as an antidote to the inertia of giants. The Surrey Space Institute will be a focal point for convening the technologies, the researchers and the companies that will prevent middle-power ambitions being limited by fragmentation. This must become a sectoral, a national and a collaborative commitment to contribute to the promise of space."

The Surrey Space Institute was set up precisely to help deliver that commitment. A key focus will be to help the UK grow the skills and capabilities in today's workforce and for future generations. The Institute will also work with its partners to conceive and operate space missions – combining hardware, software, policy and operations to tackle problems on this planet as well as in deep space. Its research will focus on three areas: managing water and climate on Earth, strengthening space systems such as satellite communications and cybersecurity, and developing the engineering, physiological, legal and economic governance solutions needed to deliver deep space exploration, operation and even settlement.

The UK space sector has a proud heritage – and Surrey has been at the heart of it, helping to drive the small satellite revolution that proved space could be accessible, not just the preserve of superpowers. The Surrey Space Institute will take that further – forging industry partnerships, opening up space sector facilities to small businesses, and equipping the next generation with mission-ready skills through hands-on research opportunities and specialist Continuing Professional Development programmes.

Surrey University

Image: Prof Amara (Surrey Uni) against imagined background of a rocket into space from UK

Related reports:

Surrey Uni on space mission to darken the skies

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Party Leader visits Epsom to launch East Surrey election campaign

23 March 2026



The Liberal Democrat leader Sir Ed Davey visited Epsom yesterday to officially launch the start of the East Surrey election campaign, promising a "fresh start" to the county after years of Conservative rule.

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ISSN 2753-2771

Visiting Epsom alongside local MP Helen Maguire, Dorking & Horley MP Chris Coghlan and Esher & Walton MP Monica Harding, Mr Davey met local party members and called for a “fresh start” for East Surrey.

The Lib Dem leader also called the local campaign a “moral responsibility to win and a historic opportunity for the party”. He told members: “Reform is a threat to our country […] The Conservative Party has run out of road here, and Nigel Farage’s Reform offers no solutions to the problems people face.”

East Surrey Council is being created as a result of a major shakeup of local government in the county, with Surrey County Council and the county’s borough and district councils being abolished. Moving from a two-tier to a unitary model, East Surrey Council will oversee all local services in the area. People can look forward to casting their ballot on May 7.

“After years of Conservative failure here in Surrey, it is time for a fresh start,” Ed Davey said. ““Liberal Democrats will deliver the real change people are crying out for with our bold plan to fix the NHS, cut energy bills and tackle the sewage crisis in our rivers.”

When asked about the possibility of raising council tax to fund services, Mr Davey made no promises: “I think you’ve got to look at the books.”. He told the local democracy reporting service (LDRS): It will be challenging initially because of the financial situation we have inherited but over time, people will notice real differences: parks and local services improve, investments continue and cuts are avoided.”

Local MPs stressed the urgency of change and importance of local engagement. Helen Maguire said: “Voters want to know that the people they elect will make a real difference in their day-to-day lives- whether that is improving schools, clearing bins, or securing social care they need. When politics delivers for them, they will be motivated to vote.”

The Lib Dem MPs drilled the three most important issues in Surrey, issues they will no doubt be campaigning on, as: finance budget, potholes and special educational needs priovision (SEND).

Monica Harding pointed out some tangible results already being delivered by Lib Dem Surrey MPs like moving the derelict boats away on the River Thames. She said: “People want a fresh start and they want change. They want to stop having to fight the system and get things more easily and things they deserve.”

Chris Coghlan criticised the Tories’ record, saying: “Surrey’s Conservative Council has appallingly managed local services and traumatised SEND families. They must go.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Liberal Democrats launch East Surrey election campaign, with leader Ed Davey. (Credit: Emily Dalton/LDRS)

Surrey’s big brains on tiny matters recognised

23 March 2026



Surrey ranked world’s leading university for nuclear isomer discovery, with three physicists in global top ten

A global database of nuclear physics discoveries spanning more than a century has ranked three University of Surrey physicists among the world’s top 10 for discovering and characterising nuclear isomers – rare, long-lived excited states of atomic nuclei that provide a unique window into the structure of matter and underpin modern medical imaging.

(From left to right: Professors Philip Walker, Zsolt Podolyák and Patrick Regan.)

Professors Zsolt Podolyák, Philip Walker and Patrick Regan – ranked second, third and tenth respectively in a global list of more than 1,000 researchers – are the highest-ranking university-based academics. Their work has helped position Surrey as the world’s leading university for nuclear isomer discovery, an exceptional distinction in a field typically dominated by large national laboratories.

Nuclear isomers occur when protons and neutrons inside an atomic nucleus rearrange into higher-energy configurations that live far longer than typical excited nuclear states, which usually last much less than a microsecond. Some isomers survive for microseconds, years, or in extreme cases, far longer than the age of the universe.

Alongside helping scientists understand how elements are formed in stellar explosions and neutron-star mergers – and how they decay to create the matter around us – isomers are most widely used in medicine. The world’s most common diagnostic imaging isotope, Technetium-99m, used in around 20 million diagnostic procedures each year, is itself an isomer, and the same techniques used to study these states allow for accurate cancer diagnosis and safe radiation dosing.

The rankings come from a new international database compiled by Professor Michael Thoennessen of Michigan State University and published in Nuclear Physics News International. The findings will be presented at the NUSTAR Annual Meeting in Germany from 23-27 February.

Zsolt Podolyák, Professor at Surrey’s School of Mathematics and Physics, said:

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ISSN 2753-2771

“Discovering and characterising nuclear isomers is technically extremely challenging. These states are rare and often hidden within enormous amounts of background data. What this recognition shows is the sustained strength of Surrey’s nuclear physics research and our ability to lead major experiments at the world’s most advanced accelerator facilities.”

The discoveries were carried out at major international accelerator laboratories, including the GSI Helmholtz Centre for Heavy Ion Research in Darmstadt, Germany, a leading hub for nuclear structure research. While the new ranking database has named GSI the world’s leading laboratory for isomer discoveries, Surrey is ranked number one in isomers discovered by external users.

Patrick Regan, NPL Professor of Nuclear Metrology at the University of Surrey, said:

“Research into nuclear isomers helps us address some of the most fundamental questions in science – including where we come from and how the atoms that make up our bodies were formed in stellar explosions. To have three researchers from one university ranked in the global top 10 is highly unusual and reflects decades of sustained leadership in a very demanding field.”

Professor Philip Walker, Emeritus Professor of Physics at the University of Surrey, who has previously been awarded the Institute of Physics’ Rutherford Medal and the European Physical Society’s Lise Meitner Prize for his contributions to nuclear structure physics, said:

“Nuclear isomers have played a central role in shaping our understanding of atomic nuclei since their discovery in 1921. They provide some of the most sensitive tests of how protons and neutrons arrange themselves inside the nucleus and have repeatedly challenged and refined our theoretical models. I am honoured to be counted among the world’s leading researchers in this field.”

The NUSTAR (Nuclear Structure, Astrophysics and Reactions) Annual Meeting forms part of the FAIR (Facility for Antiproton and Ion Research) accelerator facility at the GSI site in Darmstadt, bringing together around 800 nuclear physicists worldwide. Surrey Professor Zsolt Podolyák serves as spokesperson for the international NUSTAR collaboration, helping to guide its scientific direction and coordinate research at one of the world’s most advanced accelerator facilities.

Photo: *From left to right: Professors Philip Walker, Zsolt Podolyák and Patrick Regan*

Surrey University

Fly-tipping “running out of control” but major incidents disappear in Epsom and Ewell

23 March 2026



Fly-tipping on an industrial scale is at risk of “running out of control” across England, with organised criminal gangs blamed for dumping tens of thousands of tonnes of rubbish in the countryside and urban areas.

Latest government figures show 52,000 large-scale fly-tipping incidents — involving at least a tipper-lorry load — were recorded by councils in England in 2024-25, up sharply from 31,000 before the pandemic.

Campaigners say the crime has become highly organised, lucrative and relatively low-risk for offenders.

A spokesperson for the Chartered Institute of Waste Management said: “Waste crime is at risk of running out of control across the UK. It is evident that waste crime at all levels continues to cause misery and anxiety for local communities and causes real damage to local environments and local economies. These are crooks and cowboy operators, often organised criminal gangs, deliberately profiting from other’s misery, from polluting our environment and exploiting loopholes in the system.”

The Countryside Alliance said: “Fly-tipping is not just an environmental nuisance — it has become a serious and organised crime issue and rural communities are on the frontline… For them it is low-risk and highly profitable… contributing to a criminal market worth an estimated £1 billion a year.”

Epsom and Ewell large-scale incidents fall to zero

Figures analysed by the Epsom and Ewell Times show a striking local trend.

Epsom and Ewell recorded 30 large fly-tipping incidents in 2019-20, falling to 19 in 2020-21 and 14 in 2021-22. Since then, none have been recorded, with zero incidents reported in 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25.

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ISSN 2753-2771

This suggests large-scale dumping in the borough has been eliminated — at least in the official statistics — contrasting with rising national totals.

However, smaller fly-tipping incidents, which make up the majority of cases, are recorded separately and remain a persistent issue across the country.

Who deals with fly-tipping locally

Responsibility for tackling fly-tipping is shared between councils and national regulators.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is responsible for clearing illegally dumped waste on public land in the borough, investigating incidents and prosecuting offenders. The Council can also issue fixed penalty notices.

The Environment Agency deals with larger, organised or hazardous waste crime, including illegal waste sites operated by criminal gangs.

Private landowners are responsible for removing waste dumped on their own land, though authorities may investigate and prosecute those responsible.

Tough penalties available — but few offenders caught

Fly-tipping is a criminal offence carrying severe penalties. Courts can impose unlimited fines and prison sentences of up to five years. Vehicles used in dumping can be seized and destroyed, and offenders receive a criminal record.

Councils can also issue fixed penalty notices of up to £1,000.

However, enforcement remains limited. Nationally, only 663 fines exceeding £1,000 have been issued since 2019.

One recent major case saw a prolific offender ordered to pay more than £1.2 million following an Environment Agency investigation.

Criminal gangs and fake waste firms driving problem

Experts say organised crime is increasingly behind large-scale fly-tipping. Criminals often pose as legitimate waste clearance companies, charging households and businesses before dumping waste illegally to avoid disposal costs.

The illegal waste market is estimated to be worth around £1 billion a year.

Local improvement but national concern remains

The disappearance of major fly-tipping incidents in Epsom and Ewell will be welcome news locally. But nationally the problem remains serious, with experts warning illegal dumping continues to expand and new sites regularly appearing.

Residents are urged to use only licensed waste carriers and report fly-tipping to their local council.

Those caught face potentially severe consequences — though many offenders still escape justice.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

Fly-tipping in Epsom and Ewell part of national problem

Illegal dumps dump a dumps in Surrey

Imge: Fly-tipping in countryside. Pixabay free

EV charger grants increased as thousands of Surrey drivers without driveways could benefit

23 March 2026

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26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771



Renters, flat-owners and businesses in Surrey will be able to claim up to £500 towards installing electric vehicle (EV) chargers from April, after the Government increased grants by more than 40% in a bid to accelerate the switch away from petrol and diesel cars.

The Department for Transport says the higher payments could cover almost half the cost of installing a home or workplace charge point, potentially allowing motorists to power their car for as little as 2p per mile using domestic electricity tariffs.

The scheme is particularly relevant to areas such as Epsom and Ewell, where many residents live in flats or terraced housing without private driveways, and where on-street parking remains common.

Up to £500 per charger from April

From 1 April 2026, households in rented accommodation, flat owners, landlords, and businesses will be able to receive grants of up to £500 per charge point, increased from the previous £350 limit. Schools will be eligible for up to £2,000 per socket.

The Government says the grants will run until March 2027 and are intended to remove one of the main barriers to EV ownership — access to convenient and affordable charging at home.

A parallel £25 million scheme is also helping councils install pavement cable channels so residents without driveways can safely connect home chargers across the pavement.

Running cost savings of £1,400 a year claimed

The Department for Transport claims drivers can save up to £1,400 a year in running costs compared with petrol cars if they charge at home on cheaper tariffs. Ministers say more than 55,000 motorists have already received discounts of up to £3,750 off the purchase price of new electric cars through a separate grant scheme.

Nationally, the UK public charging network has expanded rapidly to around 88,500 public charge points, with £600 million allocated to help councils install tens of thousands more.

Transport minister Keir Mather said: “We’re taking action to make EV ownership the affordable choice for everyone — not just those with driveways. Bigger grants mean families, flat owners, renters and small businesses can now install a charger for almost half the usual cost.”

Surrey already seeing rapid EV growth

Surrey has one of the highest rates of electric vehicle ownership in the country, reflecting its relatively high average incomes and commuter population. Department for Transport data shows EV registrations nationally now account for around one in five new car sales, compared with fewer than one in 100 just a decade ago.

However, lack of home charging remains a key obstacle. National surveys show more than half of small businesses say improved charging access would encourage them to switch to electric vehicles.

Local authorities, including Surrey County Council and borough councils such as Epsom and Ewell, are expected to receive further funding over the next three years to expand public charging infrastructure.

Landlords and businesses encouraged to act

The National Residential Landlords Association said almost nine in ten landlords would install charge points if tenants requested them, while the Federation of Small Businesses said improving infrastructure was key to helping firms cut fuel costs and emissions.

The Government has also simplified its charging support schemes, reducing eight different grants to five to make them easier to access.

Ministers say the measures are part of wider plans to prepare for the phase-out of new petrol and diesel car sales, currently scheduled for 2035.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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ISSN 2753-2771

Surrey’s support for using electric vehicles

Let’s go Electric Epsom and Ewell

Council driving forward with electric chargers

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