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

5th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

Mole Valley spending plans

27 July 2025



How £11m for rail, transport, school, health and recreation upgrades will be spent in Mole Valley has been laid out. The district council has approved spending plans for community infrastructure money collected from developers since 2016 – with almost half expected to go on cycling and walking schemes. Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is paid as part of the planning process to help offset the impact of the growing number of homes in the borough. Councillor Bradley Nelson, cabinet member for planning, said: “The local plan was adopted in 2024 so the time has come to focus on the £11m of strategic CIL which could rise to £34m given the local plan growth.” He said the projects should be ones “the council thinks are necessary and achievable to help support development growth.”

“The programme commits investment for vital infrastructure such as health provision in Ashtead, Bookham, and a health hub in Leatherhead. Early years provision in Ashtead and Dorking would be targeted for funding as well as train station improvements in Dorking which we hope will lead to wider improvements and help the district as a whole, as well as investment in the district parks.” The council has been working with Surrey County Council over transport, education, early years provision and flood defence, Surrey Heartlands Integrated Care Partnership, Great Western Railway, Network Rail, the Football Foundation, and its own parks and open spaces team to get an up-to-date picture of the suitable projects.

It has earmarked two transport projects to upgrade rail infrastructure on the North Downs Line at the stations in Dorking. These projects, the Tuesday July 22 cabinet papers read, will complement planned improvements on the line, such as battery-electric trains, and increase the number of people using this sustainable transport mode. Deepdene Station will be upgraded as a priority and a lift installed, acting as a major contribution towards “realising the potential of the district’s east-west travel connections, supporting growth and promoting sustainable development”. School capacity issues requiring funding in Hookwood could also be addressed, as well as the expansion of the SEND school on Woodland in Leatherhead.

Surrey County Council’s early years team has identified two potential projects, one in Ashtead and one in Dorking, while football pitches at Ashcombe Secondary School in Dorking and the other at the Brockham Big Field could be upgraded to modern standards. There would also be financial support for the resurfacing of the sand-dressed pitch at Therfield Secondary School in Leatherhead to allow the installation of a new 3G football pitch “without losing a vital resource for hockey.”

Cllr Keira Vyvyan-Robinson (Liberal Democrats: Leatherhead North) said: “We all know just how much residents are concerned about the amount of development that comes and their biggest concern is where does the infrastructure come. It often seems that it’s a bit of a chicken and egg because the CIL comes from development, and without development you don’t get CIL – and therefore you don’t get infrastructure. For a long time we’ve been in the position where we’ve been telling residents we have to build these homes and we have to build these sites – and there hasn’t been anything to show – so it is really welcome to say ‘this is how we meet the infrastructure demands’. She added: “We can provide the funding, but we are dependent on the railway companies, the GP surgeries, the schools, to make those bids and to ask for the funding. But the development will pay for it and hopefully they will all come together at the same time.”

Estimated CIL Contributions by Infrastructure Category

- **Transport – Active Travel** – £11,555,000
- **Transport – Passenger Transport** – £3,450,000
- **Well Being – Health – Primary Care** – £2,350,000
- **Well Being – Open Space and Public Realm** – £3,859,000
- **Well Being – Sports Facilities** – £771,000
- **Education – SEND** – £870,000
- **Education – Early Years** – £300,000
- **Flood Defence – Nature Flood Management** – £95,000

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ISSN 2753-2771

Epsom Common 19th Green Flag Award

27 July 2025



Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve's enduring excellence recognised with 19th consecutive Green Flag Award

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is celebrating receiving the prestigious Green Flag Award for Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve, the international quality mark for parks and green spaces, for a 19th consecutive year.

Councillor **Liz Frost**, (RA Woodcote and Langley Vale) Chair of the Environment Committee said: "We are incredibly proud that Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve has received its 19th consecutive Green Flag Award! This is an outstanding achievement and a true testament to the dedication and hard work of our Countryside team, volunteers, and partners as they create and maintain habitats that help biodiversity to flourish.

"Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and as such it is important that we continue to protect and nurture its distinct habitats and wildlife for future generations to enjoy. A huge thanks to our Countryside team, volunteers and partners for helping us make a difference to our green spaces, including the Epsom Common Association, the Lower Mole Partnership and Natural England."

Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve dates back to Saxon times and is a nationally and internationally important wildlife site. It is designated a 'Site of Specific Scientific Interest' due to its rare insects and its importance of breeding bird habitat. This local nature reserve contains oak woods, open pasture woodland and wetland habitats, including large ponds, and hosts species including cotton spotted orchids and purple emperor butterflies.

To find out more about the walks and tours taking place, managed by the Countryside team at the council, take a look here: What's on | Epsom and Ewell Borough Council.

Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve is one of 2,250 parks and green spaces in the UK to achieve the award.

Green Flag Award Scheme Manager, Paul Todd MBE, said: "Congratulations to everyone involved in Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve who have worked tirelessly to ensure that it achieves the high standards required for the Green Flag Award.

"Quality parks and green spaces like Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve make the country a heathier place to live and work in, and a stronger place in which to invest. Crucially, Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve is a vital green space for communities in the borough of Epsom and Ewell to enjoy nature, and during the ongoing cost of living crisis it is a free and safe space for families to socialise. It also provides important opportunities for local people and visitors to reap the physical and mental health benefits of green space."

The Green Flag Award scheme, managed by environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy under licence from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, recognises and rewards well-managed parks and green spaces, setting the benchmark standard for the management of green spaces across the United Kingdom and around the world.

More information about Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve – Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve | Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

The Green Flag Award Scheme (http://greenflagaward.org/) is run by the environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy, under licence from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, in partnership with Keep Scotland Beautiful, Keep Wales Tidy and Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful.

Any green space that is freely accessible to the public is eligible to enter for a Green Flag Award. Awards are given on an annual basis, and winners must apply each year to renew their Green Flag Award status. A Green Flag Community Award recognises quality sites managed by voluntary and community groups. Green Heritage Site Accreditation is judged on the treatment of the site's historic features and the standard of conservation.

Hosepipe ban not reached Epsom and Ewell yet

27 July 2025

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Frustration is growing towards Thames Water after it announced a hosepipe ban in parts of the South East just months after residents lived through a winter of “huge” leaks and sewage overflows. Thames Water has announced a hosepipe ban will kick in on Tuesday, July 22, covering all OX, GL, SN postcodes as well as RG4, RG8, and RG9, after the UK experienced one of its warmest and driest springs in over a century – followed by England’s warmest June on record. Currently the ban only impacts towns bordering Surrey, but Thames Water has said it may need to add postcodes “if anything changes”.

This year alone, residents in Surrey have endured water supply issues due to multiple pipe bursts, a report concluding water was “unfit for human consumption”, and people putting up barricades to stop raw sewage flooding homes. For some, a hosepipe ban would be the last straw. Sir Jeremy Hunt, MP for Godalming and Ash, said: “Godalming and Ash is not included in the hosepipe ban so far, but I completely understand residents’ frustration when they witness huge water leaks losing thousands of litres locally – Chilworth, Cranleigh, Ewhurst and Bramley in the last week alone – and yet Thames Water are asking us to use water sparingly brushing our teeth. I met with Thames Water CEO Chris Weston recently to press for investment locally because, although work is underway to improve water resilience, what is really needed is to connect our ‘water island’ area with the wider Thames water network – and to urgently replace those leaky pipes.”

Thames Water says its drought plan is designed to ensure the taps keep running for customers’ essential use while also protecting the environment. Water taken from the River Thames for the currently affected area is stored at Farmoor reservoir in Oxfordshire. If the warm, dry weather continues, the company anticipates reservoir levels will continue to drop. River levels are also below average, limiting how much can be drawn from the Thames while the hot weather also causes more evaporation.

Esher and Walton MP Monica Harding said: “The threat of a hosepipe ban shows how important investment in the basics is. Thames Water’s current crumbling infrastructure can’t protect us now, let alone in the future from climate change and population growth. Thames Water has failed miserably in providing the investment needed up to this point and have lost the public’s confidence. The Government should grip the ongoing crisis at Thames Water, place it in special administration, make it a public benefit company, and replace Ofwat with a tough new regulator with teeth, to protect bill payers and give us the clean water we all need.”

Thames Water is also looking to secure future water supplies and said it was working on plans for a new reservoir in Oxfordshire, securing water supply for 15 million people across the South East, including Thames Water, Affinity Water and Southern Water customers. The company is also working on what it calls a vital drought resilience project in London which will be supported by water recycling.

A Thames Water spokesperson said: “Leakage is at its lowest ever level on our network, down 13.2% since 2020, but we know we have more work to do. The extended warm weather also brings increased risks of leaks and bursts due to pipe stress and shifting foundations in the ground. We’ve increased leakage teams in our region and we’re fixing 650 leaks a week with our engineers targeting leaks with the greatest impact to local water supplies. We’re also replacing 500km of water mains over the next five years to reduce leakage. We’re using innovative technology and data to find and fix leaks faster. So far, we have installed almost 40,000 acoustic loggers on our water network to help detect leaks and expect to have 100,000 in place by mid-2027. We’ve installed over 1 million smart meters, which are critical in helping us to locate leaks at our customers’ homes. We’ll continue to roll out smart water meters to households in our area, installing or upgrading a further c.1,200,000 smart meters to homes and businesses by 2030.”

A New Place for Reflection and Remembrance Opens in Epsom’s Long Grove Park

27 July 2025



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ISSN 2753-2771

A new natural sanctuary has been unveiled in Long Grove Park, offering a space for remembrance and quiet reflection. The 'In Memory Woodland', created by Age Concern Epsom & Ewell, was formally opened on Sunday 22nd June 2025 at a community event attended by local residents, families, and supporters.

Bathed in sunshine, the event marked the culmination of months of planning and planting, with contributions from the Epsom & Ewell Tree Advisory Board, who designed the woodland and oversaw the planting of elm and silver birch trees, alongside daffodils, bluebells, and other native flora. The tranquil glade is also home to a variety of wildlife, creating a peaceful retreat in the heart of the borough.

A ceremonial cherry tree planting and music from the Surrey Brass Quintet added to the occasion, while guests were offered complimentary tea and cake and invited to take part in remembrance activities. The speeches were led by Dorah May, Chief Officer of Age Concern Epsom & Ewell, and Howard Gregory from the Tree Advisory Board.

The woodland was made possible thanks to funding support from Surrey County Council's *Your Fund Surrey*, with land provided by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council. The site has been carefully developed to offer a permanent place for people to honour the memories of loved ones or to simply pause and enjoy the restorative qualities of nature.

Age Concern Epsom & Ewell, a long-standing local charity supporting older people, sees the 'In Memory Woodland' as a lasting and meaningful addition to the community. The charity hopes residents will return time and again to sit, reflect, and enjoy the peaceful setting.

For more information, visit: https://ageconcernepsom.org.uk/in-memory-woodland

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New planning laws threaten Surrey countryside?

27 July 2025



Fears of "irreversible damage" to Surrey's countryside have prompted calls to change a new planning bill currently going through parliament. Surrey County Council members have unanimously agreed to call for the central government to change a "deeply damaging" planning bill. Councillors voted in favour of an amended Green Party motion, highlighting serious concerns about the environmental implications of the potential legislation at a full council meeting on Tuesday (July 8).

The Planning and Infrastructure Bill currently going through Parliament aims to streamline the planning system to speed up the delivery of new homes and big infrastructure projects. But part of the bill includes the removal of some environmental red tape which the government argues is gridlocking the process. Councillor Jonathan Essex (Green Party/Redhill East) put forward the motion, stating: "If passed, this parliamentary bill will cause tragic, irretrievable and avoidable damage to Surrey's countryside. We must not let this Bill dismantle decades of progress in nature protection, including removing key principles of environmental governance from the planning system."

Surrey cabinet member for the Environment, Cllr Marisa Heath (Conservative/Englefield Green) supported the motion. She said the council is in favour of building new homes but "not to the detriment of the existing environment and residents". Cllr Heath praised Surrey MPs who had already taken a stand and voted against the bill in parliament but hinted there was still more work to do.

Key concerns raised by councillors focused on part three of the bill which outlines a mechanism that would allow developers to bypass current environmental rules by putting money into a nature restoration fund. But the fund could be used at a later date to create environmental improvement elsewhere in Surrey or beyond, according to Cllr Heath. She stressed that once the fee is paid, concreting over green spaces can go ahead with the developer measuring the potential harm to the site during the planning process, how irreversible or long-lasting it may be.

Cllr Essex's motion demanded the government "sufficiently amend" the relevant part of the bill. He said: "If Surrey's beautiful countryside is to be protected Section 3 of this Bill must be scrapped." The government has said the bill does not weaken environmental protections and will actually improve environmental outcomes and nature recovery.

Councillors from across the political divide came out against the possibility of developers side-stepping key ecological safeguards to drive through house building. They claimed it would neither bring in the finances needed nor deliver the environmental healing nature needed. Cllr Essex claimed the bill "waters down habitat protections" to sites of specific scientific interest (SSSIs) and other protected areas in Surrey like Colony Bog and Bagshot Heath, Brookwood Heath and Chobham Common. He added the new rules will chip away protection granted to individual species such as bats, newts, wild birds and water voles.

Rather than green interests slowing down growth, Cllr Essex argued planning delays are driven by under-resourced planning authorities, infrastructure bottlenecks, and industry-led viability constraints. He said: "I am not sure how Rachel Reeves was able to keep a straight face when blaming newts for the failure to build homes when a third of homes given

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ISSN 2753-2771

planning permission in the last decade, that is 1.4 million, were not built."

Surrey Wildlife Trust has slammed the bill in its current form as 'a licence to kill nature' as well as the Office for Environmental Protection claiming it waters down the existing laws designed to protect the environment. A statement from the government read: "Crucially, the Bill will also ensure that vital protections for the environment remain in place and through a more strategic approach we can deliver more for nature and not less. Current rules in the National Planning Policy Framework are clear that development resulting in the loss or deterioration or irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees, should be refused. This will not change through the Planning and Infrastructure Bill."

Surrey Hills National Landscape, Frensham Ponds (Image Natural England/ LYDIA2)

Fly-tipping in Epsom and Ewell part of national problem

27 July 2025



Organised criminal gangs are increasingly using fake waste removal companies to dump lorry-loads of rubbish across the UK — and Surrey is not immune.

According to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), over 47,000 large-scale fly-tipping incidents (involving tipper lorries or more than a van load of waste) were recorded by councils in England in 2022/23, costing local authorities more than £13 million to clear. Behind many of these cases are sophisticated criminal operations posing as legitimate businesses, advertising cheap waste clearance on platforms such as Facebook Marketplace and Gumtree.

"These aren't just one-off chancers," said John Roberts, Chief Security Officer at Kingdom Local Authority Support. "We're talking about well-organised groups using the same tactics repeatedly — setting up fake firms, offering cheap deals online, and then vanishing before anyone can hold them accountable."

How the Scams Work

According to Roberts, gangs offer low-cost rubbish removal services, load the waste into tipper trucks, and illegally dump it on green spaces, bridleways, industrial estates or roadside laybys — often under cover of darkness.

"They can disappear in a matter of hours. There's virtually no trace, no formal business records, and no accountability," he warned.

What many people don't realise is that residents who unknowingly use these services can still be fined — up to £1,000 in fixed penalties, or face unlimited fines if prosecuted — if they fail to obtain a Waste Transfer Note, which proves the waste was handed to a licensed carrier.

Fly-Tipping in Epsom & Ewell: A Local Problem

While the national picture is alarming, Epsom & Ewell Borough has seen its own troubling rise in fly-tipping.

In February 2024, a man was prosecuted for multiple fly-tipping offences across the borough, including in the World's End area. The Borough Council reported he was fined more than £2,300 after their investigations, using CCTV and physical evidence, successfully traced the waste back to him.

In 2023, the Council launched a targeted campaign to tackle what it described as "persistent" fly-tipping hotspots, including:

- Old London Road
- Hook Road
- Christ Church Road

Measures included surveillance cameras, warning signage, and public appeals.

A prior incident in 2021, covered by the Surrey Comet, showed men caught on camera dumping waste from a van near Horton Country Park — prompting public outrage and renewed calls for enforcement.

How to Avoid Illegal Waste Carriers

To avoid being scammed — and fined — residents are urged to take the following precautions:

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ISSN 2753-2771

- Check if the waste carrier is licensed with the Environment Agency: www.gov.uk/check-waste-carrier-registration
- Ask for a Waste Transfer Note. This document proves you handed over the waste legally.
- Avoid cash-in-hand deals and suspiciously low prices. Legitimate services charge based on volume and type of waste and hold valid permits.

How to Report Fly-Tipping in Epsom

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council encourages residents to report fly-tipping using the following methods:

Online: www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/fly-tipping
Phone: 01372 732000

Include details such as the time and date, exact location, vehicle registration (if known), and photos if safe to capture.

A Shared Responsibility

“People often don’t realise that even if they’ve paid someone to take the waste, they’re still legally responsible for what happens to it,” John Roberts said. “You’ve got to get that paperwork.”

The message is clear: fly-tipping isn’t just a public nuisance — it’s a criminal offence, and everyone has a role in tackling it.

If you’re clearing garden waste, disposing of old furniture, or hiring a skip, make sure you’ve checked who’s collecting it.

Image from Pixabay licence free

Volunteers Tackle Plastic Waste in Epsom Town Centre

27 July 2025



Plastic waste is a global menace that often ends up closer to home than we think. According to recent studies, the average person could be consuming up to five grams of microplastic every week — equivalent to the weight of a credit card — through food and drink. With plastic present in around 70% of consumer products, and evidence of its harmful impact on marine life and ecosystems, managing our plastic footprint is becoming increasingly urgent.

On Sunday 29 June, local volunteers from ASEZ WAO UK, a community group with a focus on sustainability, staged a “Rethink Plastic” event around Epsom’s Clock Tower. Around 40 volunteers, joined by members of the public, took part in a litter pick, public awareness presentations, and an upcycling workshop to highlight practical solutions to plastic waste.

Their efforts drew the support of the Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, Councillor **Robert Leach** (RA Nonsuch), who questioned the scale of modern packaging waste and praised the volunteers for helping to keep the town clean. Councillor S**teven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley Vale) also lent his backing, commenting, “Wouldn’t it be great if people just used the bins?”

In total, volunteers collected around 35 bags of rubbish from the town centre. Under a pop-up gazebo, families were invited to transform discarded plastic bottles into creative items such as phone stands, piggy banks, toy cars and flowers — demonstrating how waste materials can be given a second life. A young mother taking part with her daughter described the workshop as “really good, really fun — a great idea.”

Upcycling — the process of turning unwanted materials into something of higher value — is gaining traction as one response to the growing problem of plastic pollution. However, recycling still faces challenges. For example, items such as greasy pizza boxes and disposable coffee cups often cannot be recycled through normal household collections, highlighting the importance of checking local guidelines to avoid contaminating recyclable waste streams.

Littering and plastic waste remain significant problems in the UK. The charity Keep Britain Tidy estimates that local councils spend nearly £700 million each year cleaning up litter, much of which includes plastic packaging. With plastic pollution known to damage habitats and harm wildlife, local action is seen as a vital part of tackling a wider environmental crisis.

ASEZ WAO UK says it plans to continue its local campaigns and is encouraging residents to get involved in future events. More information about their activities is available online or from volunteers active in the community.

For those inspired to act, it’s a timely reminder: our throwaway habits may have far-reaching consequences — and tackling them starts on our own doorstep.

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ISSN 2753-2771

Image: Cllrs McCormick and Leach speak out against plastic waste

Are paper bottles the solution asks Surrey Uni

27 July 2025



There are few excuses left for polluting our environment with plastics – and the UK can lead the charge towards a more circular future, say researchers from the University of Surrey. The comments come as the Surrey team get ready to showcase three projects tackling plastic pollution at this week's Royal Society Summer Science Exhibition in London (1-6 July).

Surrey's interactive display will present various themes – from replacing petroleum-based packaging, to capturing microplastics before they enter our rivers and seas, to recycling mixed plastic waste that would otherwise end up in landfill.

One such project is SustaPack – a collaboration aiming to reduce the 1.9 billion plastic bottles produced globally every day by developing next generation paper-based alternatives. Backed by a £1 million EPSRC grant, the project is a partnership between Surrey and sustainable packaging company Pulpex Ltd. It combines AI, thermal imaging and advanced computer modelling to improve production processes, create a new biodegradable lining, reduce energy use, and extend product shelf life – bringing low-carbon, fully recyclable packaging closer to large-scale commercialisation.

Professor Joseph Keddie, Professor of Soft Matter Physics and Royal Society Industry Fellow, said:

"The high carbon footprint of plastic and glass packaging materials demands urgent change. This collaboration is about more than simply replacing plastic – it's about designing sustainable packaging that is truly recyclable, scalable, and with a low carbon footprint. It's a powerful example of how science and industry can join forces to address the urgent challenge of the environmental impacts of plastic."

Another project on display is addressing the recovery of plastic particles from our water systems. Some products such as sunscreens, cosmetics and disposable wipes can release microplastics, with the UK government considering restrictions or bans on certain items to reduce this form of pollution. On average, 50% of microplastics found in the world's wastewater treatment plants are fibres, mainly coming from laundry. If not captured, these tiny plastics can adsorb and carry pollutants circulating in the wastewater plant that are then ingested by marine life and ultimately enter the human food chain.

Surrey engineers are developing advanced membrane filtration technology designed to recover microplastics before treated wastewater is released into rivers and seas. By optimising membrane coatings and filtration conditions, the team is working to reduce clogging and improve long-term efficiency, paving the way for cleaner water and healthier ecosystems.

Professor Judy Lee, Professor in Chemical and Process Engineering, said:

"Microplastics are a serious and growing threat to water quality and human health. These tiny particles are difficult to remove once they're in the environment and can carry harmful pollutants. Our research focuses on practical solutions that can be deployed in wastewater treatment plants to stop these pollutants at the source."

To address the challenge of recycling plastics mixed with other materials, such as carbon fibre composites, engineers at Surrey are working to make the process more viable and commercially attractive. These composites are essential across various industries, including aerospace, transport and construction due to their lightweight, strong and versatile properties, but they are notoriously difficult to recycle.

Surrey's research focuses on developing new manufacturing routes and enhancing the thermal, electrical and mechanical properties of recycled carbon fibre, making second-life applications practical and commercially appealing. Reducing waste and using reclaimed materials also help to lower the demand for raw resources.

Dr Iman Mohagheghian, Associate Professor (Reader) in Mechanics of Materials at the University of Surrey, and EPSRC researcher in residence fellow of the National Composites Centre, said:

"Our goal is to make recycled composites a reliable, high-value option for industry. Enhancing their performance and reducing manufacturing waste is an important step towards building a truly circular economy for advanced plastics, supporting the wider journey towards net zero."

At the Royal Society Summer Science Exhibition, visitors can discover Plastic Alchemy – an outreach theme led by the University of Surrey's Circular Economy Group and Fellows from the Institute for Sustainability.

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Epsom & Ewell Biodiversity Action Plan’s five-year review ratified

27 July 2025



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council’s Environment Committee has formally endorsed the progress made on its Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) 2020–2030, following a scheduled five-year review presented at its meeting on 24 June. The review reflects both local achievements and national legislative changes introduced through the Environment Act 2021.

The Council’s Biodiversity Action Plan, which is linked to its Climate Change Action Plan, aims to protect and enhance local habitats and wildlife, supporting wider efforts to address climate change across the borough.

Key Achievements 2020–2025

The five-year progress report highlights a range of local initiatives, including:

- Integrating protected species considerations into the householder planning application process
- Improved grassland management across local nature reserves, Nonsuch Park, and Epsom Downs
- Establishment of an Ash Dieback Working Group to coordinate the management of diseased trees
- Enhanced mapping and management of veteran trees throughout the borough
- Creation of new ponds in Horton Country Park and Epsom Common Local Nature Reserves
- Development of new wetland habitat at Chamber Mead within Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve, delivered in partnership with the South East Rivers Trust

The review also noted Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve’s continued success, having secured its 18th consecutive Green Flag Award in 2024. Additionally, recent wetland restoration projects are enabling the reintroduction of water voles to Surrey for the first time in over two decades along the Hogsmill River.

Legislative Context

The Environment Act 2021 has introduced new statutory duties for local authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Among these measures:

- Most planning permissions must now deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain, with habitats protected for a minimum of 30 years
- Local authorities are required to produce biodiversity reports
- Mandatory Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) must be developed to support nature recovery

According to Natural England, the Environment Act marks a significant shift in legally protecting and enhancing biodiversity, setting targets in areas such as air quality, water, waste, and species recovery by 2030.

Background

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council’s Biodiversity Action Plan is a long-term strategy to safeguard and strengthen the borough’s ecosystems. It works alongside the Council’s Climate Change Action Plan, first launched in 2020 and refreshed for 2025–2029, which aims to reach carbon neutrality by 2035.

Councillor Liz Frost, (RA Woodcote and Langley Vale) Chair of the Environment Committee said**:** “We are committed to creating and maintaining habitats that support resilient ecosystems in our local nature reserves and green spaces across the borough. Our Biodiversity Action Plan plays a vital role in tackling climate change.

This five-year review has highlighted the vast amount of work, and wide-ranging activities, that we deliver. A prime example is Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, that was awarded its 18th consecutive Green Flag Award in 2024. Also, fantastic partnership work to create wetlands is enabling the

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ISSN 2753-2771

reintroduction of water voles to Surrey for the first time in over 20 years along the Hogsmill River.

Thanks to our countryside team for their passion, hard work and expertise in shaping biodiverse habitats across the borough. Also, a huge thank you to our partners and volunteers, without their support we wouldn't be able to enjoy such wonderful green spaces."

For further details, residents can view the Environment Committee's report on the Council's website or visit the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) for information about biodiversity net gain measures.

Image: Comma Butterfly

Green Thinking Takes the Spotlight at Epsom Picturehouse

27 July 2025



Cinema-goers in Epsom are being invited to watch, reflect, and act, as a national eco-film initiative gains local traction.

A new strand of community-focused cinema, "Green Screen," has arrived at Epsom Picturehouse, offering audiences more than just a night at the movies. Instead, it aims to foster conversation and local action around the pressing issue of climate change.

Following its Epsom debut on Earth Day earlier this year — hosted by The Woodland Trust and focusing on the conservation of Langley Vale Wood — the next Green Screen event is set for **Wednesday 9th July 2025 at 8pm**, this time in partnership with **Extinction Rebellion Epsom & Ewell**.

The evening features three short films tackling different aspects of the climate crisis. First up is *#ClimateScam?* (40 mins), a documentary from Cornwall Climate Care which addresses climate change denial and misinformation. It's followed by *Climate Anxiety* (17 mins), a film from Cambridge Movie Makers exploring the psychological toll of environmental collapse. Finally, *Plan Z: From Lab Coats to Handcuffs* (23 mins), produced by A2Y Productions, tells the story of scientists who risk their careers and freedom by engaging in direct environmental activism.

But it's not all on-screen. After the screenings, the audience will be invited to stay for a 40-minute panel discussion and Q&A featuring local voices — a doctor, a scientist, an engineer, and a community organiser — all bringing their perspectives to the urgent environmental questions raised by the films.

Joe Stroud of Epsom Picturehouse said:

"We're proud to see Green Screen take root in Epsom. It's a strand that thrives when communities take ownership — the films are the catalyst, but it's the community that brings together their perspectives, expertise, and passion."

The Green Screen series is a nationwide initiative by Picturehouse Cinemas, transforming theatres into spaces of environmental learning and grassroots conversation. Events across the UK have seen audiences inspired to take local action, supported by partnerships with schools, charities, businesses, and environmental organisations.

True to its ethos, the Epsom screening will extend the invitation to connect beyond the credits. Attendees are encouraged to continue conversations in the Picturehouse's meeting space over a free tea or filter coffee — if they bring a reusable cup.

Extinction Rebellion Epsom & Ewell, the local host for the July event, is part of the global climate action movement and is active in local campaigning and awareness-raising through non-violent action and community engagement.

Epsom Picturehouse itself is a relatively new addition to the town, having opened in June 2024. Located in Epsom Square, the six-screen venue blends modern programming with vintage touches and a strong focus on community. Its café-bar offers a menu of pizzas, toasties, cakes and drinks, helping turn cinema visits into a more social, immersive experience.

Anyone interested in organising a future Green Screen event in Epsom is encouraged to contact the venue at **epsom.marketing@picturehouses.co.uk**.

For more information about the 9th July event, readers can contact Warren Bunce of Extinction Rebellion Epsom & Ewell on **07539 069659** or by email at **epsomewell@extinctionrebellion.uk**.

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

5th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

Smarter tickets would boost bus travel

27 July 2025



Public transport in Southern England is struggling, not just because of cost or convenience, but because it has failed to keep up with the digital age, according to a new study from the University of Surrey.

In a study published in Public Transport, researchers simulated improvements in areas like payment convenience and real-time service updates. The study found that these tech-driven changes could boost bus ridership by over 30%.

Researchers have found that simple innovations, such as easy payment systems, e-ticketing, and mobile applications, can transform public transport, boost ridership, and improve passenger satisfaction.

The study employed a novel analytical approach, Machine Learning Influence Flow Analysis (MIFA), to understand the attitudes and behaviours of bus passengers in Southern England. The team also analysed detailed survey data, which helped them identify the key factors that influence whether people choose the bus over their private cars. These factors where: addressing issues around payment convenience and real-time information can make buses far more appealing.

Dr Wolfgang Garn, one of the authors of the study and Associate Professor in Analytics at the University of Surrey, said:

“We discovered that passengers want a seamless, hassle-free experience. If paying for a bus journey feels complicated or outdated, people are more likely to opt for driving instead. By introducing smart ticketing and contactless payments, alongside mobile apps that provide real-time updates, we can not only make bus travel easier but also more attractive. This isn’t just about technology, it’s about fundamentally changing how people view public transport.”

The study used advanced machine learning methods, including neural networks and random forests, to create predictive models from survey responses. These models enabled the researchers to identify the factors that most strongly influence bus usage decisions. By simulating improvements in passenger sentiment, such as increased satisfaction with payment methods, the MIFA framework can predict how these changes may alter people’s willingness to use buses. The results suggest that these technological enhancements could increase bus ridership by over 30%.

The findings also highlight several critical issues that undermine bus usage, including inconvenient payment processes, a lack of clear information about bus routes and fares, and concerns about reliability and security. The research recommends practical solutions such as integrated smartcard payment systems, real-time travel apps, and expanded bus lanes to reduce journey times. Together, these measures can create a public transport system that competes with the convenience of private cars.

Dr Garn continued:

“Integrated ticketing is an option that needs to be further explored. It allows passengers to travel across different public transport modes using a single ticket or system, typically a smart card, for their entire journey. This means a traveller can switch between buses, trains, trams, and other modes of transport without needing to purchase multiple tickets or navigate different payment systems – an issue that arises when governmental policies do not sufficiently guide multiple private bus transport companies. A related study I worked on demonstrated that increased frequency, low fares, and an improved bus network significantly boost bus ridership.

The future of bus travel in Southern England depends on embracing digital convenience and improving the passenger experience. With smart payments and better information at the heart of this transformation, buses can become the preferred mode of travel for many, not the last resort.”

Image credit: Geoff Charles, National Library of Wales. Public domain

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Surrey battery leads

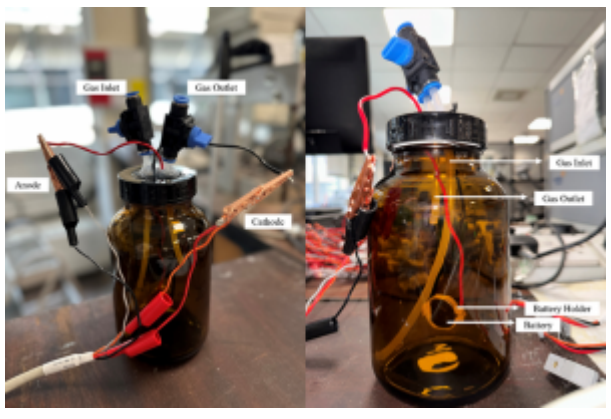
27 July 2025

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5th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771



Scientists at the University of Surrey have made a breakthrough in eco-friendly batteries that not only store more energy but could also help tackle greenhouse gas emissions. Lithium–CO_2 'breathing' batteries release power while capturing carbon dioxide, offering a greener alternative that may one day outperform today's lithium-ion batteries.

Until now, Lithium-CO_2 batteries have faced setbacks in efficiency – wearing out quickly, failing to recharge and relying on expensive rare materials such as platinum. However, researchers from Surrey have found a way to overcome these issues by using a low-cost catalyst called caesium phosphomolybdate (CPM). Using computer modelling and lab experiments, tests showed this simple change allowed the battery to store significantly more energy, charge with far less power and run for over 100 cycles.

The study, published in Advanced Science, marks a promising step toward real-world applications. If commercialised, these batteries could help cut emissions from vehicles and industrial sources – and scientists even imagine they could operate on Mars, where the atmosphere is 95% CO_2.

Dr Siddharth Gadkari, Lecturer in Chemical Process Engineering at the University of Surrey, and corresponding author of the study, said:

"There's a growing need for energy storage solutions that support our push toward renewable power while also tackling the growing threat of climate change. Our work on lithium–CO_2 batteries is a potential game-changer in making that vision a reality.

"One of the biggest challenges with these batteries is something called 'overpotential' – the extra energy needed to get the reaction going. You can think of it like cycling uphill before you can coast. What we've shown is that CPM flattens that hill, meaning the battery loses far less energy during each charge and discharge."

To understand why the CPM worked so well, teams from Surrey's School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering and the Advanced Technology Institute used two approaches. First, they dismantled the battery after charging and discharging to study the chemical changes inside. These post-mortem tests found that lithium carbonate, the compound formed when the battery absorbs CO_2, could be reliably built up and removed – an essential feature for long-term use.

They then turned to computer modelling using density functional theory (DFT), which allows researchers to explore how the reactions unfold on the material surface. Results showed how the CPM's stable, porous structure offered the ideal surface for key chemical reactions.

Dr Daniel Commandeur, Future Fellow at the University of Surrey and corresponding author of the study, said:

"What's exciting about this discovery is that it combines strong performance with simplicity. We've shown that it's possible to build efficient lithium–CO_2 batteries using affordable, scalable materials – no rare metals required. Our findings also open the door to designing even better catalysts in the future."

The discovery opens new doors for developing even better low-cost, easy-to-make battery materials. With further research into how these catalysts interact with electrodes and electrolytes, lithium–CO_2 batteries could become a practical, scalable way to store clean energy, while helping reduce carbon in the atmosphere.

Surrey tree planting initiative surpasses halfway mark with 768,832 trees

27 July 2025



Surrey County Council has planted over 49,000 trees and hedgerows over the past year, bringing the Surrey wide total to 768,832 since 2019. This marks a significant milestone for the council, with over half of our planned 1.2 million trees by 2030 – one for every Surrey resident – now planted in the ground.

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ISSN 2753-2771

Trees provide numerous benefits including producing oxygen, absorbing carbon dioxide, regulating the water cycle, and offering habitats for wildlife. A range of community projects have also been undertaken to support our target, including:

- **Mullard Space Science Laboratory, Dorking:** Our team conducted a tree planting workshop for staff, resulting in the planting of 20 fruit trees and three young oak trees in a new orchard area.
- **Broadwater School, Waverley:** Pupils on the school's eco council learnt about the importance of trees. They planted 753 trees to create a reflection area and were supported by the community garden opposite the school.
- **Goldsworth Park Medical Centre, Woking:** As part of the NHS Forests scheme, which aims to transform green spaces within healthcare sites to improve health, wellbeing and biodiversity, 10 fruit trees were planted to create an orchard, with local community volunteers supporting.

Marisa Heath, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for Environment, said, *"I am delighted to be making significant progress towards our goal. Trees play a vital role in enhancing the appearance of Surreys green spaces, while also strengthening our climate resilience.*

"We couldn't do this alone, so I thank all the partners, communities, and residents who support this initiative. I encourage you to continue to do so to achieve our target for the benefit of our communities and future generations to come."

Community groups, charities, schools, parish councils, and businesses can register to be involved in the next planting season this winter. To find out more and to register your interest, visit our **tree planting website**.





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5th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

Supporting Bees and Pollinators in Your Epsom and Ewell Garden

27 July 2025



Expert Advice on Supporting Bees and Pollinators in Your Epsom and Ewell Garden

Epsom and Ewell residents are being offered expert advice on how to make their gardens more welcoming for bees and other vital pollinators, thanks to insights from local academics.

Will Wilkinson and Dr Jorge Gutierrez Merino, both from the University of Surrey, have shared practical tips for nurturing these important species. Mr Wilkinson is a lecturer and leads The Beekeeping Project at the university, while Dr Gutierrez Merino is a senior lecturer.

Their advice highlights that while honeybees are important, it's crucial to support the many other pollinator species that are often more vulnerable.

Key recommendations for local gardeners include:

- **Recognise the bigger picture:** While honeybees are "kept species," conservation efforts should also focus on other less conspicuous pollinators vital to our food web, many of which are more at risk.
- **Plant native and heritage varieties:** Opt for native plant species and traditional heritage varieties in your garden. Not all modern plants produce the quantity of pollen and nectar that pollinators require.
- **Ensure year-round food sources:** Aim for a diverse range of plants that flower across different seasons, including trees, to provide a continuous supply of food for pollinators.
- **Create a "rough patch":** Leaving a corner of your garden unkempt, perhaps with a pile of old sticks, allows it to overgrow. This helps retain moisture and creates a humid microclimate beneficial for various invertebrates.
- **Consider #NoMowMay:** Avoid mowing your lawn throughout May. This allows native plants to flower and provides a crucial habitat for insects to thrive.
- **Review pet treatments:** If your pet regularly receives flea or worm treatments, discuss a risk-based approach with your vet instead of monthly preventative applications. Residues from some spot-on treatments have been detected in UK habitats and can negatively affect invertebrate survival.

The Beekeeping Project at the University of Surrey

The advice stems from work connected to The Beekeeping Project at the University of Surrey. Led by Will Wilkinson and funded by the Student-Staff Partnership Project and Forever Surrey, the initiative provides students, staff, and the wider university community with opportunities to learn about beekeeping, the environment, and develop new skills. It also aims to support student experience and mental health.

The project has fostered interdisciplinary research, including studies into the beehive microbiome as an indicator of honeybee health, led by PhD student Kerry Barnard and Dr Jorge Gutierrez-Merino. This research investigates how bacterial communities within the hive correlate with the health and disease status of bees and other pollinators.

Through workshops, teaching materials, and practical experience, The Beekeeping Project has encouraged discussion and shared knowledge about bees, gardens, and nature, emphasising the importance of all bee species for biodiversity, ecology, and sustainability – principles central to the University of Surrey's ethos.

Residents interested in learning more can note that Will Wilkinson and Dr Jorge Gutierrez Merino are available for interview by contacting mediarelations@surrey.ac.uk.

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