

## Dorking Halls to shut again for restoration?

One of Surrey's "largest and most comprehensive arts and performance" spaces could shut its doors again if the next phase of its near £10m revamp is approved. Dorking Halls closed last year as Mole Valley District Council agreed to fund £6.1m in "sorely needed" repairs and refurbishments to avoid safety risks and any unscheduled problems. It later became clear the original scope and scale of the issues had been underestimated and that work would take longer and cost more than first forecast. This has been made worse by rises in material prices and market rates over the past year, the council said. Hoped-for grant funding through the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme has also stopped being available.

Mole Valley District Council is now seeking an extra £3.34m of upgrade works to replace outdated air handling units and chillers, cut annual carbon emissions by 75 tonnes with solar panels and heat recovery systems, as well as upgrading the Grand Hall to modern safety and performance standards. Councillor Nick Wright, cabinet member for leisure and tourism, said: "Dorking Halls is arguably the largest and most comprehensive arts and performance venue in eastern Surrey. It is central to our community and is key to the local economy. Dorking Halls plays a vital cultural role in the district, with a busy programme of shows, concerts and films, as well as hosting youth theatre, school productions, live screenings, and community events. It also provides employment opportunities, particularly for young people entering the hospitality sector. This investment will ensure the Halls continue to serve residents and visitors with high-quality cultural experiences for many years to come, while also helping MVDC to meet its carbon reduction goals."

The Mole Valley's cabinet is expected to agree to the additional funding when it meets on September 23 ahead of formal sign off at the following month's full council. The proposed works will be scheduled to minimise disruption, with the venue expected to close temporarily in 2026 from mid-April to early December. The halls last closed over the summer last year as the council addressed making its ceiling safe after a critical failure risk was identified. Had no work been done there was the potential the Grand Hall's fibrous plaster could become unstable – forcing its closure at short or no notice. Any collapse, regardless of whether the public were in attendance, would likely have led to a fine.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Dorking Halls Grand Hall (Image MVDC)

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