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

19th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

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Former Epsom job centre worker hopes to question next PM in Parliament

30 June 2026



A local marketing entrepreneur seeking Conservative parliamentary selection once went on television's *Blind Date* with the woman who later became Andy Burnham's wife — and was working at Epsom Jobcentre by the time the programme was screened.

The story was reported by *The Sunday Times* on 28 June 2026 in an article by chief news correspondent Rosamund Urwin.

Will Harris was chosen by Marie-France "Frankie" van Heel on Cilla Black's ITV dating show in 1992. Van Heel was then studying at Cambridge University and was already in the early stages of a relationship with Burnham, the Mayor of Greater Manchester and former Labour Cabinet minister.

According to *The Sunday Times*, Burnham gave his blessing for van Heel to appear on the programme. She selected "Will from Surrey" from three unseen contestants.

Harris, then 21, was studying English at Nottingham University. He told the newspaper that he had spotted posters seeking *Blind Date* contestants and decided to audition on impulse.

"I had never watched *Blind Date* — I'm not a big TV guy — but I just thought it would be fun to go on a date and a holiday," he recalled.

By the time his appearance was broadcast, however, Harris had apparently taken a job at a Jobcentre in Epsom. The article reports that he referred to himself as "signing John Major's unemployment dole".

The pair were sent to Gibraltar for their television date and spent about three days there, including visiting the Barbary macaques, dining together and filming sequences for a later programme.

Harris said there was no romantic spark. He described van Heel as "clever and cool" and said they got on well, but compared the atmosphere to being with a sister rather than on a conventional date.

The programme-makers later asked them to return for a follow-up, apparently believing the original encounter had not produced enough drama. Harris said that he found the idea uncomfortable, particularly when production staff urged him to say that van Heel was cold and lacking fashion sense.

He declined a further appearance. Harris said Cilla Black later told him: "Sorry, Will, it's just good TV."

Van Heel married Burnham in 2000 and the couple have three children.

Harris's later career, as described in *The Sunday Times*, was separate from van Heel's. He became marketing director of the Conservative Party in 2003 and later met van Heel and Burnham again in a House of Commons bar after both had been sent on the same training course.

The report says Harris now runs Bridge F61, an AI-powered business intended to help private-equity firms assess the marketing strategies of companies they may wish to acquire. He is also seeking selection as a Conservative parliamentary candidate.

Sam Jones – Reporter

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