EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
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12th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

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Independent view of Ewell’s Bourne Hall

27 January 2026



BBC LDRS reports: Up to £359,000 could be spent on rejuvenating Ewell’s Bourne Hall Museum under new plans but opposition councillors have stressed that key information on the decision has been made available too late.

An independent report into the museum has now been published, laying out both the problems and the potential at the popular local attraction. The document says the museum could have a strong future, but only if the council invests money, improves how it is run and does a much better job of attracting visitors and funding.

Councillors voted earlier in January to back plans to improve the museum instead of closing it or leaving it as it is. However, no money has actually been approved yet: the decision on whether to release up to £359,000 is expected in March.

Cllr **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) says councillors should have seen the full report before they agreed to support the plans in principle. “Problems with Epsom & Ewell Borough Council’s secrecy and reluctant transparency are well documented,” he said. “Even the council’s auditors call it out in reports. Refusing to share an LGA report with committee members when they make a decision is another demonstration of the instinct to cover up bad news.”

Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court), Leader of the Labour Group, agreed, adding: “It doesn’t make sense for councillors to be asked to make decisions without access to all the available information.”

At the January meeting, committee chair Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) admitted that, “in hindsight”, the full report should have been included in the papers after opposition councillors challenged its absence.

What the report says about the museum

The independent review made clear the museum is not in crisis but it is struggling to move forward. One of the biggest issues is money. The report said it is hard for the museum to win grants or sponsorship because it does not have solid information about its visitors.

Funders want to know who comes through the door, how often, and how numbers might grow in future. But at the moment the data is limited.

The report also says that the way the council currently counts costs makes it hard to see the true price of running the museum. It recommends sorting this out so future funding bids are more realistic and transparent.

Visitors may also recognise some of the other issues raised. Displays are described as dated, marketing as uninspiring, and the museum’s overall “identity” as unclear. Reviewers said the space could be made more interactive and appealing, especially for families and younger people.

The report praised the museum for already attracting a strong mix of ages, especially families. Its location inside Bourne Hall which also houses the library and community spaces was also seen as a major advantage. With better use of the building and stronger promotion, it could become more of a destination.

Volunteers are another key part of the picture. The report says there are some highly committed people helping out, but not enough of them. It suggests recruiting more volunteers from a wider range of backgrounds to better reflect the local community.

A council spokesperson said: “The Community and Wellbeing Committee has initiated the first step in a process to invest in the future of Bourne Hall Museum by submitting their preferred option, which was to spend up to £250,000 over two years, to the Strategy and Resources Committee for their consideration in March.

“Before committee, Community & Wellbeing Committee members saw a summary of the Culture Peer Challenge in the committee report and were invited to attend a briefing session which also summarised the findings of the report. The LGA Culture Peer Challenge for Bourne Hall Museum has been made available to all EEBC councillors and is also available on our website: Culture Peer Challenge | Epsom and Ewell Borough Council.”

What happens next?

In short, the museum’s future now depends on whether councillors agree to invest. If funding is approved in March, work could begin on modernising the space and building a stronger long-term future. If not, things are likely to stay much as they are.

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ISSN 2753-2771

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View of Bourne Hall and Museum, Spring Street, Ewell. (Credit: Google Street View)



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