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

12th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

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King’s Award for Age Concern Epsom & Ewell volunteers

14 November 2026



A former borough mayor who has made more than 3,000 trips as a volunteer driver is among the people whose work has earned Age Concern Epsom & Ewell the King’s Award for Voluntary Service.

The independent local charity is one of five Surrey groups to receive the award in 2026. Equivalent to an MBE, it is the highest honour a local voluntary group can receive in the UK. More than 180 volunteers help the charity provide services ranging from lifts to medical appointments and home visits to befriending, information and advice, monthly Sunday Teas and a Men’s Club.

Alan Carlson, a former teacher and Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, has made more than 3,000 trips helping older people get to medical appointments. For him, the conversations along the way are part of what makes the work worthwhile.

“After each drive I feel like I have made their life a little bit better just by listening to them,” he said.

An hour or two can make a difference

In 2023, the charity used the Epsom & Ewell Times to appeal for volunteer befrienders who could spare an hour or two a week to visit an older person who might otherwise have little company. It offered training and ongoing support and asked for qualities that anyone could bring to the role, including reliability, a willingness to listen and a sense of humour.

Manjit, one of the charity’s volunteer befrienders, described what she gets from the visits. “The time I spend with them feels so rewarding. We share stories, laugh together, and it’s like we’re all learning something from each other.”

At the monthly Sunday Teas, volunteers serve tea and cake and put on entertainment. For some guests, the charity says, it is one of their few chances to get out of the house and spend an afternoon with others.

The charity’s work has also left a public mark on Epsom. In June 2025 it opened the In Memory Woodland in Long Grove Park, a place for residents to remember loved ones or spend time quietly. The Epsom & Ewell Tree Advisory Board designed the woodland and oversaw planting, Surrey County Council helped fund the project through Your Fund Surrey and the borough council provided the land.

Recognition for the volunteers

The award comes as chief officer Dorah May Hancock prepares to retire after more than eleven years in the role. As the Epsom & Ewell Times reported, she has worked with volunteers, community groups and local businesses to set up activities, build partnerships and raise funds.

“Volunteers are at the heart of Age Concern Epsom & Ewell, and this award is a wonderful recognition of all they give,” she said. “They bring an extraordinary range of skills, experience and kindness, freely giving their time to make a difference to people around them.”

County Councillor Eber Kington, who nominated the charity, said the volunteers’ dedication, skills and enjoyment of their work were evident to the people who use its services. Surrey’s Lord-Lieutenant, Neelam Devesher MBE, also welcomed the award and paid tribute to the volunteers’ hard work.

The Lord-Lieutenant is due to present the charity with its award crystal and certificate in early 2027. Two representatives will also be invited to a Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in May.

Lionel Blackman

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