

Bourne Hall row escalates as Chief Executive suspends councillors' decision

26 February 2026



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's decision to delay plans for investing in Bourne Hall Museum has itself been suspended after the Council's Chief Executive intervened, raising questions about whether councillors have the authority to demand disclosure of the full report they say they need.

At a special meeting on 25 February, the Community and Wellbeing Committee voted to defer any decision on the museum's future until councillors could see the complete, unredacted service review. But in an email to all councillors the following day, leaked to the Epsom and Ewell Times, Chief Executive **Jackie King** said the resolution could not yet be implemented and was now on hold pending legal advice.

She wrote: "While the resolution was agreed at Committee, it relates to the Council's broader constitutional arrangements around access to information and the respective roles of elected Members and statutory officers... As legal advice was not available at the meeting, it is necessary to seek clarification from the Monitoring Officer regarding the constitutional effect of the resolution and appropriate next steps. In the meantime, implementation is suspended to ensure that any action taken is consistent with the Council's governance framework."

Her intervention leaves the museum decision in limbo and raises a wider constitutional question: whether a committee of elected councillors can compel disclosure of information that council officers have decided should remain confidential.

Chair expressed "disappointment" after councillors voted to delay decision

The committee had been reconvened after the Council's Audit and Scrutiny Committee ruled that the original January decision had been taken without councillors seeing key reports, including the Bourne Hall service review and peer challenge findings.

Opening the meeting, committee chair Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) said: "This is being called as a result of a calling of a decision that we took back in January. Councillor Coley... called the decision in on the basis that the committee did not have all the information necessary to make the decision, in particular that we did not see the LGA corporate peer challenge report." He said councillors could either retake the decision or uphold it.

Instead, members voted to defer the matter entirely. After the vote, Cllr Woodbridge said: "I can't hide my disappointment at the decision, but it is the decision that you've taken."

Coley: "If we're spending public money... I find it very difficult to justify secrecy"

Independent councillor **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley), who initiated the call-in, said councillors were still being denied crucial financial detail. He told the meeting: "The Service Review provided has significant redactions which amount to several pages of missing content, especially that which relates to the financial aspects of the museum... If we're spending public money on services the council owns and operates directly itself, I find it very difficult to justify secrecy."

He warned councillors they were being asked to commit future funding without proper scrutiny. "Year one requires additional funding from revenue that was not allocated in our recently passed budget. Years two to five require funding from a council that doesn't exist yet... Surely, the most sensible option is to leave things as they are and allow the new unitary council to decide how best to proceed."

Lawrence: "You need to see the plan in front of you before you spend a quarter of a million pounds"

Cllr **James Lawrence** (LibDem College) criticised both the timing and substance of the information provided. "As of Monday at 2pm appendix three, the service review hadn't been published... Public money was paid for this report." Referring to the peer challenge findings, he added: "The peer challenge team were unable to access more detailed income slash expenditure relating to Bourne Hall... You need to see the plan in front of you before you spend a quarter of a million pounds on this."

Muir: "We do not have enough information... this is unacceptable"

Cllr **Bernie Muir** (Conservative Horton) said the redactions were unprecedented in her experience. "I'm actually very, very concerned about the lack of the information we have. We are the front line of making decisions, and we don't have

enough information on which to make one.” She added: “I have literally, in nine years, never seen a document like the one that... we’ve been given... This is unacceptable. No company I’ve ever worked for would accept making a decision if we provided this.”

Chinn: “Every single recommendation is redacted”

Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court), who proposed the deferral, told the meeting councillors were still missing the report’s most important section. “A redacted version shall be appended... but every single recommendation is redacted. I don’t understand how we can say that we’ve got all the information... I don’t think this has moved on at all.”

Her amendment to defer the decision until the full report is disclosed was carried by the committee.

Reynolds warned of consequences of continued delay

Cllr **Humphrey Reynolds** (RA West Ewell) cautioned councillors about the risks of postponement, saying delay could itself harm the museum’s future and create further uncertainty. He argued councillors needed to balance transparency with the need to move forward with decisions affecting services.

Chief Executive’s intervention raises constitutional questions

The Chief Executive’s subsequent decision to suspend implementation of the committee’s resolution now creates a new layer of uncertainty. Her email makes clear the issue is no longer just about the museum, but about the balance of authority between elected councillors and statutory officers.

Councillors voted to delay a decision until they could see the full evidence. The Council’s most senior officer has now paused that instruction pending legal advice on whether councillors have the constitutional power to require disclosure.

Future of museum – and decision-making authority – now unclear

The original plan involved investing substantial additional funding to improve the museum, with the aim of securing its long-term future ahead of the borough council’s abolition in 2027 and replacement by a unitary authority.

For now, both the museum’s future and the committee’s attempt to obtain full disclosure remain unresolved. Councillors are awaiting legal advice from the Monitoring Officer, which will determine not only what happens next with Bourne Hall Museum, but potentially who ultimately controls access to key information at Epsom and Ewell Borough Council.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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On the Primarks Epsom, ready, steady, go 25th March

26 February 2026



Primark will open the doors of its new store at Epsom’s The Ashley Centre on Wednesday 25 March at 10am, taking over the former House of Fraser unit.

To mark the moment, the first customers and loyal Primark fans will be welcomed by a live DJ. The new store will cover 31,400 sq. ft set over two floors and follows the retailer’s recent recruitment of 90 new team members ready for opening

day.

Customers will be able to shop the bestselling Primark products they know and love across clothing, kidswear, beauty, lifestyle and home.

In further good news for local shoppers, its popular Click & Collect service will also be coming to Epsom to enable customers to browse and order on the Primark website before picking up their items in store, at a time that best suits them.

Ewa Klepczuk, Primark Epsom’s store manager, said: “After working at Primark for many years, I’m excited to now be part of bringing our exciting new store to Epsom. We know there is a lot of anticipation for our arrival, and with 90 new retail colleagues now in place, we’re all working hard behind the scenes to ensure we’re ready for opening day. I’m really looking forward to seeing the reaction of local shoppers when our doors open, where they’ll find our famous Primark must-haves, all at unbeatable value for the entire family. Everyone is welcome to join in with our celebrations – we can’t wait to see everyone there!”

Louisa Butters, Head of Urban Destinations (Retail & Offices) at CBRE Investment Management, owners of Ashley Centre, said: “The opening of Primark marks a significant milestone for the Ashley Centre and is a strong acknowledgement of the progress we’ve made through our recent refurbishment programme. As one of the UK’s leading retailers, Primark brings both scale and drawing power, playing a key role in strengthening the scheme’s anchor line-up and enhancing its overall proposition. Its arrival will further elevate the quality, accessibility and relevance of the destination, while reinforcing the confidence that major national brands have in our long-term vision for its continued transformation.”

The new Epsom store will be Primark’s 199th store on the UK high street and follows the retailer’s last store opening in December 2025 in Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

As shoppers prepare for the opening day, Primark customers can continue to shop at nearby stores in Sutton, Kingston-Upon-Thames and Guildford – and use Primark’s handy online stock checker tool to track down their favourite styles before heading in-store.

Primark Press Release

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Epsom and Ewell’s four year commitment to Ukraine

26 February 2026



4 Years of War in Ukraine, 4 Years of Heart Ache, Support and Immense Pride in this Community

By Roy Deadman, Chairman and Co-Founder, Surrey Stands With Ukraine

Four years ago, we woke to news that changed Europe overnight. Ukraine had been invaded. I remember sitting in shock, watching the images unfold, feeling an overwhelming mix of disbelief and anger. I was incredibly angry that Russia had invaded Ukraine. What mattered to me in that moment was not politics, but people. A proud European nation was under attack, and I wanted to do all I could to defend it.

On day one of the war, I called my Ukrainian friend Natalia Irvine, who lives here in Epsom. I asked her a simple question: “What do you need?” I made her a promise that I would support her and her country in any way I could, for as long as it took. At that point, I thought in terms of weeks, perhaps months. I could never have imagined we would still be here four years later.

Together, Natalia and I reached out to our local community. We asked for help and the response was overwhelming. Donations flooded in almost immediately. People wanted to stand with Ukraine. They wanted to do something tangible in the face of such horror.

Within hours, it became clear that we needed space. The generosity of the Ashley Centre was extraordinary. On day one, they offered us 6,000 square feet of retail space. Even though it was rent-free, I had to take a personal risk and sign a

lease that made me liable for the business rates, as we were not yet a registered charity. It was a leap of faith, but it was the start of what we proudly called “The Hub.”

By the end of that first week, 180 volunteers had registered with us. We had raised close to £20,000 and sent two truckloads of humanitarian aid, donated by this incredible community. It was breathtaking how quickly everything moved.

Those early days were intense. Some people spent up to 20 hours at a time sorting and packing boxes. We worked through exhaustion fuelled by tea, determination and a shared sense of purpose. The emotional rollercoaster was constant, heartbreak at what we were seeing unfold in Ukraine, and immense pride at how Epsom and Ewell pulled together.

We quickly realised this could not be chaotic goodwill alone. We had to run it like a small business operation. Every item had to be sorted, categorised, packed and properly manifested before being loaded onto whichever truck was available. Transport offers poured in, with drivers volunteering to take aid directly into Ukraine. It was inspiring, and it required careful coordination.

In that first week, we formed a core team. Some volunteers stepped forward to create a committee to help make difficult decisions about what we could send and where it should go. These were not easy choices. Demand was enormous, and resources, though generous, were not infinite.

Natalia, based here in Epsom, worked tirelessly alongside us. Her sister Anya, coordinating from inside Ukraine, helped guide where our aid would have the greatest impact. Between Epsom and Ukraine, somehow, we made it work. It was teamwork across borders, built on trust and shared determination.

Very quickly, we understood that we needed to become part of a registered charity. One reason was practical, the burden of business rates. The other was credibility, and the invaluable ability to claim Gift Aid on donations. I was introduced to Lionel Blackman, who ran a charity called Harrop HR Missions. After a coffee and a conversation about our mission, Lionel generously agreed to let us operate under his charity’s structure.

From there, Surrey Stands With Ukraine became the fully formed charity we know today: Surrey Stands With Ukraine. As we reach the four-year mark, we have shipped £5 million worth of aid. We have sent 153 trucks, a fire engine, over 50,000 mobility aids and 650 winter family survival packs, and so much more besides.

Today, our charity is based at Global House, where we share space with the totally amazing Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network. EERN provides local support for Ukrainian families who have made Epsom and Ewell their temporary home. It has been a privilege to work alongside such a dedicated team and to witness their daily commitment.

One unexpected gift from these four years has been friendship. What began as an emergency response has grown into a powerful community bond. I have made lifelong friends through this work. We meet for quiz nights, coffee mornings, beers, lunches and parties. That human connection is not a side note, it is central to our resilience.

This work is emotionally hard. While we do not face the same unimaginable horror that Ukrainians endure, we are closer to it than most. We receive constant requests for help. We watch videos from the ground. We hear heartbreaking stories of families torn apart. We cry. We carry it with us.

That friendship network sustains us. There is always someone ready with a hug, someone to make you smile, someone to pick you up when you are exhausted. This is what being part of this charity and this community truly means.

Every single one of us is a volunteer. No one is paid a wage. We are there because we care deeply and because we want to do something meaningful on behalf of the Ukrainian people. That purity of purpose has shaped everything we do.

Over these four years, I have learned so much about Ukraine and its people. The obvious lesson is their extraordinary courage. But that courage is not confined to the front lines. It runs through all Ukrainians, young and old, men and women. Their commitment to preserving their culture, history and identity in the face of attempts to erase it is profoundly inspiring.

When I made that promise on day one, I thought this would be short term. I do believe Western governments have not done enough, or not quickly enough. This is a war in Europe, on our doorstep. History teaches us hard lessons, yet we so often seem slow to act.

If we are not careful, we may look back five or ten years from now at a Europe that has changed for the worse. It feels at times as though we have moved from a post-war world into a pre-war one. The longer this conflict continues without decisive resolution, the more lives are lost.

And yet, despite the geopolitical uncertainty, I find hope here at home. I find it in every donated sleeping bag, every cheque written, every volunteer shift completed. I find it in schoolchildren raising funds and pensioners knitting winter hats.

When people come together with kindness in their hearts, extraordinary things can happen. A community can unite behind people from another country simply because it is the right thing to do. That gives me hope.

I am immensely proud of what Epsom and Ewell has done over these four years. Proud to live here. Proud to raise my family here. Proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with all of you.

Four years of war. Four years of heartbreak. Four years of unwavering support. And four years of immense pride in this remarkable community.

Roy Deadman - Chair Surrey Stands With Ukraine

There will be a commemoration today at 5pm in The Ashley Centre, marking the 4th anniversary of the war and the Mayor

of Epsom and Ewell Cllr Robert Leach will be in attendance. All are welcome.

Image: Roy Deadman with SSWU's latest appeal for negative pressure wound dressings

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The Ripley effect of rural development in Surrey

26 February 2026



Surrey villagers say they fear their semi-rural community will be "overwhelmed" by development.

Ripley is frequently named one of the prettiest and best places to live in Surrey. But locals are worried it could soon lose the charming character that drew them there as plans for up to 540 homes on farmland edge closer to submission.

The proposed development of Grove Heath North, between Ripley and Send, would see hundreds of two- and three-storey houses built on farmland off Portsmouth Road. While the scheme is still at the environmental scoping stage, locals say the scale alone is enough to change the face of the historic village for good.

'Completely out of character'

Brian Crosby, chairman of the Grove Heath North Residents' Association, moved to Ripley 33 years ago from Twickenham for what he calls its "semi-rural character".

Brian said: "We want to maintain the identity of villages at the edge of the countryside. This [development] just doesn't sit comfortably behind the existing houses. It would virtually join Ripley to Send Marsh creating more urban sprawl."

He described the proposal as a major speculative development that is not currently identified as a potential development site in the Local Plan and is a complete shock to our residents who are in disbelief, adding: "The developers do not care what happens to the village afterwards."

To add insult to injury, the scheme also borrows the very name of Brian's road, Grove Heath North, which is almost opposite the site. He said he has raised the issue with the developer, arguing it will be confusing for emergency vehicles or delivery drivers in future.

Residents are particularly concerned about three-storey homes, which they say would be "completely out of character" in a village proud of its heritage and historic High Street, once known as the first stop on the coaching route to Portsmouth from the 16th century. The Allium Park Development a mile up the road has 3 storey building being built and these are completely out of character.

While Brian accepts more homes are needed, he argues they should not be built on greenbelt farmland. "This is the easy option," he said. "The land is used for agriculture. Don't we need more farmers and people producing food for our country?"

Plans include a new village green, a nature trail and suggests a new local shop. However, the application does not clarify if the developers would build it and the new store would be located next to an existing farm shop.

But Brian said it felt like it was part of a tick-box exercise. “Ripley has one of the largest village greens in the country,” he said. “Giving us effectively what we have already got isn’t adding anything. Sally added the proposed site already had public right of way footpaths running across it.

The developer response

A Green Kite Homes spokesperson said: “This site presents an opportunity to deliver a landscape-led development of new homes and community uses in a highly sustainable location. Our proposals would address identified local housing needs, delivering homes in a range of sizes and tenures.

“We have also listened carefully to feedback received during the public consultation and, as a result, have decided to change the name previously used for the site. We will be engaging further with the local parish councils on this.”

Fears over traffic, schools and sewage

Brian and fellow resident Sally pointed to other large schemes in the wider area, including Wisley Airfield (around 2,000 homes), Gosden Hill (1800 homes), Send Marsh (140 homes) and Allium Park (around 620). They argued there is no “joined-up thinking” about the cumulative impact on roads, schools, doctors and drainage.

Sewage capacity has sparked particular anger. Brian claimed the local works are already struggling and have discharged into the River Wey during heavy rainfall in the last few weeks. They pointed to comments from Thames Water indicating major upgrades are not due to be completed until 2030 and Ripley Sewage plant would not be able to meet Government targets for storm overflows until 2045-2050, and questions whether new homes should be occupied before then.

They questioned the pressure on already stretched services. Brian and Sally warned there is only one GP surgery in neighbouring Send which serves both Ripley and Send and one private dentist in Ripley. “The surgery has already had to increase patient numbers and cannot physically increase further,” they said. “Where are all these people going to go?”

There are also claims the local primary school is oversubscribed and there are no local secondary schools nearby, and fears that hundreds of additional commuters would pile a “burden of traffic”. They said roads are already busy, with effectively one main route running through the village, which is often used as a cut-through despite the A3 bypass since there aren’t on and off connections to the A3 at each end of the village.”

A Green Kite Homes spokesperson said: “As part of the planning process, we will continue to work closely with the council and statutory consultees to ensure that local infrastructure can appropriately support development of this scale. This will also include financial contributions towards infrastructure upgrades as part of any future planning consent for the site.”

The current submission is only about setting the scope of environmental studies, not approving the homes themselves. Guildford Borough Council’s decision on the EIA will determine what issues must be examined in detail before any full planning application is considered.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Ripley village sign. (Credit: Emily Dalton/LDRS)

Surrey armed officers in fatal shooting to remain anonymous?

26 February 2026



A coroner will soon decide whether armed police officers involved in a fatal shooting in Surrey will have their names kept out of the public eye.

At a pre-inquest review today (February 23), Surrey’s senior coroner Richard Travers said he would take “a couple of weeks” to rule on a Surrey Police application for anonymity for the firearms officers who shot 29-year-old Joel Stenning.

Mr Stenning died after being shot in the early hours of August 11, 2024, in Nursery Road, Knaphill, near Woking.

He had reportedly pointed an air rifle at officers who were called to his home following reports of a man with a gun. Mr Stenning died shortly after 7.30am on August 15 in a London hospital from “complications of a gunshot wound to the abdomen”.

Mr Stenning was born in Chertsey, lived in Woking and worked as a roofer. He was remembered by the coroner, who opened proceedings by offering condolences to his parents, who were present in court.

Surrey Police, backed by the Chief Constable, applied for nine firearms officers to remain unnamed. Chief Superintendent (CSI) Justin Berkenshaw told the court that firearms officers are highly trained, voluntary specialists who deal with the “most dangerous and lethal criminals”.

Naming them, he argued, could put them and their families at risk from organised crime groups and damage future careers.

“If someone gets named it cannot be undone,” he said, adding that officers have faced threats and harassment in other cases nationally. He said anonymity would help officers give their “best evidence” without fear of becoming headlines.

BBC Surrey said that giving evidence is stressful for everyone in court and, given the circumstances, would expect police officers to give the best evidence possible.

CSI Berkenshaw said, due to the specialist and technical nature of highly-trained armed police officers, they are not easily replaced. He raised concerns that if the officers’ names were put into the public domain, not only could it undermine their role as armed officers, it could discourage new recruits from going into armed operations and persuade current officers to give up their weapons.

CSI Berkenshaw said: “My team works extremely hard with my firearms officers to prevent knowledge of their role...this is because of the risk to the officers and their families..and to maintain an effective firearms unit.”

He said he was worried naming the officers could risk Surrey Police’s capability for an armed officer unit.

But lawyers for the Stenning family and BBC Surrey (on behalf of the media) opposed the move. The family’s representative said there was no evidence of any threat linked to Mr Stenning’s relatives or associates and warned against a “blanket” approach simply because officers were armed.

They argued open justice should not be side-lined by general policy concerns.

The family’s legal representative said: “It sets an entirely new precedent setting approach in which the mere fact of the status of a firearms officer should give rise to anonymity across the board without assessment of conditions of the case.”

Mr Travers noted the force’s arguments were not specific to this case but could apply to any firearms incident. He will now weigh privacy and safety concerns against the principle of open justice before deciding whether the officers will be named when the full inquest begins.

The inquest, expected to be heard over four weeks in early 2027, will examine the circumstances surrounding Mr Stenning’s death.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Image - purely illustration and not related in any way to this incident.

Surrey wasting education in primary schools

26 February 2026



Surrey County Council (SCC) has launched the Surrey Schools Waste Engagement Grant Scheme for primary schools in the county. Through the scheme, SCC will support schools to educate their children and the wider community about waste reduction and recycling.

The funding, which will be spread across the county, can be used to develop and deliver projects that may contribute to educating children and families on:

The impact and importance of recycling.

The impact of putting items that can’t be recycled into recycling bins.

How to dispose of different types of waste correctly, including which items should be recycled, either via home recycling bins, council recycling collections, community recycling centres or non-council recycling schemes, and which items should go in rubbish bins.

Food waste.

Clothing, textile and electrical waste.

The Waste Hierarchy.

Waste reduction, reuse and repair.

Schools that complete waste projects will also be given funding to contribute to or deliver projects that improve the environment of their school for the benefit of pupils.

Natalie Bramhall, SCC's Cabinet Member for Property, Waste and Infrastructure, said: "I'm pleased to announce the launch of the Surrey Schools Waste Engagement Grant Scheme and look forward to seeing as many primary schools as possible apply for funding. By helping schools educate children about their responsibilities now, Surrey County Council's scheme aims to create sustainable citizens and recyclers of the future."

Waste is a key area in which residents can take direct action to help fight climate change. When residents reduce waste and recycle right, there are benefits for the environment. Fewer resources are used up creating new materials and fewer harmful emissions are made during resource production. There are also benefits for other council services as waste disposal is expensive for councils; reducing waste and increasing recycling saves councils money.

The window for schools to apply for a grant opens on Monday 23 February and closes on Wednesday 25 March 2026.

To find out more information and to apply for funding, schools should visit the Together for Surrey website page on the Surrey Schools Waste Engagement Grant Scheme.

Surrey County Council



"It's my meeting": Cllr Dallen stops questions about his role in alleged Rainbow "cover-up".

26 February 2026



Rainbow Leisure Centre secrecy row deepens after heated council clash

A bitter exchange between councillors over a confidential "urgent decision" concerning the Rainbow Leisure Centre has raised fresh questions about transparency, governance and the condition of one of Epsom's major public buildings. The confrontation, between Residents' Association Strategy and Resources chair Cllr **Neil Dallen** and Labour Court ward councillor Cllr **Chris Ames**, follows earlier coverage by the BBC's Local Democracy Reporting Service [Cllr Dallen accused of £1/2 m Epsom & Ewell Council cover-up] into claims that up to £500,000 of dilapidations had been discovered at the council-owned facility.

Questions have been raised as to whether the secrecy being maintained over the matter is justified by a need to protect negotiations with contractors or is motivated by covering up possible negligence of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council in failing to ensure the proper maintenance of a major asset it owns.

£500,000 repairs estimate revealed in confidential decision

The urgent decision document itself that was obtained by the BBC's LDRS — acknowledged extensive repair issues and stated: "The issues cover many aspects of the operation of the centre from issues like fire alarms, the lift, seating, glazing, sanitaryware, ventilation, damp, possible cracks in the roof etc." It went on to estimate the scale of financial exposure: "The costs of the dilapidations are not yet fully known... However, an estimate is that this could cost up to £500k." The report also confirmed that the council had spent little on the building during the previous operator's tenure: "The previous operator GLL ran and maintained the Rainbow Leisure Centre... During that time... the council has spent minimal money on the RLC over that period." At the same time, the decision warned that repairs were necessary to avoid jeopardising the new contract: "The key issue would be if we did nothing, which would be to jeopardise the contract." It also acknowledged health and safety implications: "Some items identified by Places relate to health and safety issues... to ensure a safe and practical operating environment." The urgent decision was approved on 17 December 2025 with the recorded support of Cllr Neil Dallen, who wrote simply: "Happy to support."

Chair invokes safety risk — but secrecy questioned

At the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting on 27 January 2026, Cllr Dallen defended the urgency of the decision, suggesting that without it the centre might have faced closure on safety grounds. But Cllr Ames focused instead on why the decision had been kept secret, telling the meeting: "Falling into a category of exempt information does not make information exempt from publication... Has somebody made a decision that, in all the circumstances, the public interest in

withholding this document outweighs the public interest in disclosing it?” He pressed repeatedly for an answer: “This document should have been published... Who took that decision, and on what basis? And I’m not getting any answers.” Cllr Dallen confirmed that he had supported the urgent decision and its confidential status but then halted further questioning, telling the committee: “We have given you an answer... This meeting is asked to note the urgent decision taken. I’m not going to have any more comments or questions.” When Cllr Ames persisted, the chair asserted his authority: “It is my meeting. I am chairman of this meeting, and I have made a decision there is going to be no further comments.” The debate ended without any explanation of whether a public-interest assessment had been formally carried out before the decision was withheld from publication.

After the meeting Cllr Ames stated to Epsom and Ewell Times his regret for calling Cllr Dallen “arrogant”, realising instead he should have raised a point of order concerning Cllr Dallen remaining in the Chair for the item.

Council and former operator give sharply differing accounts

The urgent decision suggested extensive outstanding repair liabilities and the possibility of legal action to recover costs. But the former operator, Greenwich Leisure Limited, has strongly disputed any suggestion it failed in its responsibilities, stating: “The Council undertook... a full survey of the building prior to GLL exiting... items... were all completed prior to handover and signed off... GLL handed the building over to the standard required by the Council and under the contract.” GLL added it was “unaware of any legal claim” by the council.

Council declines to answer key questions

Before publication, Epsom and Ewell Times put a series of detailed questions to the council, including whether it had exercised its inspection rights over the building and when councillors were first informed of the scale of repairs. The council declined to address those points directly, saying: “Details relating to terms and financial arrangements are commercially sensitive and therefore not in the public domain.”

Governance and accountability questions remain

The dispute raises a number of unresolved issues, including whether the council had been fully aware of the building’s condition during the previous operator’s tenure, why the urgent decision was treated as confidential, and whether councillors were given complete information before being asked to note the decision. It also raises procedural questions about the conduct of the committee meeting itself, where the chair both confirmed his own role in approving the confidential urgent decision and subsequently closed down further questioning on the subject.

Epsom and Ewell Times has submitted Freedom of Information requests seeking clarification on the council’s inspection regime, the origins of the repair backlog, and the decision-making process behind the confidential urgent decision. At the time of publication, the council had not yet provided those answers and has stated it needs more time in excess of the statutory 20 day period to respond.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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[Epsom’s Rainbow Leisure Centre Places new operators](#)

Image: Epsom and Ewell Borough Council YouTube channel

Surrey could have had elections last year after all

26 February 2026



The Government’s u-turn on reinstating elections across 30 local authorities shows just how “rash and reckless” last

year's decision was to cancel polls in Surrey, opposition councillors said. In 2025, residents were told elections in Surrey should be axed because councils needed time to focus on merging into two mega authorities. Now however, the Government has written to the High Court to set out its position that 30 councils, including 21 going through their own mergers, should proceed 'in the light of recent legal advice' - a year too late for Surrey. It comes after a legal challenge was brought against the decision to delay polls by Reform UK leader Nigel Farage. It means all local elections in May 2026 will now go ahead, leaving some in Surrey wondering what has changed and whether they needed to cancel their own polls.

In a letter to the affected chief executives, Steve Reed, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, wrote: "I recognise that many of the local councils undergoing reorganisation voiced genuine concerns about the pressure they are under as we seek to deliver the most ambitious reforms of local government in a generation. I am therefore announcing today that we will provide up to £63m in additional capacity funding to the 21 local areas undergoing reorganisation across the whole programme, building on the £7.6m provided for developing proposals last year. I will shortly set out further detail about how that funding will be allocated."

Councillor Paul Follows, leader of the Liberal Democrat group at Surrey County Council, opposed the postponement in 2025 saying it robbed people of their democratic right and left in place dozens of unmandated councillors. Speaking after the Government's announcement, he said: "I am sure those areas will welcome the chance to have their democratic rights restored and to have their say on the various proposals for local government reorganisation in those areas. Surrey of course will not be one of them, due to the rash and reckless actions of Conservative-led Surrey County Council. They have jumped into the unknown, exposed most of the county to significant debt and discord in the process with barely a plan of their own - joined at the hip on this subject to a Labour government that seemingly are abandoning their own plans on a daily basis."

Epsom and Ewell Times adds: **Why the Government's U-turn does not change anything in Surrey**

Despite the Government's decision to reinstate elections in 30 other council areas, it does not alter the position in Surrey. Surrey County Council's May 2025 elections were already formally postponed as part of the Government-approved programme to abolish the existing county and district councils and replace them with two new unitary authorities. The Government has confirmed that Surrey's postponed elections are being replaced by elections to the new unitary councils instead, expected in May 2026. This means Surrey residents will not vote again for the current county council, and its existing councillors will remain in office until the new authorities take over, whereas voters in some other reorganising areas will now go to the polls as originally planned.

Surrey County Council wrote to the Government in January last year to take up the offer of delaying its own elections, arguing this would give officers time to focus on merging with its boroughs and districts. They added that spending millions on an election only to then dissolve the entire council within a year or two would be a waste of time and money. Asked what has changed since then and whether its decision in Surrey was still correct, the ministry gave a stock reply declining to answer the questions put to it. It said that, in the case of Surrey, last year's elections to the county council and six of the district councils are being replaced by elections to the two new unitary councils and that the decision relating to the postponement of 30 local council elections is separate from the decision which impacts Surrey. The ministry declined to add anything further.

Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council, said: "In Surrey we remain focussed on delivering a smooth transition for devolution and local government reorganisation and we are gearing up for local elections in May as planned. Last year, we were confirmed on the Government's accelerated programme and elections were postponed for one year so that the necessary preparatory work could take place at pace." The council also pointed out that some of the reinstated council elections this year had already been postponed once and would have given their elected officials six-year terms.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

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Epsom and Ewell pledges to end poverty

26 February 2026



Following the 2024 lead of Surrey County Council, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council also has formally adopted the End Poverty Pledge, committing itself to pay the Real Living Wage, review accessibility of key public venues, and embed poverty considerations into future policy decisions. The pledge was endorsed at Full Council on 10th February 2026 as part of the same meeting that approved the council's final budget before local government reorganisation, following earlier approval by the Community and Wellbeing Committee on 13th January, and forms part of a wider Surrey initiative led by the Epsom-based charity Good Company.

Under the pledge, the council has committed to pay the Real Living Wage to all council staff from April 2026, provide training to staff to improve understanding of poverty, review accessibility of community venues such as Bourne Hall, and include poverty considerations in Equality Impact Assessments for all future policies. Council leader **Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) said: "As a council, we are committed to supporting all our residents, including ensuring that those facing financial pressures are not left behind. The End Poverty Pledge helps sharpen our focus on understanding the barriers some of our residents face and working with our partners to remove them, so that Epsom & Ewell is a place where everyone feels supported and included. We also recognise the wellbeing of our workforce as an important part of that commitment. By adopting the Real Living Wage, we aim to help staff more reliably meet living costs, contributing to a better quality of life for those who deliver our services every day."

Community and Wellbeing Committee chair **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) said: "We know that rising costs continue to affect many individuals and families across the borough. At Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, we have a long history of supporting vulnerable residents. Our Health & Wellbeing Strategy continues to deliver a range of initiatives aimed at improving mental and emotional wellbeing, alongside community services and support for key voluntary organisations including Age Concern and the Citizens Advice Bureau. We want every resident to feel included, and the pledge ensures that compassion, awareness and practical support remain embedded in everything we deliver for our community."

The council will work alongside Good Company, which operates food banks and led the borough's recent Poverty Truth Commission. Its founder **Jonathan Lees** said: "Good Company started its operations in Epsom & Ewell nearly 14 years ago; sadly, there is still a real need here. It's fantastic that the council has officially committed and signed up to work with us and other partners to address poverty in our community."

Although Epsom & Ewell is widely seen as prosperous, council data shows stark inequalities, including a seven-year difference in life expectancy between wards, with Ruxley, Court and Town wards performing worst, and significant numbers of residents relying on food banks or subsidised food schemes. Socio-economic factors account for about 40% of health outcomes, underlining the impact of income on wellbeing even in an affluent borough.

The Real Living Wage, which the council has pledged to adopt, is independently calculated each year by the Living Wage Foundation based on the actual cost of living and currently stands at £12.00 per hour nationally compared with the statutory National Living Wage, set by government, which is lower and forecast to reach £11.89 per hour from April 2026. The Real Living Wage is voluntary and intended to reflect what workers need to meet everyday living costs rather than the legal minimum employers must pay.

It remains unclear how many, if any, EEBC staff are currently paid below the Real Living Wage, as most council employees fall within nationally negotiated salary scales that already exceed that level. The pledge may therefore have limited direct financial impact on many existing staff, although it could affect lower-graded roles, casual workers or future contracted staff depending on procurement decisions.

Some of the pledge's commitments focus on awareness and culture rather than direct financial support, including training staff to recognise poverty issues and reviewing how welcoming Bourne Hall is to residents facing hardship. The council will also ensure poverty is explicitly considered when developing future policies through Equality Impact Assessments, which could influence decisions on service delivery and access.

The pledge was adopted during the same meeting that approved a 2.98% council tax increase, the maximum allowed without a referendum, raising questions about whether such increases could worsen financial pressure for some residents. In practice, many of the poorest households receive Council Tax Support, which reduces or eliminates their bill, meaning they may be shielded from the increase, but residents on modest incomes who do not qualify for support may still feel the impact.

The End Poverty Pledge reflects growing recognition that poverty exists alongside affluence in Epsom & Ewell, and while its commitments may influence how the council operates and makes decisions, its real significance will depend on whether those commitments lead to measurable improvements for residents facing hardship. As Jonathan Lees observed, there remains "a real need here," and whether the pledge marks a turning point or remains primarily a statement of intent will become clearer as the council approaches its replacement by the new East Surrey unitary authority in 2027.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Image: Mart Production

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Sweet success for Sutton and Epsom Rugby

26 February 2026



Beckenham 14 Sutton & Epsom 22. Saturday 14th February.

Last October a Tom Lennard penalty with the last kick of the game secured a Sutton and Epsom 22-19 win. A Beckenham side hit by injuries, with a George Bunton brace and the traditional Rimarni Richards try, had taken the game to the wire. Not quite as rare as the sighting of a fluffy-backed tit-babbler at Rugby Lane but the Black & Whites crucially won a second half. With the season meandering intermittently to a conclusion both clubs might be considering whether they will be involved in the inaugural play-offs. For the upwardly mobile fourth-placed hosts there is the possibility of embarking on four outings. Pessimists from the off-colour visitors might be fearing the 25th April match to decide who remains in Regional 2 South East. On Saturday, lightning struck twice as, once again, S&E won a second half and secured a vital 22-14 win to steady their nerves.

The Black & Whites were without their German international lock, Ewan McTaggart, as 'Die Schwarzen Adler' ('The Black Eagles') were in Portugal for the next round of the European Rugby Championship. Such inconveniences are most familiar to Beckenham with their Caribbean connections. For followers of rugby at this level it is a familiar tale of woe that injuries are never spread evenly from 1 to 15. This season for Sutton and Epsom the Number 9 shirt has been a hexed item of clothing and this week Sam Lovatt became the sixth player to don the cursed shroud. However, there was happier news with the return of Josh Pulvirenti to the colours. The Balmoral Avenue Brigade are no stranger to injuries and have done remarkably well this campaign despite regular absences of key personnel and once more they took the field minus stalwart players.

A year ago Beckenham lost their 2nd XV captain Graham Murray in a tragic traffic accident and there was a minute's applause in his honour before the kick off. Considering the recent weather, that might make a modern Darwin predict webbed feet for humans in the future, Balmoral Avenue was blessed with not only sunshine but a playing surface that was a credit to the hardworking ground staff. Freddy Bunting kicked off for Sutton and Epsom but it was Beckenham who seized the initiative. The home team dominated the opening 15 minutes playing at a high tempo they threatened to run away with the game. An ominous first scrum saw Sutton and Epsom shunted back on their own ball. The combination of desperate defence and inopportune handling near the line saw S&E survive until scrum half Jack Gurney opened the scoring from close range following mounting pressure. Josh Burke added the conversion for a worthy 7-0 lead.

This was not a case of the floodgates opening but, to the contrary, the visitors replied at once. A surging burst from Gareth O'Brien hitting the line at pace from fullback carried him from his own half to near the Beckenham 22. Adam Bibby running the perfect supporting line took the pass and coasted home. Freddy Bunting added the extras for a 7-7 score. Sutton and Epsom had weathered the storm and now began to dominate possession. What was to become the theme of the afternoon was errors undoing invention for both sides. A dropped pass, a penalty kicked dead and turnovers conceded all blighted the Rugby Lane men's progress. Approaching the 40-minute mark Jack Howes won a terrific turnover penalty and Captain Bunting decided on the 3-point option to put his team ahead 10-7. Despite a lengthy period of time added on the scoring for the first period had concluded and the Surrey men turned around 10-7 up.

With the alarming statistics for the 2025-6 season in terms of second half performances by the Black & Whites no one from Rugby Lane was counting numbers in the hen house. For the travelling supporters there was the satisfaction that the

tide had turned. For the Balmoral Avenue faithful there had been more than enough evidence that they could take the honours as the fascinatingly poised match resumed. It was a fast start from all concerned as both teams sensed the importance of the first score of the second half. Reversing the policy of the season, much to the delight of ageing alickadoos, Freddy Bunting decided on taking a pot at goal after five minutes. Unfortunately for those with Black & White tinged glasses it narrowly missed.

The game became a stop-and-start affair as errors mounted. Though credit must go to the back row brethren on both sides whose industrious efforts thwarted promising openings, won turnovers and were a ubiquitous source of frustration. It was Beckenham, regaining the pomp of their earlier play, who seized the momentum and were rewarded with the next score. Winger Juai Charles carved through the defence to score and Josh Burke added the conversion to put the hosts 14-10 up. A perfectly struck restart from Freddy Bunting forced a restart drop out from the Beckenham line. Sutton and Epsom took advantage of the territorial position and won a penalty. The 3-point option was shunned for the kick to the corner with a dozen minutes of regular time on the clock. Fortune did not favour the brave but S&E only had themselves to blame as they lost the lineout.

Possibly the turning point of the match came with ten minutes left on the clock as Juai Charles saw yellow and Beckenham were reduced to 14 men. A simple three points were declined as Sutton and Epsom took a tap penalty. Lennie went close as the home forwards stood strong. However, as soon it went wide Gareth O'Brien took advantage of the visitors' numerical superiority to score out wide. The conversion failed but Sutton & Epsom had their noses in front by 15-14. It was a reinvigorated Black & Whites rather than the tiring version of recent times who now took the game by the scruff of the neck. The swerving, stepping and deceptively powerful Adam Bibby broke into the 22 to be felled by an excellent cover tackle. S&E maintained possession and replacement Dan Jones carried towards the line. Once more it was released to the backs and Tom Lennard dummied the cover and scored under the posts. Freddy Bunting chipped over the easy conversion for a 22-14 lead.

Two tries in a few minutes had altered the complexion of the contest. With the game within their grasp Sutton and Epsom tackled tenaciously and kicked sensibly to keep Beckenham at arm's length. The match concluded with two moments that were synonymous of the game. Firstly, Beckenham had an attacking lineout that gave them a great opportunity to get back into the match. It was inexplicably overthrown and lost... it was certainly not the first lost lineout during an afternoon punctuated by costly errors by both teams. Secondly, in the dying moments Sutton and Epsom were in a prime position to go for the bonus point try. The ball was secured and Tom Lennard floated the perfect kick to the corner where not one but two colleagues were waiting unguarded to score. Neither laid a hand on the ball and it hit a knee. The Benny Hill theme tune would have fitted perfectly for the ensuing fiasco as the ball went to halfway. Sanity was resumed and the ball was kicked off the field to secure the 22-14 win for Sutton and Epsom.

Once again this fixture provided excitement and tension until the final whistle. Sutton and Epsom prevailed for a win that was much needed after recent disappointments. Beckenham remained in fourth and have the prospect of promotional play-offs in their own hands. At the other end of the table Old Reigatian's 19-14 loss to Canterbury Pilgrims confirmed their relegation but who joins them is a matter for a very congested lower half of the table. As always the hospitality at Balmoral Avenue was exemplary. Amongst the throng of spectators was Dave Weller who had represented both 1st XV's. The erstwhile flanker, motor cycle racer and expert pumpkin carver diplomatically wore his Beckenham tie to the lunch but secreted his Sutton and Epsom version upon his person in case it would be appropriate. For those Beckenham members of a malicious disposition they may be praying for a heat wave in September because Mr Weller has entered the Welsh Iron Man in Tenby.

Another week off and the season resumes on the 28th February when Sutton and Epsom host Battersea Ironsides whilst Beckenham are at home to Gravesend who are snapping at their heels in fifth place.

Sutton & Epsom

O'Brien, Symonds, Bibby, Bunting, Scott, Lennard, Lovatt, Boaden, Howes, Lennie, Duey, Glanville, Pulvirenti, Rea & Hegarty. Reprs: Jones & Tame. Unused: Payne.

Beckenham: Bosch, Bennett, Pennacchia, Jebb, Charles, Burke, Gurney, Baker, Aoke-Tiamu, Brown, Prince, Keefe, Moran, Ward & Knowles.

Reprs: Richards, Ryan-Coker & L. Caddy.

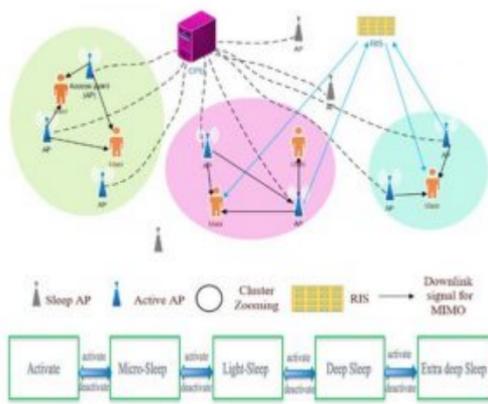
Epsom scoring a try against Beckenham from a previous fixture. Credit Robin Kennedy.

John Croysdill

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Surrey Uni finds energy-saving 5G features could cut carbon emissions

26 February 2026



An optimal combination of energy-efficient 5G network features – including AI systems that let mobile mast and antenna base stations go into sleep mode when usage is low, and phones that avoid unnecessary background network checks – could help cut indirect carbon emissions across the UK economy by around 25 million tonnes of CO₂, suggests new research from the University of Surrey.

The study, published in *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*, challenges the assumption that 5G will inevitably increase the UK’s energy demand. Instead, researchers show that next-generation network technologies have the potential to reduce emissions across many industries that rely on the digital infrastructure that keeps them online – from finance and IT to transport and construction.

Using UK economic and emissions data, the team established an environmentally extended input-output (EEIO) model tailored specifically to the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector. This allowed them to trace how cutting energy use in 5G can send knock-on effects across 33 industries of the UK economy.

Working in collaboration with Professor Ming Xu from Tsinghua University, researchers looked at 10 emerging technologies – six targeting how base stations operate and four designed to make user devices more energy-efficient. These included AI-driven multi-level sleep modes, which let mobile masts switch off when demand is low, reconfigurable intelligent surfaces (RIS) such as smart panels that redirect radio waves using little power, “cluster-zooming” in cell-free MIMO networks that allow groups of small antennas to expand or shrink coverage so energy is not wasted, and smarter handset signalling.

They found that AI-powered sleep control for base stations and improved control-channel signalling on user devices delivered the most impactful reductions.

Dr Lirong Liu, Associate Professor at Surrey’s Centre for Environment and Sustainability, said:

“Smarter base stations and devices don’t just cut electricity use in telecoms – they reduce indirect emissions in the whole supply chain. The modelling framework allowed us to quantify effects that are usually hidden, especially the indirect emissions linked to electricity use and wider supply chains. It also gave us a clear way to compare different 5G features side by side and identify which combinations deliver the strongest environmental benefits.”

The analysis shows that sectors such as financial services, IT services and computer programming gain some of the largest indirect benefits, reflecting just how much modern industries depend on digital connectivity.

Professor Pei Xiao, Professor of Wireless Communications at Surrey’s Institute for Communication Systems, said:

“Many of these energy-efficient features are already on the engineering roadmap. What this study provides is a clear system-level view of where the biggest carbon wins lie – and why regulators, operators and industry should prioritise them as part of the UK’s net zero transition.”

The research also suggests that to unlock these benefits, 5G policy must extend beyond coverage and speed targets and encourage the adoption of energy-efficient architectures. Measures could include building energy targets into spectrum licenses that mobile operators need to use 5G frequencies, incentives for low-power network design and making sure 5G research supports the UK’s broader net zero goals.

Surrey University



The full paper can be found here: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0921344925005774?via%3Dihub>

Image from *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*

Epsom and Ewell Town-Twinning Association invites

Cyril Frazer Award entries

26 February 2026

Epsom and Ewell Town-Twinning Association



Epsom and Ewell Town-Twinning Association is inviting applications for this year's **Cyril Frazer Award**, a prize established in memory of Cyril Frazer, who died in 2016. Cyril Frazer was Mayor of Epsom and Ewell when the town was first twinned with Chantilly in 1995 and was a founding member of the association. Alongside his commitment to town twinning, he was passionate about singing and was a keen member of the Epsom Male Voice Choir.

Both of these interests are reflected in the award, which offers a top prize of £500 and is open to individuals and groups within the Borough. The award will be made to qualified applicants who meet some or all of the agreed criteria, including living or studying in the Borough, meeting a special need such as mental or physical health, benefiting young people, having cultural or educational value, being related to music or the performing arts, furthering friendships or links with Chantilly, or supporting a key twinning or community event.

Last year's winner was Sarah Carpenter of Southfield Primary School, with runners-up Siobhan Cornell and Jo Johnstone from the French and Music departments at Wallace Fields Junior School, and Olivia Gioffredo from Epsom College. The winner received a £500 grant to support French visits and learning activities planned by Southfield Park School, while the joint runners-up each received £250 to support their work in French education and musical study.

Association secretary Diana Deavin said: "Last year we were very impressed by the quality of the submissions received, which is why we awarded a total of £1,000 in the end. We are looking forward to receiving ideas and suggestions and are hopeful that this year will exceed our expectations once again. Please do consider submitting an application, as we are keen to receive entries from as wide as possible a range of potential beneficiaries and keep Cyril's name alive in this very meaningful way."

The prize will be awarded at the Twinning Association's AGM in June, with a closing date for applications of **May 31, 2026**. For further information or to apply, contact diana@epsomtwinning.com.

Related report:

Epsom and Ewell Town-Twinning Association presents Cyril Frazer Awards for 2025