

Music and dance for Ukraine at Epsom Methodist Church

4 November 2025



The 13th Ukraine Music Evening took place on Saturday 25th October at Epsom Methodist Church, organised by Lionel Blackman with the support of the Epsom Refugee Network and Surrey Stands With Ukraine. Extra seats were brought in as the Church filled to the brim.

The Worshipful Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, Councillor Robert Leach (RA Nonsuch), opened the event with words of welcome and appreciation for the town's ongoing solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

For the first time, the programme featured a Ukrainian dance ensemble — **Stephania**, choreographed and led by **Alina Luts** — whose performances introduced vibrant movement and colour between the musical sets.

The modern section of the programme offered a change of mood. Epsom-based performers **Helin Konyar** (vocals), a graduate of Epsom's Laine Theatre Arts and **Vladislav Voloshin** (saxophone) presented three songs: *Almost There* (Anika Noni Rose), *Dream a Little Dream* (Robbie Williams) and the Ukrainian favourite *Stari Fotohrafyyi* by Skryabin, combining contemporary and national influences with confident stage presence.

The evening continued with **Vadym Perig**, an alumnus of the nearby Yehudi Menuhin School, who travelled from his new home in Vienna to perform **Robert Schumann's Violin Sonata No. 1**, accompanied by the accomplished Ukrainian pianist **Svitlana Kosenko**. Their expressive partnership recalled the high standard of the first Ukraine Music Evening in 2022, in which both artists also appeared.

Pianist **Maria Zhornikova** returned to Epsom with a refined interpretation of **Enrique Granados' Eight Poetic Valses**, followed by **À Giverny**, a short composition by the organiser Lionel Blackman. Projected images of Monet's gardens accompanied the performance, and the Mayor's purchase of the sheet music contributed to funds for Surrey Stands With Ukraine.

Further performances by **Stephania** included traditional Ukrainian dances such as *My Kyiv*, *Polka*, and *Chycheri*, performed by a talented ensemble of soloists.

As is now tradition, the evening concluded with the **Renaissance Choir** under the direction of **Nataliia Zadorizhna** and conductor **Dana Kuhlyk**, singing the Ukrainian National Anthem and a selection of beloved folk songs — *Oh, in the Cherry Orchard*, *Why Didn't You Come*, *Why, Why, My Land*, and *Hey, Falcons*.

All proceeds from the concert went to support the professional musicians who continue to share Ukraine's rich artistic culture with audiences in Epsom.

Nina Kaye

Epsom Methodist Church launches new Story Club and Warm Wednesdays

4 November 2025



Epsom Methodist Church (EMC) is organising two exciting ventures for local people and

families this autumn.

First out of the blocks is a new Story Club for parents and toddlers that is now meeting every Monday morning at 11am in the community café at the Church in Ashley Road, Epsom. Christa Schoeni, an experienced children's practitioner, is leading 30 minutes of reading, rhyme time and singing for children up to age five. Parents and carers are able to borrow books to read with their children during the week.

"Our aim is to foster a love of reading. With tablets and other electronic devices so commonplace today there is a risk that children miss out on the value of listening, sharing stories with their parents and having their imagination fired by imaginary worlds," said Christa Schoeni.

And EMC's Warm Wednesdays starts a new chapter in its life. For a fourth year the church is open every Wednesday starting on 5th November.

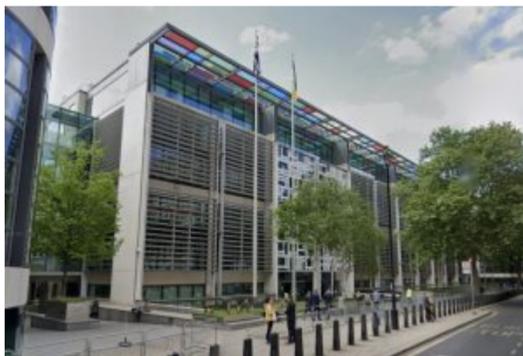
Robert Hill commented: "Every Wednesday we provide a warm space where people can come and chat, join in with quizzes and games, enjoy free teas and coffees and a lunchtime snack of hot soup and a roll. On the first Wednesday of every month we have an expert who comes and provides practical help and advice on reducing energy costs and dealing with gas and electricity bills. Surrey County Council has also provided us with some warm clothing and accessories to help stay warm over the winter months and we will be distributing these supplies to local residents.

"Every Wednesday afternoon from 3.30 our warm space becomes an after-school club with craft activities for children and parents and a chance for older children and adults to hone their table tennis skills. We end our day with everyone enjoying a hot meal together cooked by a great team of volunteers.

"As a town centre church, we see it as our role and mission to serve the local community. We love having hundreds of people coming through our doors each day. We hope that Warm Wednesdays will provide a place not just to be warm and get help with staying warm, but a place where warmth also means friendship and a generous welcome."

Surrey resident's views on County split ignored?

4 November 2025



The Government has been accused of ignoring Surrey residents' views on how to dissolve and merge the county's councils after it emerged there was a clear preference for three unitaries rather than the two mega authorities that have been imposed.

A consultation ran from June 17 to August 5 to help the Government understand what residents, businesses, and other stakeholders thought about the changes in Surrey. The results, we were told, would be used to "inform the final decision on which option is best for Surrey, with a decision expected in October."

On Tuesday, October 28, it was announced that Surrey County Council and its 11 boroughs and districts would be abolished and replaced with West Surrey Council and East Surrey Council. The decision flies in the face of the 51 per cent of the 5,617 respondents who backed three unitary proposals versus the 19 per cent that favoured East/West.

This, despite a costly PR drive from Surrey County Council that sent leaflets to every household pushing for the two unitaries. The results were published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government as part of its decision - and found that, in addition to the strong resident support for three councils, 56 per cent were also strongly opposed to what has been delivered.

The Ministry said: "Support for the three unitary proposal was based on the view that a three unitary council model resulted in authorities that were a good size and that the groupings of current authority areas made sense. Residents generally believed that the proposal would achieve good economies and efficiencies and be good for local identity, accountability, community engagement and service improvement.

"Negative responses relating to the three unitary proposal highlighted concern that it would not generate significant efficiencies, as well as concerns about how debt would be addressed. Those who supported the two unitary proposal typically did so on the basis of the greater efficiencies presented in the proposal, with the belief that it would create authorities of a good size.

"It added: "There was no single factor as to why residents did not support the two unitary proposal, though the most common theme in responses was that the two unitaries were too large and secondly, that the proposals would be bad for local identity."

Councillor Paul Follows, leader of the Liberal Democrats on Surrey County Council, was one of the drivers behind the three unitary model in his role as leader of Waverley Borough Council. He said: "They cancelled elections, asked for

views, and then did the opposite.”

The Ministry said its decision process carefully considered responses to the consultation as well as all other relevant information. It said the proposals were assessed against set criteria and that, of the choices, the two-council proposal better met that – particularly as it is seen as more likely to be financially sustainable.

A spokesperson said: “Putting Surrey’s local authorities on a more sustainable footing is vital to safeguarding the services its residents rely on, as well as investing in their futures. The government consultation for both proposals, held between July 17 and August 5, treated the proposals equally.”

On the cancelled elections, the ministry said they were postponed for a year to provide additional capacity for speeding up reorganisation – given the urgency of creating sustainable unitary local government for Surrey.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

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Image: Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government (image Google)

Government Casts Doubt on Surrey’s Mayoral Devolution Promise

4 November 2025



No promises have been made that Surrey will get full devolution and a directly elected mayor – despite it being the “entire purpose” of the lengthy and arduous process of splitting the historic county and its 11 boroughs and districts into two mega councils.

It had been understood that Surrey’s councils would be abolished and reformed into either two or three unitary authorities, with two sets of elections – first for the new bodies, and then for an overarching mayor in 2027. Surrey County Council’s website outlining the devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) process mentions the word “Mayor” seven times, and even lists May 2027 as when residents would go to the polls to decide who would be responsible for strategic services such as education, policing, fire and rescue.

However, the Government’s own timetable for Surrey only lists a May 2026 election for the two shadow councils, followed by the next round of balloting in May 2031 – and then every four years after that. Furthermore, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has said that the references to Surrey getting a directly elected mayor were “not quite accurate” as the decision “has not been confirmed” and that they were only “committed to working with partners to establish a strategic authority for the area”. They clarified that the announcement that Surrey would be dissolved and reformed into East and West Surrey was “not promising a mayor”.

Areas with strategic mayors, such as London and Manchester, are given extra devolved powers from Government, with the argument being it gives local people a greater say in the running of their areas. Writing to the leaders of Surrey’s councils, the ministry would only say that simplifying local government ensures “a strong foundation for devolution”. It said it was committed to working with partners across Surrey, including the new unitary authorities, to establish a strategic authority to ensure relevant functions held at the county level can continue on that geographic footprint where possible, such as transport and adult skills.

It added that the establishment of a strategic authority would be subject to the relevant statutory tests being met and local consent – but makes no mention of a directly elected mayor. This is important because strategic authorities are

different from Mayoral Strategic Authorities. According to the ministry, Foundation Strategic Authorities include non-mayoral combined authorities and combined county authorities, and any local authority designated as a strategic authority without a mayor.

Mayoral Strategic Authorities, such as the Greater London Authority, all Mayoral Combined Authorities and all Mayoral Combined County Authorities, “automatically begin as Mayoral Strategic Authorities” - and only those that meet specified eligibility criteria may be designated as Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities to unlock further devolution.

It has left the county council saying devolution is now an “ambition” rather than a formality. Others have called out the council for rushing into such a seismic shift, and cancelling elections to get devolution done - without any guarantees over whether the county would get a mayor.

Councillor Paul Follows, leader of the Liberal Democrat group at Surrey County Council, said having a mayor “was the entire purpose of the reorganisation”. He added: “The county council has gone in on this nonsense without any guarantee over the reason they have it, despite that being the principal reason the county has initiated this process - but they have yet to receive any guarantees. I’m sure the county will reflect their reasons for going for this in the light that the ministry said we may not be getting devolution.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Image: Tim Oliver (credit Surrey Live) and County graphic (credit SCC).

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Surrey prison drug smuggling drones might be investigated

4 November 2025



Drones smuggling drugs into prison will be investigated in an inquest into a man who died in custody. The full inquest, which opens next month, will also look at his care and supervision.

Oliver Mulangala, 40, was found dead at HMP High Down, Sutton in July 2024. A pre-inquest review was held at Woking’s Coroner’s Court on October 29, ahead of a 10-week inquest due to begin on November 17.

At the hearing, Coroner Jonathan Stevens said it was his role to investigate any potential factors contributing to Mr Mulangala’s death, including the possibility that drugs may have entered the prison by drones. However, Ministry of Justice (MoJ) representative Mr Simms said there was no evidence to suggest the substances consumed by Mr Mulangala were delivered by drone.

He warned releasing details of intelligence related to drone activity in prison, and measures to reduce or minimise drones, could risk compromising the prison’s security. Mr Simms said the MoJ’s decision had “not been taken lightly” but said “it was not in the public interest” to provide this information.

Barrister Michael Etienne, acting on behalf of Mr Mulangala’s family at the coroner’s court in Woking, said the family wanted the inquest to look at the monitoring, care and supervision in the 12 months prior to Oliver’s tragic death. The court heard that the prison officer who failed to conduct the roll call the morning of July 13 was subsequently dismissed. When Mr Mulangala was found by officers, they undertook initial life support.

Coroner Stevens asked to see all the evidence available from family statements, the MoJ and NHS trust, before deciding if it is relevant for the full inquest. A full inquest with a jury is due to take place for two weeks from November 17. Numerous witnesses will be called, including senior figures from HMP High Down, current prisoners and those responsible for Mr Mulangala’s health.

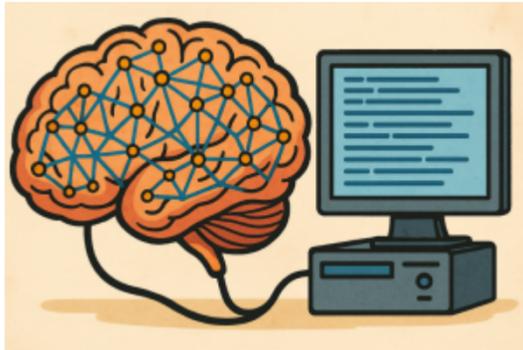
The Ministry of Justice and North West London NHS Trust have been identified as interested persons in the inquest.

Emily Dalton LDRS

HMP High Down from Google maps

Surrey Uni show AI systems based on the human brain's save energy

4 November 2025



Artificial intelligence (AI) could soon become more energy-efficient and faster, thanks to a new approach developed at the University of Surrey that takes direct inspiration from biological neural networks of the human brain.

In a study published in *Neurocomputing*, researchers from Surrey's Nature-Inspired Computation and Engineering (NICE) group have shown that mimicking the brain's sparse and structured neural wiring can significantly improve the performance of artificial neural networks (ANNs) - used in generative AI and other modern AI models such as ChatGPT - without sacrificing accuracy.

The method, called Topographical Sparse Mapping (TSM), rethinks how AI systems are wired at their most fundamental level. Unlike conventional deep-learning models - such as those used for image recognition and language processing - which connect every neuron in one layer to all neurons in the next, wasting energy, TSM connects each neuron only to nearby or related ones, much like how the brain's visual system organises information efficiently. Through this natural design, the model eliminates the need for vast numbers of unnecessary connections and computations.

An enhanced version, called Enhanced Topographical Sparse Mapping (ETSM), goes a step further by introducing a biologically inspired "pruning" process during training - similar to how the brain gradually refines its neural connections as it learns. Together, these approaches allow AI systems to achieve equal or even greater accuracy while using only a fraction of the parameters and energy required by conventional models.

Dr Roman Bauer, Senior Lecturer at the University of Surrey's School of Computer Science and Electronic Engineering, and project supervisor, said:

"Training many of today's popular large AI models can consume over a million kilowatt-hours of electricity, which is equivalent to the annual use of more than a hundred US homes, and cost tens of millions of dollars. That simply isn't sustainable at the rate AI continues to grow. Our work shows that intelligent systems can be built far more efficiently, cutting energy demands without sacrificing performance."

Surrey's enhanced model achieved up to 99% sparsity - meaning it could remove almost all of the usual neural connections - but still matched or exceeded the accuracy of standard networks on benchmark datasets. Because it avoids the constant fine-tuning and rewiring used by other approaches, it trains faster, uses less memory and consumes less than one per cent of the energy of a conventional AI system.

Mohsen Kamelian Rad, a PhD student at the University of Surrey and lead author of the study, said:

"The brain achieves remarkable efficiency through its structure, with each neuron forming connections that are spatially well-organised. When we mirror this topographical design, we can train AI systems that learn faster, use less energy and perform just as accurately. It's a new way of thinking about neural networks, built on the same biological principles that make natural intelligence so effective"

While the current framework applies the brain-inspired mapping to an AI model's input layer, extending it to deeper layers could make networks even leaner and more efficient. The research team is also exploring how the approach could be used in other applications, such as more realistic neuromorphic computers, where the efficiency gains could have an even greater impact.

Surrey University



Epsom and Ewell Times asked ChatGPT to explain the above press release from Surrey University and this is what it wrote:

“Artificial intelligence models like ChatGPT rely on vast numbers of digital connections between “neurons”, mimicking how the human brain works – but they use enormous amounts of electricity to do it. Researchers at the University of Surrey have developed a new way to wire these networks that could make them dramatically more efficient.

Instead of connecting every artificial neuron to every other, the Surrey team copied the brain’s habit of linking only nearby or related neurons. Their method, called **Topographical Sparse Mapping**, cuts out unnecessary connections, saving energy while maintaining accuracy. A refined version, **Enhanced Topographical Sparse Mapping**, even “prunes” the network during learning – like the brain trimming unused connections as it develops. The result is AI that can train faster, use less memory and consume less than one per cent of the energy of current systems.

If this approach proves scalable, it could mean greener, cheaper and quicker AI – taking inspiration not from bigger computers, but from the extraordinary efficiency of the human brain.”

Residents sigh of relief if Government bail out bankrupt Woking

4 November 2025



The government’s whopping £500m bailout for debt-ridden Woking Borough Council may not be the last. The cash injection, announced as part of Surrey’s local government reorganisation on October 28, will cover roughly a quarter of Woking’s debt. But ministers have described it as only the “first tranche” of support. Surrey County Council leader Tim Oliver said commissioners appointed to oversee Woking’s finances are still selling off property assets to reduce the total debt and the government has left the door open to further payments.

“They’ve called it a first tranche. So this is £500 million now to get on with selling down the assets, reducing the debt as much as you can, and then we’ll have a conversation about that balance,” he told the Local Democracy Reporting Service. “The expectation is that whatever the rump of the debt remains, the government will pick it up.”

Woking’s debts, which peaked around £2bn, stem from a series of risky property investments that left the council effectively bankrupt. The government’s intervention prevents the shortfall from being passed on to other Surrey residents, something Cllr Oliver said ministers have been “very clear” would not happen. “It’s nobody’s fault, least of all residents’, but they were at risk of being penalised just for living in the wrong place,” the council leader said. “We worked hard to make sure that didn’t happen.”

He added that securing government support for Woking’s debt was a collective effort between Surrey’s council leaders and MPs. Cllr Oliver added that ministers were keen to stress Woking’s situation was “exceptional” to prevent other indebted councils seeking similar bailouts. Although Woking council may be able to breathe a slight sigh of relief with the government’s handout, residents are still left wondering what will happen with the rest of the debt across Surrey.

Cllr Oliver said the coming months would be focused on “getting the detail right” and ensuring that the reorganisation delivers simpler, stronger local government. “It’s great to get a decision, but now the hard work starts,” he said. “We’ll make sure this works for residents and that the government honours its commitment to clearing Woking’s debt.”

The announcement came alongside confirmation that Surrey will be split into two new unitary councils, replacing the current county and district system by 2027. While more than half of those who responded to the public consultation backed a three-way split, ministers said the two-unitary model was “more likely to be financially sustainable”. Local government minister Alison McGovern said the decision “does not set any precedent” for other areas, but acknowledged Surrey’s “unique financial context”: a hint that more support could still be needed. The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government have been asked for comment.

Emily Dalton LDRS

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Image: Woking Victoria Square Towers (View From North)

Some election detail on the new Surrey Councils

4 November 2025



Election dates in Surrey, and how the seats will be split in the two new mega councils, have been confirmed as more details emerge of how everything will work following the Government's local government reorganisation announcement. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government wrote to council bosses across Surrey laying out the roadmap to how and when the old authorities will be abolished. Councils will be sent a draft structural change order with a November 7 deadline to give their feedback. From there, parliament will scrutinise the plans in early January before the formal creation of East Surrey Council and West Surrey Council - and the abolishment of the existing authorities. Elections for the new councils will take place in May 2026 in order to create shadow bodies that will sit alongside the outgoing system. Those elected will be responsible for budgets and long term planning before formally taking over local government functions and powers on April 1 2027.

The new councils will run under a leader and cabinet model, as is currently the case with Surrey County Council. The outgoing councils will remain responsible for services in their areas until they are abolished on April 1 2027. It is understood wards in the new mega councils will follow the current county boundaries - having only recently undergone an electoral boundary review. The major difference will be that each ward will have two councillors representing their areas rather than the current one. Elections will be overseen by the head of paid service of Reigate and Banstead Borough Council for East Surrey Council, and the head of paid service of Runnymede Borough Council for West Surrey.

The ministry has said it wants the first elections to carry a five-year term and is scheduling the second ballots for 2031. After this it will revert to a standard four-year cycle. Writing to Surrey councils' chief executive, Ruth Miller, deputy director for local government reform and strategy, said: "This is in line with recent reorganisations and brings benefits of stability, with councillors serving most of their first year on the 'shadow' council. From your representations that means the election cycle will align with the majority of elections to parish councils. Where that is not the case, we can, in further legislation, look to align parish elections with the 2031 election, and we will be guided by your views."

Any Parish council elections are expected to take place as normal in 2027. During the shadow year, the new councils will be expected to prepare and submit a devolution proposal or consent to a government plan, to progress the work for a Strategic Authority.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

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Image: Scout outside a polling station Molesey (image: Chris Caulfield)

Epsom and Ewell to Go East in Surrey shake-up

4 November 2025



The Government has confirmed plans to abolish Surrey’s two-tier system of local government and replace it with two single-tier unitary councils — East Surrey and West Surrey — in what is being described as the biggest reform of local administration in the county for half a century.

A letter from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Steve Reed MP, sent to Surrey’s council leaders on 28 October 2025, confirmed the decision to proceed with the two-unitary model, subject to Parliamentary approval. The change will dissolve Surrey County Council and its eleven borough and district councils, creating two large authorities responsible for all local services.

Under the plan, **Epsom & Ewell** will join Elmbridge, Mole Valley, Reigate and Banstead, and Tandridge to form the new East Surrey Unitary Authority. The remainder of the county — Guildford, Runnymede, Spelthorne, Surrey Heath, Waverley and Woking — will form West Surrey. Each authority will be responsible for everything from waste and planning to adult social care, highways and schools.

Elections for the new shadow councils are expected in **May 2026**, with the new authorities assuming full powers from 1 April 2027, once the required Structural Changes Order has been approved by Parliament.

In a statement issued Tuesday, **Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC)** said it “acknowledges the decision of Government to proceed with the creation of two new unitary councils” and pledged to work constructively to secure the best outcomes for residents.

Council Leader **Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) said: “Although this is not the decision we had hoped for, our focus now is on supporting the transition in a way that protects our residents’ interests and maintains the quality of local services. Epsom & Ewell has always prided itself on being a well-run, community-focused council, and that commitment remains unchanged.”

EEBC said it would continue working closely with neighbouring councils and government officials and would “keep residents fully informed every step of the way” as plans for the new East Surrey authority take shape.

Three local Liberal Democrat MPs — **Helen Maguire** (Epsom & Ewell), Chris Coghlan (Dorking & Horley) and Monica Harding (Esher & Walton) — issued a joint statement describing the reorganisation as “an important moment of clarity for Surrey after years of uncertainty and financial mismanagement under the Conservatives”.

Helen Maguire MP said she welcomed the new chapter for Surrey, particularly the confirmation that local elections will now proceed: “I am pleased that Surrey is entering a new chapter with the introduction of these unitary authorities, and it is right that the local elections will now go ahead, especially after the delays. The Liberal Democrats have always championed decisions being made closer to the people they affect. We will continue to press the Government to give East Surrey Council the funding and freedom it needs to do its job effectively.”

Her colleague Chris Coghlan MP said he welcomed “the end to Tory mismanagement of Surrey County Council” and added that it was “entirely inappropriate that [the County Council] has such influence over the new structure,” citing its record on special educational needs and disabilities.

Monica Harding MP said Elmbridge residents should not be “expected to shoulder the debt of the failing Tory-run councils elsewhere in Surrey,” adding: “It’s high time residents get the chance to vote out failed Surrey leadership and replace them with those who will deliver for our transport systems, our adult social care, and our schools.”

The MPs said that while they support the simplification of Surrey’s structures, there remain serious concerns about how much control Surrey County Council will retain during the transition process. They called for full public consultation and financial transparency throughout.

In his letter to Surrey leaders, Secretary of State Steve Reed MP said the decision to proceed with two new unitary councils was driven by the need for financial sustainability. Across Surrey’s existing councils, total debt is estimated at £5 billion, led by the bankruptcy of Woking Borough Council.

He wrote: “In particular, I believe [two unitaries] performs better against the criterion of whether the councils are the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks. My view is that the two-unitary proposal is more likely to be financially sustainable.”

He confirmed a Government commitment to repay **£500 million of Woking’s debt** in 2026–27 — calling it a “significant and unprecedented commitment” necessary to give the new system a clean start.

Surrey County Council Leader **Tim Oliver** (Conservative) welcomed the decision, calling it “good news for Surrey residents and businesses. We welcome the Government’s direction to create two new unitary councils for Surrey from April 2027 – East Surrey and West Surrey,” he said. “Reorganisation and devolution are huge opportunities, and this is good news for Surrey residents and businesses. As expected, there will be elections to the new unitary councils in May 2026. This reform will unlock huge benefits for Surrey, with more powers held closer to communities, stronger local decision-making and turbo-charged economic growth for the region.”

Oliver added that he was “absolutely clear that, throughout this process, our vital work supporting residents will continue – services will be delivered and we will still be here for those who need us most.”

Currently, Surrey County Council runs roads, social care and education, while borough and district councils handle bins, planning, housing and leisure. Under the new model, residents will deal with one council instead of two, which ministers say will make services more efficient and reduce duplication.

Officials have confirmed that council tax rates across the new areas are likely to be “harmonised” over time, though details are yet to be finalised. The Government says the reorganisation will save money and improve accountability, but critics warn that merging larger and indebted authorities could make councils more remote and financially fragile.

For **Epsom & Ewell** – which has existed as an independent borough since 1937 – the coming eighteen months will bring detailed negotiations over staffing, budgets and boundaries as the East Surrey authority takes shape.

If Parliament approves the necessary legislation early next year, the new structure will come into force on 1 April 2027, marking the end of Surrey’s 12 existing councils and the beginning of a new era in local government.

Image: Map illustrating proposed East and West Surrey unitary boundaries. Epsom & Ewell joins Elmbridge, Mole Valley, Reigate and Banstead and Tandridge in East Surrey. Source: Surrey County Council. Credit SCC

Sam Jones – Reporter



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A former Epsom Long Grove Hospital patient remembered for his pacifism

4 November 2025



Barney Cohen (1897-1970)

By his nephew, Andy Strowman

There is a very quiet cemetery in London – East Ham Jewish Cemetery. You may be the only visitor there apart from the grave workers. Among the rows of stones lies one marked *Barnett Cohen* – the only one there by that name.

Barney, as the family called him, was born in 1897 in Whitechapel. His parents were Milka (Millie) and Hershel (Harris) Cohen, and the family lived at 17 Milward Street, behind the London Hospital. His brothers were Jack and David, his sisters Rachel and Rose. The same house later became my home too, long before I was born.

Barney grew up in hard times. Like so many of his generation, he left school at fourteen and joined the garment trade. He was gentle by nature, a man who never said a bad word about anyone. I think he lacked confidence – something I have inherited too.

When the Second World War broke out, he enlisted. But when faced with the prospect of killing, he refused. He simply could not harm another human being. For that courage – for it was courage – he was punished. He was placed in the guardhouse and later imprisoned in Wormwood Scrubs as a conscientious objector.

In prison he suffered terribly. His weight fell to five and a half stone. My grandmother Millie, desperate to save him, sought help from her sisters in North London. Together, they visited a government office, and — as the old East End saying goes — *the brown envelope changed hands*. Only then was he released.

A retired officer once told me what those conditions were like: “You wouldn’t have liked it in there. Tiny cells, no space, noise all night — shouting, banging, threats. We only stepped in if someone started hitting you.”

Barney came out of prison changed. He was nervous, forever scratching, anxious about his work. If he worked beside his brother Jack, he was always asking, “*Is this all right?*”

When I was sixteen, my mother told me that Uncle Barney had endured six sessions of electro-convulsive therapy at **Long Grove Hospital in Epsom** — the same hospital that later held Ronnie Kray. Long Grove closed in 1992, but its shadow remains.

Yet Barney was no shadow. Despite his suffering, he radiated kindness. He loved to make people laugh, performing little magic tricks that delighted us as children. Once, when I was about eight, he came to visit us during his lunch break from the Ellis and Goldstein factory. While he talked to my mother, I quietly bolted the front door so he couldn’t leave. My mother struggled with the latch and he burst out laughing — a moment of warmth I have never forgotten.

He married Dolly, and my mother, then fourteen, was his bridesmaid. Life was not easy for them. Poverty, mental illness, and misunderstanding strain any family, and in those days help was scarce and sympathy rarer still.

Barney once told a story about visiting London Zoo on a Sunday in his best suit. A commotion broke out near the monkey cage; he joined the crowd, only for one of the monkeys to run off and return — to spit a mouthful of water all over his suit. The crowd roared with laughter, and so did Barney. That was his nature — to laugh even when the joke was on him.

He died in 1970, still working, collapsing at his workplace at Ellis and Goldstein in Aldgate. His brother Jack said simply, “He always lacked confidence. If I was sewing beside him, he kept asking, ‘*Is this all right?*’”

Barney’s life was not easy. He came from poverty, fought private battles with fear and illness, and faced the cruelty of others with quiet dignity. But he also gave laughter, love, and gentleness to those around him.

His was the untold story of so many — the sensitive souls caught in the machinery of war, poverty, and misunderstanding. He suffered because he refused to harm others. That is a kind of heroism that seldom earns medals.

When I think of Uncle Barney, I see not weakness but light — the quiet strength of a man who never stopped being kind, no matter what the world did to him.

I dedicate these words to him, and to all who, like him, struggled to fit into life yet gave it more compassion than it ever gave them.

Andy Strowman

Image: Barney at son’s wedding. Barney on right.

You can read many stories of former patients of the cluster of Epsom psychiatric hospitals on the website of The Friends of Horton Cemetery

Battling Beckenham Take Sutton & Epsom RFC The Full Distance

4 November 2025



Sutton & Epsom 22 Beckenham 19. Saturday 25th October.

This fixture is rapidly gaining a reputation for fabulous finishes. Two seasons ago the visitors triumphed 42-41 on a sweltering afternoon as they watched Freddy Bunting’s last-moment touchline penalty from halfway miss by millimetres. Last time the hosts prevailed 20-19 when Lewis Bunton’s last-ditch drop kick failed in direction and altitude. On Saturday in excess of 250 avaricious spectators gathered expecting more drama and they were not disappointed as **Tom Lennard’s** last kick of the game earned Sutton a 22-19 triumph.

An ominous slate-grey sky punctuated by a resplendent rainbow hung over the clubhouse environs. Fortuitously, the



match avoided the predicted precipitation but the wind was a constant hindrance to the place-kickers. Sutton welcomed back most of their society absentees. In contrast Beckenham arrived in reduced circumstances, not only minus their second-row pairing but also their centre combination from Round 6. The Kent club kicked off and the first opportunity was engineered by S&E. A well-angled kick by **Tom Lennard** was improved by **Kyren Ghumra's** chase and charge down. **Sam Lennie** dragged the scrambling defender into touch and the Black & Whites had a five-metre attacking lineout within five minutes of play. All seemed set for an imperious catch-and-drive try but a shrill blast from the whistle indicated an infraction enabling Beckenham to have the first scrum of the afternoon. A penalty ensued and the visitors cleared their lines.

After ten minutes Beckenham enjoyed a period of total domination. The Sutton & Epsom defence was exceptional against robust carrying, grubber kicks and jinking backs. Unfortunately for the Black & Whites it ended like the Alamo rather than Mafeking. The ten-minute onslaught concluded with **George Bunton** squeezing into the corner. The fraternal failure to add the extras by **Lewis Bunton** did not diminish Beckenham's deserved 5-0 lead nearing the end of the first quarter. Moments later, misfortune struck the visitors as centre **Matt Lovell** was forced off through injury, stretching their resources even further in that position as winger **Fran Pennacchia** stepped up to the challenge.

Sutton had a golden opportunity to open their account with another five-metre line. It was overthrown and Beckenham countered through their excellent flanker **Kareem Swandells** as he motored towards halfway. A couple of passes later **George Bunton** was in possession, he chipped ahead, re-gathered the ball and sauntered in under the posts. It was a sensational score as the recent returnee from the Northeast added his second try. A Beckenham baritone boomed: "Sutton supporters, where were you when the best try was scored on your ground?" **Lewis Bunton** put the cherry on the Bunton family celebratory cake with the simple kick for an impressive 12-0 lead.

The Balmoral Avenue boys pressed on and **Gareth O'Brien** was forced to touch down and then centre **Greg Lawlor** came close to scoring on the half hour. Finally, Sutton enjoyed some possession and engineered another five-metre chance. Despite advancing towards glory, prop **Alex Mount** was held up over the line. The first period was entering its final moments of regulation time. Yet another five-metre attempt came up short but the hosts had the consolation of a penalty. The forwards took control and, *mirabile dictu*, **Alex Mount** scored. **Tom Lennard** added the conversion for 7-12. The first half had endured multiple interruptions and belatedly concluded after almost fifty minutes of breathless entertainment with Beckenham leading 12-7.

Beckenham were good value for their interval advantage. They had monopolised territory and possession with back-row forwards **Kareem Swandells**, **Tom Ward** and captain **Andrew Knowles** in superb form and winger **Kyron Bennett** a constant threat. Their swarming defence had denied Sutton time and space, neutering the threat of the home backs. S&E had been remarkably resilient in defence and had fashioned multiple opportunities from attacking lineouts. The final outcome was still very much in the balance and another nail-biting finale looked probable.

The start of the second half made onlookers recall Laurel & Hardy, the Keystone Cops and Fred Karno's Army. **Rob Hegarty** was fortunately placed to purloin the ball on halfway. He walked back to connect with support but it was dislodged and kicked ahead. Sutton were in full retreat as Beckenham sprinted with optimism to the corner. The ball rolled free behind the S&E line and **Kyren Ghumra** decided to counter. He narrowly evaded a couple of tackles in his lateral run before seeking the far touch. His kick hit the upright and went straight to the opposition. The visitors added to the pandemonium by dropping the ball with the line at their mercy. Encouraged by that mayhem, moments later, number 8 **Andrew Knowles** kicked ahead once more and nearly manufactured a try.

Sutton were desperate for a modicum of control and a period of sustained pressure. After some encouraging phases fifteen minutes into the half they were awarded a kickable penalty. Despite trailing by only five points they opted for yet another attacking lineout. The mountainous **McTaggart** rose to claim the ball. The forwards rolled ever onwards towards the uprights. The ever-alert scrum-half **Laurence Wise** took the ball, dummied and reached for the line for a try. **Tom Lennard's** kick failed but Sutton were level at 12-12.

Tom Boaden came on to replace try-scorer **Alex Mount** in the front row with the final quarter approaching. Beckenham responded positively to the setback and twice were frustrated by errant handling deep in the Sutton 22 as they put the hosts under the cosh. The exemplary Black & White defence spread across the park, tackled tenaciously and refused to take a step backwards. Having weathered the storm it was the Surrey side that secured the lead with their next visit to the Kent half. Another penalty was kicked to the 22. After the frustrations of earlier lineouts what followed was a catch and drive of pure perfection and the forwards marched over the line from 15 metres with hooker **Sam Lennie** scoring. The **Tom Lennard** conversion followed such a bizarre path that the ball might have been remotely controlled as it meandered over the posts for a 19-12 lead.

With ten minutes remaining referee **Ruben Gobregts** issued a yellow card to reduce Beckenham to 14 men. Boosted by their numerical superiority Sutton looked to be in control and a bonus-point try looked more likely than an equalising score from Beckenham. However, captain **Andrew Knowles** had other ideas as he stole the ball near halfway. His kick ahead was weighted to perfection to force a drop out. The visitors now flung themselves into attack. Penalties followed and **Gareth O'Brien** was shown a yellow to make it 14 v 14. From close range **Rimarni Richards** powered over the line, as is his wont at Rugby Lane, having scored last season to add to the brace he scored two years ago. The conversion made it 19-19 with the crowd expecting yet more drama.

For the third season on the trot it came down to the last kick of the game. This time it was the boot of **Tom Lennard**. Having removed his headgear, he steadied himself and sent the ball through the uprights to secure a 22-19 victory. It was a pulsating affair that could have gone either way and arguably a draw would have been the fairest outcome. Beckenham, with their back row in their vanguard, had been superb. Equally, Sutton's superb number 8 **Rob Hegarty** carried courageously in adversity in a victory built on defensive durability and self-belief.

Both teams will be glad that next Saturday is a rest weekend before league hostilities resume on Saturday 8 November when Sutton visit Battersea Ironsides at their famous facility with canine connotations.

Sutton & Epsom: O'Brien, Benson, Rea, Bibby, Ghumra, Lennard, Wise, Johnson, Lennie, Mount, McTaggart (c), Duey, Tame, Jones & Hegarty.

Replacements: Boaden, Butt & Elliott.

Beckenham: Bunton G., Pennacchia, Lovell, Lawlor, Bennett, Bunton L., Gurney, Baker, Aoke-Tiamu, Richards, Moran, Tookey, Swandells, Ward & Knowles (c).

Replacements: Brown, Willden & Charles.

John Croysdill

Image from a previous fixture. - credit Robin Kennedy

Ewell's Sporting Ambition for Gibraltar Rec Hits the Rocks

4 November 2025



£3.1 Million Sports Hub Proposal at Gibraltar Recreation Ground Rejected amid Transparency and Planning Concerns

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Strategy and Resources Committee (S&R) rejected a proposal to spend £3.1 million of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds on transforming Gibraltar Recreation Ground (GRG) in Ewell into a "Centre of Sporting Excellence" at its meeting on 25 September 2025.

The plan, fully recommended by the CIL Member Working Group (CIL MWG), would have created a multi-sport community hub featuring new and refurbished pitches, floodlit courts, a pavilion extension, solar panels, CCTV, and improved access. The project was recorded in committee papers with an overall criteria score of 8/10 and a best-value score of 2/3.

What Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Is and How It Works

Community Infrastructure Levy is a national charge on new developments designed to fund infrastructure supporting local growth, such as schools, roads, and leisure facilities. In Epsom and Ewell, receipts are divided approximately into:

- 70-80% Strategic CIL for borough-wide projects
- 15-25% Neighbourhood CIL for community-level schemes
- 5% for administration

As of September 2025, the Council reported £6.086 million unallocated Strategic CIL and £1.138 million Neighbourhood CIL.

A Closed Decision-Making Process

The CIL Members Working Group is composed of Councillors. It evaluates and recommends spending of millions, meets privately without publishing minutes or allowing public or press attendance. The group comprises Councillors Neil Dallen (Chair) (RA Town), Alex Coley (Independent - Ruxley), Liz Frost (RA Woodcote and Langley), James Lawrence (LibDem College), Rob Geleit (Labour - Court), Phil Neale (RA Cuddington), Kieran Persand (Conservative Horton), Alan Williamson (RA West Ewell), and Clive Woodbridge (RA Ewell Village). Only summary scoring and recommendations appear in the Strategy & Resources Committee meeting documents, limiting transparency about debates, votes, and possible conflicts of interest.

Open Chamber Debate Highlights

Chair Councillor **Neil Dallen** reminded members that the Gibraltar project still required an additional £500,000 in revenue funding to be considered later and that planning permission was needed before any construction.

Councillor **James Lawrence** opposed allocating £3.1 million now, citing concerns over capacity and linkage to the Local

Plan: “This... is the one item that there was a bit of disagreement in the member working group on... Because we had identified... Hook Road Arena would be where we provide a centre of sporting excellence, that was always our plan... This bid kind of came a little bit out of the blue... I happen to not like this bid. I think it’s a lot of money... although [Gibraltar Rec] is in need of upgrading, that would only cost about six or 700k rather than 3.1 million.”

He warned about risking depletion of Strategic CIL funds: “If we vote for [Gibraltar Rec]... we’ll have about 1.6 million left in a strategic CIL fund... it would lower our ability if we need to support Hook Road Arena... particularly because the one in Hook Road Arena will at least be near some big Local Plan development. This... will not be near new developments.”

Councillor **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) questioned duplication and timing: “I was quite shocked when I saw this... all of a sudden, we’re going to have two super sport sites... I think it should wait until the... Hook Road Arena is decided... I’m thinking 3.1 million... Suddenly here, in the face of the local government reorganization... I’m suspicious of the motivations.”

On whether GRG would compete with Hook Road Arena, Councillor Dallen said: “It’s not an either or... Hook Road Arena... will develop... and Gibraltar Rec can be done in parallel with that, or in advance of that, or behind that... I’m not sure they’d be competing. I think they would be complementary... we’re very short of sporting facilities, and the more we can get, I think the better.”

Councillor **John Beckett** (RA Auriol) asked: “Will Gibraltar Rec be up and running before Hook Road Arena?” Councillor Dallen responded: “I personally believe it will be... long before anything at Hook Road happens.”

Planning officials highlighted that Hook Road Arena is expected beyond the first five years of the Local Plan period, projecting delivery from 2030 onwards.

Governance and Potential Conflicts

Concerns emerged about spending nearly half of the remaining Strategic CIL on a single site and whether Gibraltar Rec aligns with CIL’s statutory purpose, which emphasises investment near new developments. The Chair disclosed a personal interest in local scouting just before S&R approved a separate £50,000 Neighbourhood CIL grant to the 3rd Epsom Scouts for a community building rebuild. This expenditure was approved without discussion with Cllr Dallen remaining in the Chair.

The vote on the Gibraltar Recreation Ground Sporting Excellence project was one vote for, two votes against, two abstentions and the Chair not voting.

Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village), a keen supporter of the Gibraltar Rec. project, told the Epsom and Ewell Times; “Naturally I was disappointed by the decision, although I accept that the bid did require a large sum of money to be allocated. However I do believe it would have provided a fantastic legacy project for the Borough, addressing for example the shortage of football and cricket pitches, as identified in the Local Plan’s Playing Pitch strategy, while providing some exciting new facilities, such as a public Padel court to meet demand for this increasingly popular sport. I am confident also that it would have leveraged in external grant funding from sporting bodies. Hopefully we can now discuss within the council how to address some of the concerns raised during the S&R committee meeting with a view towards potentially resubmitting a new, and possibly revised bid, sometime next year. The project certainly continues to enjoy my full support, so I will persevere!”

What Happens to the £3.1 Million?

With the recommendation declined, the £3.1 million remains in the Council’s Strategic CIL pot, increasing the unallocated balance to about £4.7 million. The funds remain ring-fenced for infrastructure under the Council’s CIL Spending Protocol. However, the handling of interest accrued on unspent CIL balances is not disclosed.

Calls for Greater Transparency and Clarity

The controversy highlights debates about whether a private councillors working group should steer multi-million-pound spending without greater public scrutiny. Residents lack access to debates, detailed scoring, or councillor voting records, limiting accountability on how priorities are balanced or conflicts managed.

The broader question remains: should CIL funding follow the locations of new development closely, or should it support borough-wide projects deemed strategically important?

For now, the “Centre of Sporting Excellence” at Gibraltar Recreation Ground remains stuck between a rock and a hard place.

Image: Gibraltar Recreation ground - Google

Sam Jones - Reporter



Calculating the cost of care in Surrey

4 November 2025



Surrey residents and their families can now benefit from a simple new online tool to help them be prepared for the costs of care, if they become less able.

Many of us don't realise that we are likely to have to pay for some or all of our own care, especially if we have savings over £14,250. And while most people who need care tend to be older, support needs can emerge at any age due to illness or injury.

Surrey County Council's new **Care Cost Indicator** allows people who arrange and pay for their care to see how much it may cost to stay in a typical residential / nursing home compared to receiving care or support in their own home. Using a simple slider to choose the number of weeks, months or years they wish to plan for, people can judge how long their savings or assets may last.

Once people know the costs, it's easier to prepare, or see how spending some money now can help avoid more expensive care further down the line. Simple equipment, new technology or small changes to people's homes can make the difference between living independently and needing assistance.

Research with Surrey residents in January 2025 highlighted:

- 81% were concerned how they would pay for their care
- Only 13% have sought or plan to seek independent financial advice about care costs

Furthermore, a **recent study into care home residents by the independent health and social care champion Healthwatch Surrey** showed only 33% of people interviewed had actually planned for the costs involved.

The new indicator, which was designed and tested with local people, aims to prompt residents to plan ahead. The online information features lots of useful tips to help with preparation and ensure that future arrangements are affordable.

Figures show that Surrey residents live longer than most other parts of the country. But the same reported data shows that at least a decade is likely to be spent in poorer health, increasing the likelihood of care being required.

While homeowners in Surrey might think they can always use the proceeds from a house sale to fund any care they need, even this is not certain. Based on an **average house sale of around £590,000**, if a couple both needed to move into a care home, their nest egg could easily be used up in a little over three and a half years.

Sinead Mooney, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care at Surrey County Council, said: *"No-one knows what the future will hold for us or our loved ones, but understanding the costs of care is complex and many people are shocked to learn the true figures.*

"Doing what we can to stay independent and live in our own home is most people's goal, and receiving care at home from a visiting provider can be more cost-effective than a move into a residential facility. But we also need to be aware that our needs may change - and discuss our wishes with our families.

"Every year we see people who are 'self-funding' run out of money, at which point their families may have to step in to help them stay in a more expensive care home, rather than face the upheaval of moving. Planning ahead can lessen the chance of that happening, which is why appreciating the price you can expect to pay for care is so important."

The Care Cost Indicator can be found at www.surreycc.gov.uk/carecostindicator

It supports Surrey County Council's nationally commended **Planning for your Future** campaign which is run in partnership with local charity, Age UK Surrey. The campaign aims to help people prepare for later life, and have an early conversation with family about their plans.

Surrey County Council



Walk brings the wonders of the Solar System to Nonsuch Park

4 November 2025



Epsom & Ewell, Saturday 25th October 2025 – Visitors to Nonsuch Park can now enjoy a journey through the Solar System thanks to the successful launch of the Nonsuch Park Solar Walk, officially opened on Saturday in a well-attended community event celebrating science, nature, and local heritage.

The Solar Walk is an engaging, scaled model of the Solar System stretching through one of Epsom & Ewell’s most loved green spaces. Each planet is represented by an informative plaque showing its relative distance and size in comparison to the Sun – helping visitors of all ages experience the vastness of space in an accessible and educational way.

Developed in partnership with the Ewell Astronomical Society (EAS), the project combines outdoor recreation with science learning in a fun and interactive way. The EAS provided their astronomical expertise and educational input, helping to bring the concept to life for residents and visitors alike.

“Anyone visiting the park can now experience the scale and vastness of our Solar System whilst enjoying the beautiful surroundings of the historic park,” the Society explains on its website.

The launch event saw local councillors, community volunteers, and families take part in guided walks, children’s activities, and talks from members of the EAS.

Cllr Steven McCormick said: “The Solar Walk is a fantastic addition to Nonsuch Park – blending education, exercise, and the beauty of our surroundings. It’s ideal for families, schools, and visitors of all ages, and it’s a perfect activity to enjoy together this half term.”

The Solar Walk encourages everyone – from young children discovering the planets for the first time to adults curious about astronomy – to explore the park, learn something new, and stay active outdoors. It’s a great way to spend quality time with family and friends during the half-term break.

Nonsuch Park continues to be a cherished green space for Epsom & Ewell residents, offering a mix of recreation, history, and natural beauty. The Solar Walk adds a new dimension for visitors – quite literally – to walk among the planets.

For more information about the Solar Walk, including trail maps and learning materials, visit the Ewell Astronomical Society website.

Space walk launch Nonsuch Park. Featuring Epsom and Ewell Mayor Cllr Robert Leach (2nd from right) and Cllr Steven McCormick (RA Surrey County and EEBC Woodcote and Langley ward)

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Remembrance and Armistice Day activities 2025

4 November 2025



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is proud to announce that Remembrance and Armistice Day memorial services, parades and activities will take place across the borough to honour those who have died in the service of their country and give thanks to those past and present who have served **in** the armed forces. Formal Acts of Remembrance will include the council's annual Garden of Remembrance at Bourne Hall Park on 5 November, Remembrance Day wreath laying and procession on 9 November and an Armistice Day Service on 11 November.

Garden of Remembrance: Wednesday 5 November

On Wednesday 5 November at 10.30am, The Mayor of Epsom & Ewell, the Chief Executive of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council and local schoolchildren will officially open the Garden of Remembrance. Children will perform songs and poems and place poppy tokens to honour and remember all those who have died in the service of their country. **The Garden will be open to the public until the end of November**, giving people the opportunity to visit, and take time to reflect.

Remembrance Sunday: 9 November

At 9.30am the Mayor of Epsom & Ewell will lay two wreaths at the War Memorials in Ashley Road, Epsom. This will be followed by a Remembrance Day procession from the Army Reserve Centre at Welbeck Close and ending at St Mary's Church, Ewell - followed by an Act of Remembrance service, wreath laying and a church service.

Armistice Day Service (11/11/11): Tuesday 11 November

Members of the public are invited to join a ceremony at the Clock Tower at 10.40am in Epsom Market Place. The Mayor, Chief Executive and elected Councillors will join the Royal British Legion, armed forces, veterans and local schools at the service which ends with observation of the nationwide Two Minute Silence at 11am.

Jackie King, Chief Executive, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, said: "In this moment of remembrance, we pause to honour the service and sacrifice of our Armed Forces. We remember with deep gratitude those who gave their lives in defence of our freedoms, and we honour those who continue to serve with courage and commitment. We will remember them."

Other Remembrance Day activities

Large poppies, kindly donated by the Royal British Legion, are being placed in Epsom High Street, Ewell High Street and Stoneleigh Broadway alongside other poppies placed around the borough.

Events and activities also taking place will include:

- **Bourne Hall Museum: World War I Walk on Saturday 8 November at 10am (free event)**

The public can join Tim Richardson for a walk around Langley Vale First World War Centenary Wood. More information can be found [here](#).

- **Museum Kids club at Bourne Hall: Meet Captain Townsley on Saturday 8 November at 1pm to 2pm (£6.50)**

Children can come along and hear about tales of the war and handle real equipment and uniform. More information can be found [here](#).

For more information on Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Remembrance Day activities - Remembrance in the borough of Epsom & Ewell | Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council



Photo: 2024 Remembrance Event Epsom Market Square, led by then Mayor Cllr Steve Bridger - credit Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

Is there a neat solution to struggling Epsom Common Club?

4 November 2025



The long-established Epsom Common Club remains closed but not forgotten, as a handful of volunteers continue restoration work and urge fellow members to help decide whether a partnership proposal could bring the venue back to life.

Emails circulated by the Club Committee since late September set out a potential arrangement with **NEAT**, a local community organisation best known for transforming the disused bowls pavilion in Court Recreation Ground into “NEAT HQ”. Founded by two former Chelsea Foundation coaches, NEAT provides wrap-around childcare, alternative schooling for pupils unable to remain in mainstream education, and a wide range of family and youth activities.

Under the plan, NEAT would rent the rear hall of the Club’s premises for use during the week and contribute to finishing both the front and back halls. The Club explains that this could secure a steady income stream, remove the need to rent the front room to outside hirers, and revive the building as a “community hub”. However, it would also mean losing the existing snooker room and restricting member use of part of the premises.

The Club’s emails emphasise that the idea is still a proposal only. “Before it could proceed to this stage it would require members’ consent and this was stressed to NEAT as non-negotiable,” wrote the Club Secretary, Mr C. O’Neil, in response to Epsom & Ewell Times.

Three rounds of consultation emails have been sent to roughly 220 members—about three-quarters of the Club’s recorded list—but only around seven per cent initially replied. Later reminders lifted the total response rate, producing an approximate three-to-one majority in favour of exploring talks, though still short of what organisers regard as a clear mandate.

With no formal committee now in place and the Club being managed informally by the Secretary and one assisting member, progress has been slow. The handful of volunteers who meet on Saturday mornings to carry out repairs are credited with keeping the building from dereliction. “If this idea is allowed to wither on the vine it could well be last orders for your Club,” one circular warned.

Mr O’Neil told the *Times* that if members give approval, formal negotiations would follow to settle details such as rent, permitted uses, and neighbour consultation. Any final agreement would then be put to a members’ meeting for ratification. Questions about parking, noise, and the possible need for planning or licensing changes would be addressed at that stage.

For now, the Club remains closed to new memberships while restoration work continues. “The work is currently being undertaken by a few valiant members and any member wishing to assist would be welcomed,” said Mr O’Neil. Volunteers can make contact via the Club’s email address: **clubeventsecwmc@gmail.com**.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Epsom Common Club - Google Maps