

Epsom and Ewell Council leader message for 2026

28 December 2025



Cllr **Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) has outlined Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's goals for 2026 in a New Year message to residents. The leader has promised a smooth transition to the new mega council, East Surrey, and services will still be there for residents.

It has been a busy year for Cllr Dalton with growing financial pressures amid housing demand for those facing homelessness, planning applications on green belt sites and, of course, local government reorganisation and heated debates around parish councils.

The leader wrote:

"2026 will mark the final full year of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) as a local authority. As the one of the longest, independently led councils in England and Wales, that is quite a legacy and landmark.

"As Chair of the Surrey Leaders Group, I have been heavily involved in local government reorganisation (LGR) process since it was announced in December last year. The focus for me in the next 12 months will be around establishing the new East Surrey Unitary Council. As part of this I will be a member of the Joint Committee for LGR in Surrey, and I want to ensure the safe and legal transition of services to the new authority. My focus will also be on EEBC continuing to deliver for our residents and our legacy.

"Elections for the East Surrey Unitary Council in May 2026 will be pivotal, and I urge all Surrey residents to vote when the time comes. It's vital that everyone in our communities is represented, as these elections will decide the make-up of the new Unitary Council that will set the strategy for the next five years.

"EEBC is also currently carrying out its second and final consultation asking residents them whether they want to create two new community councils, Epsom Community Council and Ewell Community Council. Epsom & Ewell is unparished which means that when EEBC is dissolved, there will be no lower tier of local government, and we are asking if residents want new community councils to represent local voices, be a statutory consultee on planning matters, and more.

"Finally, next year I will look to reflect and recognise what EEBC has achieved during the 90 years since it was formed and the vast changes it has seen. It's an honour to lead the council in its final year of Residents' Association administration, and I'm proud to serve our community during this landmark time."

Emily Dalton LDRS

Hannah Dalton, leader of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council. (Credit: Epsom and Ewell Borough Council)

Mole Valley leaders look to their final year legacy

28 December 2025



We are entering the final full year for councils in Surrey before they are dissolved and merged into mega authorities - and the leaders know time is running out if they wish to fulfil any lasting ambitions. In October this year, the government announced that Surrey would change forever. From the ashes will rise two mega authorities that split the map effectively in two. People living in Waverley, Guildford, Woking, Surrey Heath, Spelthorne and Runnymede will soon be calling West Surrey home, while East Surrey will cover Epsom and Ewell, Elmbridge, Tandridge, Reigate and Banstead, and Mole Valley. West Surrey will be the larger of the two authorities, but will also have its share of financial challenges given the debt issues in Woking, Surrey Heath and Spelthorne.

Next year voters will go to the polls to elect their new representatives to sit in a shadow council before taking over in 2027. It means 2026 will be the last full year for councils to achieve any remaining goals. The Local Democracy Service

asked council leaders what they hoped to achieve before this seismic shift in how services are delivered in Surrey.

Councillor Bridget Kendrick, leader of Mole Valley District Council, said: "I can't believe how quickly the past year has gone and how much we've achieved in line with our vision for a fairer, greener Mole Valley that provides opportunities for all." She said highlights included delivering their best-ever programme of holiday activities for over 1,500 children, signing a Poverty Pledge that recognises and builds on their support for vulnerable people across Mole Valley, and progressing the development of much-needed small business units and housing on the Foundry site in the centre of Dorking. Other milestones included submitting a planning application for the regeneration of the Swan Centre and Bull Hill. The leader also singled out the council's action on homelessness, which she said prevented 233 households from becoming homeless, delivered 36 emergency housing units and 72 new affordable homes.

She added: "It's with a sense of nostalgia that I recognise next year's annual plan as the final one from Mole Valley District Council as we know it. From April 2027, the new East Surrey authority will take over, but until then we'll continue delivering for our residents and have a very busy schedule ahead. Our plans to refurbish playgrounds in Ashted, Bookham, Dorking and Leatherhead are progressing, with a destination playground planned for Riverside Park. We also have a very ambitious action plan for increasing biodiversity in Mole Valley, including rewilding, planting additional species and introducing additional ponds. The second phase of works for Dorking Halls is scheduled for this spring to ensure the venue is accessible and ready to welcome future visitors. Pippbrook House, our Grade II listed building, is growing in strength as a cultural hub with a packed list of events planned for the coming months and unique rooms available for community hire.

"We're also pleased to confirm that funding has been obtained to continue the work of our incredible MV Employment Hub, delivering job advice and support to hundreds of residents. We're planning another successful year of summer holiday activities, and our bursary scheme financially supporting children to access sports clubs' membership is open for applications. Mole Valley Life team continues to support the most vulnerable in the district, providing lifeline alarms and support services via our Fairfield Community Centre. On a more practical side, parking improvements are planned for next year and we're procuring a new waste contract to commence from June 2027 too. As we head into what I know will be a busy and productive final year for Mole Valley District Council, I'd like to take this moment to wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and a peaceful New Year."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Image: New Mole Valley District Council cabinet, including leader Cllr Bridget Kendrick (front left) and deputy leader Cllr Claire Malcomson (image MVDV)

Epsom Christmas Concert Triumphs After Last-Minute Conductor Crisis

28 December 2025



What could have been a genuine crisis for Epsom Choral Society's Christmas Concert on Saturday became a remarkable story of teamwork, professionalism, and musical courage.

The day began with unwelcome news. Early in the morning, Musical Director, Julian Collings, phoned to say he had been struck down with flu and was unable to conduct that evening's concert. This was to be no ordinary performance: it was completely sold out and featured two world premieres, making cancellation unthinkable.

From his sickbed, Julian immediately set about trying to find a replacement conductor for the evening. His first call was to Neil Ferris, conductor of the Leith Hill Music Festival. Unfortunately, Neil was unable to step in at such short notice, but he suggested a name: Victoria Ely. Crucially, ECS Chair, Helen Phillips, was able to recommend her with confidence, having seen Victoria in action when she took a rehearsal for Neil at one of the Leith Hill Music Festival rehearsals last Spring.

Victoria Ely, who had never met the choir before, bravely agreed to conduct the concert with just four hours' notice.

Meanwhile, Julian faced another formidable task. From home, he painstakingly scanned all of his marked-up scores - 20 different pieces, the parts for the brass quintet, and his detailed annotations and introductory notes. These were sent at speed to the ECS's Concert Management team, who rushed to print everything so it could be placed in Victoria's hands as soon as she arrived and so the brass had something to play! It was a race against the clock, but by 1pm everything was in place.

That afternoon's rehearsal was necessarily intense. Rather than imposing her own methods, Victoria immediately showed her musicianship and collaborative spirit by asking the choir to demonstrate how each piece had been rehearsed. She

listened carefully, adapted quickly, and worked with the choir's established approach, creating a sense of trust and calm despite the extraordinary circumstances.

By the time the evening concert arrived, what might have felt like an emergency substitution instead felt like a confident partnership. Victoria conducted with assurance, clarity, and good humour, guiding the choir through a demanding and varied programme. Her warm presence and engaging manner extended to the audience, who responded with enthusiasm and obvious enjoyment.

Against all odds, the concert was not merely rescued, it was a resounding success. For Epsom Choral Society the evening became a powerful reminder of the strength of its musical community and the generosity of fellow professionals. Thanks to Julian's determination, Helen's quick thinking, the Concert Manager's efficiency, and above all Victoria Ely's courage and skill, a potential disaster was transformed into a memorable and uplifting Christmas celebration.

Nina Kaye

'I don't believe I am a political person': Surrey leader reflects

28 December 2025



As Surrey heads into the new year, the mood at Woodhatch Place, the county council's head quarters, is one of reflection and quiet apprehension for the year ahead. For Tim Oliver, leader of Surrey County Council, the festive period comes at the end of what he described as a "busy" year. One that began with the announcement of the biggest shake up in local government for decades and will end with the council preparing for even more change in 2026.

"It's been quite a journey," he said, reflecting on the year since local government reorganisation was announced. "But we've ended it in a pretty good place in terms of setting ourselves up for the heavy lifting over the next 12 months."

While Christmas brings a lull in council business and many work places, Cllr Oliver joked that residents "with a bit of time on their hands" are still keen to get in touch about local issues. But there is no resentment in his voice, just a familiar sense of public service never stops.

Sat in an office of some description, a blurred bookshelf marked a hazy backdrop, the council leader seemed slightly weary but ready for a half-hour interview. Reflecting back on his time at the local authority, at the last full year in power, he said: "I just marked seven years as the leader of this council. I feel proud of what the council has done over that period in terms of financial stability, we've invested a lot into communities like 'Your Fund Surrey'."

"I don't believe that I am a political person," said Mr Oliver, the Conservative leader of the council, speaking to the local democracy reporting service. "Or that I run this council in an overtly political way."

It is a claim some of his colleagues and opponents may find laughable. Particularly when the councillors might claim the council is concerned about financial resilience despite all the criticism over its SEND service, asset-based funding and ambitions to empower communities and charities with funding rather than expand the council's services. But Mr Oliver confirmed the council should not be swayed by ideology and national movements. "There shouldn't be party politics in local government," he said. "We have one job here and we are elected to improve the lives of our residents."

Yet the past year has shown how difficult that principle can be to maintain. Debates over reorganisation, he said, have exposed what he described as a rise in "tribal politics" within the council's HQ. "One of the things that has been slightly disappointing over this last year is that there has been a bit of tribal politics around the reorganisation," he said. Mr Oliver added: "

However, this criticism has been robustly rejected by opposition councillors. Paul Follows, leader of the Liberal Democrats, said that while the Conservative leader was "disappointed" by the tone of the debate, the response from other parties reflected what they described as the reality that only the Conservatives supported pursuing local government reorganisation in its current form.

He said Lib Dems across Surrey had supported reform only where it was rooted in "genuine localism" and underpinned a proper assessment of the county's financial challenges. Cllr Follows said: "It is difficult to see what, if any, benefit this rushed process of local government reorganisation brings to Surrey - particularly to boroughs that are largely self-sufficient and solvent, such as Waverley, Guildford, and Reigate & Banstead."

Cllr Oliver acknowledged that local election results often reflect national sentiment, regardless of how councils perform. "You could be the most outstanding council," he said, "but if you're standing through a political party, it reflects the

national position.”

While he said he was proud of the council’s record on financial stability and service improvement, he admitted he did not know how voters would respond in an election likely to be shaped by national politics, council tax pressures and public frustration. “I genuinely don’t know what will happen here locally,” he said. Mr Oliver said he saw no evidence that Reform-run councils were doing anything fundamentally different from authorities already under financial pressure.

Despite his concerns, Mr Oliver said residents ultimately judge councils on outcomes rather than ideology, on results rather than rhetoric. As he prepares to take a step away from leadership, Mr Oliver said whoever takes over must remain true to acting in the best interest of residents.

Emily Dalton LDRS

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

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Epsom and Ewell one of the most expensive places to own a home in the UK

28 December 2025



Residents in Epsom and Ewell could be spending the equivalent of more than four-fifths of a **single** average salary on mortgage repayments, according to a new affordability analysis published by property buying firm Sell House Fast. The study ranks Epsom and Ewell fourth among UK areas outside London for the proportion of “net annual pay” it estimates would be taken up by annual mortgage repayments, putting the figure at 82.2%.

The analysis combines earnings data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings with local average house prices from the UK House Price Index. It then models mortgage repayment costs by assuming a 20 per cent deposit and applying the Bank of England base rate. On that basis, Sell House Fast lists Epsom and Ewell with a median annual net pay of £35,380, an average house price of £560,957, and estimated annual mortgage repayments of £29,083.

Official figures suggest the house-price element of the estimate is broadly consistent with published data. ONS housing statistics show the average house price in Epsom and Ewell was around £556,000 in October 2025 (provisional), rising to about £570,000 for homes bought with a mortgage.

Housing analysts caution, however, that figures of this kind are highly sensitive to assumptions. The analysis does not describe what existing homeowners in Epsom and Ewell actually pay each month, but instead models repayments using a fixed deposit level and an interest-rate assumption that may not reflect the mortgage products many households are on, particularly those who secured fixed-rate deals in earlier years. The Bank of England base rate has also changed several times over the past year, which can significantly affect illustrative repayment calculations.

It is also important to note that the comparison is based on the average net salary of a single individual. In practice, many mortgages in Epsom and Ewell are taken out jointly, with repayments shared between two wage earners, which can substantially alter affordability at the household level.

Even with these caveats, the analysis adds to wider evidence that Epsom and Ewell remains one of the least affordable areas in the South East when local incomes are set against local house prices, underlining the continued pressure faced by first-time buyers and households seeking to move within the borough.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Image: An Epsom Street - Google Maps

East Surrey gets new Police Station

28 December 2025



Surrey Police's near two-year hunt for a replacement to its shut, dangerous, crumbly concrete riddled Reigate station is over - with people only needing to walk travel miles to the new one. The new base for the Reigate and Banstead area will give the force a permanent presence and front counter for the public, the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) said after securing a building at Perrywood Business Park in Honeycrock Lane in Salfords. It comes after the 2023 closure of its Reigate Station that left officers and staff stationed in Mole Valley and Caterham Police Station.

Commissioner Lisa Townsend hailed the purchase as great for policing presence in East Surrey and follows what she described as an extensive search in the Reigate and Banstead area. The new building was considered to be the only suitable site in the area and will be funded by selling Reigate Police Station. This station will run alongside the force's new eastern division headquarters in Leatherhead, which was granted planning permission earlier this year. The PCC and senior officers wanted to find a secondary site in the Reigate and Banstead area specifically for a police station and front counter service for residents.

Surrey Police maintain a counter service during office hours in the Town Hall, The Parade. Epsom.

The Perrywood Business Park keeps the trend of police sites in industrial sites and will be just a three minute drive from the Surrey Custody Centre in Salbrook Road. Lisa Townsend said: "I know how much residents value their local policing presence so this is really fantastic news for our communities in the area. The discovery of RAAC and subsequent closure of Reigate Police Station has meant it has been a disruptive time for our hard-working teams in East Surrey. I want to pay tribute to their continued patience, professionalism and resilience in challenging circumstances. The search for a site in the Reigate and Banstead area has been extensive and Perrywood was the only building which met our needs so I am delighted that we have been able to secure the purchase. I believe that together with the progress being made on our new Eastern Division HQ in Leatherhead, this heralds a bright future for policing in East Surrey."

Deputy Chief Constable of Surrey Police Mark McEwan said: "We believe this new building will provide sufficient space and facilities for our teams, be fit for purpose and enable us to continue delivering the high levels of service our residents expect. Whilst we are still at the very early stages, considerations continue into where individual teams across the Eastern division will be based in the future and we will provide updates as and when we have them. The safety of our communities remains our priority and there will be no change to officers."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Reigate Police Station (Image Google)

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Epsom Christmas carols of two colleges and a council

28 December 2025



In the first and a unique festive venture for the Borough of Epsom Ewell a special carol service was held in the Chapel of St Luke, Epsom College this evening. Organised on the joint initiatives of Julie Kapsalis (CEO NESCOL), Jackie King (CEO Epsom and Ewell Borough Council) and Mark Lascelles (Head of Epsom College).

The event brought local choirs together including NESCOL's own choir, singers from Epsom College and the local Ukrainian choir Renaissance.

Solos were sung by Evie Kingsley, Sienna-Leigh Campbell, Benedict Raper and Caleb Mangatal-Francis.

Julie Kapsalis read from the Gospel of St Matthew 2: 1-12 and Jackie King recited her own reading "The Heart of Christmas", reprinted below.

The service was officiated with humour and aplomb by The Reverend Canon Andrew Haviland.

Epsom Racecourse supported the service.

And no less a figure than the Worshipful Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, Cllr Robert Leach (RA Nonsuch) accompanied the congregation on the magnificent Chapel organ and played the processional at the end J.S. Bach's Prelude and Fugue in F from his book of 8 preludes and fugues.

The carol service was an uplifting beginning for many to the festive season and promises have been made to make it a regular feature in the Borough in future years.

Lionel Blackman



The Heart of Christmas

There are so many ways to tell the story of Christmas.
Some begin with angels, some with gifts, some with the hush of falling snow.
But however the story starts, it always finds its way to one place-
the warmth we share when we come together.

Christmas is found in the quiet moments:
in the smell of something baking,
the sound of wrapping paper being carefully - or not so carefully - torn,
in the giggles of children who can't quite sleep,
and in the gentle nod of someone who's seen many Christmases before.

It's in the messages sent to far-off friends,
the unexpected kindness from a neighbour,
the extra chair pulled up to the table,
and the thought that maybe - just maybe -
there is more that connects us than divides us.

And in this season of gathering and giving.
we also pause for a moment to hold in our hearts
those who are not with us tonight-
loved ones we remember with tenderness,
and friends or family who are far away.

We think of Christmases past -
of laughter spilling across the table,
carols sung a little off-key,
hands held during snowy walks,
stories told beside the glow of the tree.
Those moments, though now memories,
are treasures we carry with us -
poignant reminders of love shared,
and joyful times that shaped who we are.
Their voices may have quietened,

but their light has not dimmed.
It lives in our hearts,
woven into every song, every smile, every candle we light.

Distance and time may keep us apart,
and for some, separation comes through hardship or conflict.
Tonight, we think of them too -
those far from home,
those seeking safety,
those waiting for peace.
May they feel the warmth of the world's compassion
and know that they are not forgotten.

For love is wonderfully stubborn;
it travels in our thoughts, in our stories,
and in the quiet spaces where we still feel their presence.
Each memory, each name whispered with a smile,
becomes part of the light that surrounds us now.

For some, Christmas means faith.
For others, it means family, friendship, or the turning of the year.
But for all of us, it can mean light-
the light we share when we care,
when we welcome,
when we choose to hope.

So tonight, as the music rises and the candles glow,
may we remember what truly makes this season shine:
not the decorations or the presents,
but the people-
those beside us,
those we miss,
and those we have yet to meet.

Because the heart of Christmas is not found under a tree -
it's found in us,
in every act of kindness,
every hand extended,
every loving thought that crosses the miles or the years.

For when we give, include, and love-
we keep the heart of Christmas alive.

Jackie King



Epsom waste site plans refused after years of noise and disruption complaints

28 December 2025



Plans to retrospectively approve changes at a controversial waste and recycling site near Epsom have been refused, following years of complaints from residents about noise, dust and early-morning lorry movements.

Surrey County Council's planning committee voted to reject the application for land at the Chalk Pit on College Road,

where skip hire firm Skip It Epsom Ltd operates, at a meeting on December 17.

Residents speaking at the meeting and objecting to the scheme online slammed the plans. They described how the site had been “destroying their lives” and making it a misery with constant noise, intruding on their home life and impacting nearby schools. Locals complained that site has not been built according to its planning permission.

The application was not for a brand-new site, but to regularise changes that had already been made to buildings and operations at the former waste transfer station, which was granted permission in 2023 to become a materials recycling facility.

However, councillors were told the development had not been built as approved and crucially, a required drainage system was never installed.

The operator wanted permission to change several conditions attached to the original approval, including:

- Buildings being built on a different footprint and with altered materials
- A new entrance and staircase
- Moving noisy waste-sorting machinery into a different building
- Changes to HGV parking and electric vehicle charging points

Officers described most of these changes as relatively minor and, on their own, acceptable even though the site sits in the Green Belt.

So why was it rejected? The refusal came down to one major issue: drainage. Councillors heard that the surface water drainage scheme approved in 2023 had never been installed, and that new assessments now showed a much larger soakaway was needed.

But part of the required drainage system would sit outside the application site, meaning it could not legally be approved or enforced through this planning application.

As a result, officers said an essential planning condition could no longer be met or reimposed, leaving the council with no option but to recommend refusal.

Local residents spoke passionately against the application at the meeting, describing years of disruption since operations ramped up in 2020.

Bernie Muir, local councillor for Epsom, told the committee that the site had been “destroying lives for five years”. She said: “People can’t use their gardens, open windows or work from home [...] There are serious mental health impacts from the constant noise.”

More than 170 objections were submitted overall. Residents complained of:

- Banging, clanging and crashing from skips being dropped
- Heavy lorries arriving as early as 5.30am
- Dust, light pollution and breaches of operating hours
- Noise carrying across the landscape due to the bowl-shaped chalk pit

Fiona, who lives around 350 metres from the site, said she had no problems for years after moving to the area until operations changed. “On some days the noise I experience in my garden is banging, clanging and repetitive crashing,” she said.

She also raised concerns about drainage, saying the site sits near a protected groundwater zone and the chalk geology is highly porous. “This is an unfixable flaw,” said John Beckett, an Epsom and Ewell borough council member.

Residents’ groups also argued that moving noisy machinery and changing the building entrance had directed sound towards homes that were never properly assessed in earlier reports.

Speaking for the applicant, a representative said she was aware of concerns but claimed the developer had not been invited to some of the multi-agency meetings.

Cllr Tim Hall said he was “surprised” by the claim, given the number of meetings held with residents, agencies and council officers over five years.

The applicant’s agent defended the criticism by describing the chalk pit as a “very busy site” and it is difficult to keep all the workers across the procedures to keep the doors closed and noise down. She also said the early starts referred to residents were “alleged breaches on the site” and the noise could be coming from elsewhere nearby.

Some councillors acknowledged residents’ frustrations, while others pointed out the site has long been industrial. Cllr Ernest Mallett MBE said: “At the end of the day, people bought houses next to an industrial site.” But others felt the problems went beyond normal industrial impact.

The refusal does not shut the site down but it does mean the unauthorised changes cannot be approved. To move forward, the operator would need to submit a new full planning application, including a drainage solution that can be properly assessed and enforced.

Emily Dalton LDRS

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"Heat and Dust" epic in Epsom

From Abramovich's frozen wealth to Epsom's Ashley Centre - support for Ukraine continues

28 December 2025



The Government has announced that £2.5 billion from the frozen proceeds of the sale of Chelsea Football Club by sanctioned Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich is to be directed towards humanitarian aid for Ukraine, following years of political and legal delay.

The money has been held in the UK since the forced sale of the football club in 2022, after Abramovich was sanctioned in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Ministers have now confirmed that the funds will be transferred to a foundation dedicated to humanitarian support for Ukraine, with legal action threatened if the process is not completed.

Helen Maguire, Liberal Democrat MP for Epsom and Ewell, welcomed the decision, describing it as "long-overdue action" and a step towards accountability. She said billions of pounds linked to sanctioned Russian oligarchs had remained frozen while Ukrainians continued to suffer the consequences of what she described as Putin's illegal war, and that she would continue to press the Government to ensure the money reaches Ukraine swiftly.

While £2.5 billion is a significant sum, it represents only a small proportion of the overall cost of the war's impact on Ukraine. According to the World Bank, the United Nations, the European Commission and the Ukrainian government, the estimated cost of recovery and reconstruction in Ukraine now stands at around \$524 billion over the next decade. That figure includes widespread destruction of housing, hospitals, schools, energy infrastructure and transport networks, alongside the long-term costs of healthcare, rehabilitation, psychological trauma and landmine clearance.

Direct physical damage to infrastructure alone is estimated at more than \$170 billion, while millions of civilians have been displaced and tens of thousands injured. The long-term health consequences of the war, including treatment for complex injuries and trauma, are expected to place a continuing burden on Ukraine's public services for many years. Against that backdrop, the Abramovich funds amount to well under one per cent of the estimated total cost of rebuilding, though they could make a substantial difference to targeted humanitarian and medical programmes.

The announcement has renewed local focus on the role of Surrey Stands With Ukraine, a volunteer-run charity based in Epsom which has been providing humanitarian aid since the early weeks of the invasion. Operating under Harrop HR Missions Ltd, the group has sent more than 148 vanloads of aid to Ukraine and has supported both medical relief overseas and displaced Ukrainians in the UK. The charity has also been recognised in Parliament, with Helen Maguire MP praising its work in providing medical aid and rehabilitation support.

For nearly four years, Surrey Stands With Ukraine has maintained a highly visible permanent kiosk in the Ashley Centre near Waitrose, which volunteers describe as central to sustaining donations, public awareness and community engagement. The kiosk is due to close permanently on 1 January 2026 following a change in the Ashley Centre's policy on charity fundraising.

Under the new arrangements, Surrey Stands With Ukraine has been selected as one of a small number of charities allowed to operate a branded market stall inside the centre for limited periods each month. From January 2026, the charity will operate a stall near the soon to open Primark on a restricted schedule, typically four days per month. Physical donations will continue to be accepted at the charity's Ukraine Hub in Global House, accessed via the rear entrance to the Ashley Centre.

Surrey Stands With Ukraine will operate a fundraising and information stall inside the Ashley Centre on the following dates in 2026. The stall will be located near Primark.

January: Tuesday 6, Thursday 8, 15 and 22
February: Tuesday 3, Thursday 5, 19 and 26
March: Tuesday 3, Thursday 5, 19 and 26
April: Tuesday 7, Thursday 9, 16 and 30

May: Tuesday 5, Thursday 7, 14 and 21
June: Tuesday 2 and 16; Thursday 4 and 11
July: Tuesday 7, Thursday 9, 16 and 30
August: Tuesday 4, Thursday 6, 13 and 20
September: Tuesday 1, Thursday 3, 10 and 17
October: Tuesday 6, Thursday 8 and 15

Physical donations can also be made at the Surrey Stands With Ukraine Hub in Global House, accessed via the rear entrance of the Ashley Centre by pressing the “Ukraine Hub” buzzer.

The loss of a permanent stand is expected to reduce income by around £30,000 a year and significantly limit the collection of physical aid. A spokesperson for SSWU stated the daily presence allowed volunteers to build relationships with regular donors and served as a constant reminder of the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Ukraine.

The Ashley Centre provides Surrey Stands With Ukraine with a suite of rooms and storage space in Global House, Ashley Avenue. The premises also are home to the Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network and is known as the “Ukraine Hub”. Previously a retail unit facing the mall was used by SSWU until the unit was re-let commercially. The Ashley Centre has not responded to questions from the Epsom and Ewell Times about the decision to remove the permanent kiosk.

Surrey Stands With Ukraine thanks the Ashley Centre for its ongoing support and confirmed it will continue its work, stressing that the reduction in visibility makes public backing more important than ever. The charity says it is exploring alternative ways to maintain a visible presence in Epsom town centre and is encouraging residents to visit the new stall dates in the Ashley Centre and to continue donating through the Global House hub.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has repeatedly warned that Russia’s war against Ukraine is not an isolated conflict but a direct threat to the security of the whole of Europe, arguing that Moscow’s actions demonstrate a willingness to use military force to pursue imperial ambitions beyond its borders. Sustaining humanitarian support for Ukraine is essential in maintaining civilian morale, stressing that resilience among the Ukrainian population is a decisive factor in resisting aggression and deterring further expansionism by President Vladimir Putin.

The contrast between the scale of national and international funding announcements and the challenges faced by local charities has highlighted the continued reliance on community-level support to meet urgent humanitarian needs. While the release of frozen oligarch assets has been widely welcomed, organisations working on the ground say sustained public engagement remains essential as the war and its consequences continue.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Since the war began the 14th Ukraine Social and Music Evening will take place at the Epsom Methodist Church this Saturday 20th December. Helen Maguire MP will welcome guests and performers. See listing here for details.

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Image: Abramovich – licensed HERE. Credit: IAN KINGTON / AFP / picturedesk.com. Ashley Centre entrance – Google Maps

Surrey countryside campaigners warn new planning rules risk more speculative development

28 December 2025



Local countryside campaigners have voiced strong concerns over the Government's newly announced changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), warning that the reforms could increase speculative development across Surrey without delivering the affordable housing and infrastructure communities need.

The changes, announced by the Housing Minister this week, form part of the Government's wider pledge to accelerate housebuilding and address England's housing shortage. Ministers say the revised framework is intended to simplify the planning system, reduce delays, and ensure local authorities play a more active role in meeting housing need.

Among the key changes outlined by the Government are a renewed emphasis on meeting housing targets, revisions to how land supply is assessed, and proposals to allow some areas of the Green Belt to be reclassified as so-called "grey belt" land where development is judged to have limited environmental or landscape value. Ministers have also argued that the reforms will reduce repeated legal challenges and appeals that, they say, slow down development.

Responding to the announcement, CPRE Surrey said it was "deeply concerned" that the changes would fail to meet their stated aims while placing greater pressure on countryside land.

Andy Smith of CPRE Surrey said the proposals were "unlikely to meet the Government's aim of speeding up housebuilding but will certainly blight more of our countryside with the shadow of unwanted development".

"Yes, we need more affordable housing but these proposals won't achieve that," he said. "What we will see is a further increase in speculative development which boosts the profits of developers but will not produce the housing or public services that we really need."

CPRE Surrey has questioned why the Government is pursuing development on Green Belt land when national figures indicate there is capacity for at least 1.4 million new homes on brownfield sites across England. Campaigners argue that the absence of a legally enforceable "Brownfield First" policy means developers will continue to prioritise greenfield sites, where land values are higher and projects are more commercially attractive.

"Why, when across England there is space for at least 1.4 million new homes on brownfield sites, does the Government still want to reclassify much of the Green Belt as 'grey belt' and build on it?" Mr Smith asked. "Why do Ministers want us to lose farmland and open spaces to the developers?"

The Government has also said the changes are intended to prevent repeated attempts to overturn planning decisions. In Parliament, the Housing Minister said the reforms would help end a system that allows parties to "come back again and again if they don't get the outcome they want".

CPRE Surrey disputes that characterisation, arguing that it is developers, not local communities, who benefit from repeated appeals. Mr Smith said that if a planning application is approved by a Surrey council, local residents generally have no right of appeal, whereas developers can submit multiple revised applications or appeals following refusals.

"Developers can indeed 'come back again and again' with appeals and revised, often barely changed, planning applications, aiming to wear down the objectors," he said. "The proportion of legal challenges brought by local communities is tiny compared to the number of developments that are pushed through."

While ministers insist the revised NPPF will streamline decision-making and unlock new housing supply, CPRE Surrey said it could not see how the changes would genuinely speed up development or improve outcomes for communities.

"All these changes will do is play into the hands of speculative developers," Mr Smith said.

The revised National Planning Policy Framework is expected to guide planning decisions across England once formally adopted, with local authorities required to update their planning policies in line with the new national framework.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Image: View of development land west from Hookwood, Horley. (Credit: Google Street View)

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