

12,000 years of Surrey history to spring to life

24 July 2025



Fetcham Springs, Surrey - One of Surrey’s most important archaeological sites has secured £250,000 in National Lottery Heritage Fund backing to launch a groundbreaking five-year community archaeology initiative.

The Communities at the River: The Fetcham Springs Archaeology Project, led by the Surrey County Archaeological Unit (SCAU), will uncover over 12,000 years of human history while offering local people opportunities to get involved through volunteering, open days, and educational events.

Thanks to National Lottery players, the funding will expand on discoveries made in 2009 at the site, which revealed evidence of a prehistoric hunting camp dating from the end of the last Ice Age and a high-status Roman building. The new phase of work will explore periods ranging from the Ice Age to the Saxon era.

Hands-on history for all

The project, developed by SCAU’s Community Archaeologist Hannah Potter, includes:

- **Volunteering on live archaeological digs**
- **Public open days** showcasing findings
- **Workshops** including **flintknapping** and even **gladiator training**
- **Visits from Stone Age and Roman reenactors**
- **Free school visits and loan boxes** for educational use

Fetcham Springs, which also holds the Wildlife Trust’s Biodiversity Benchmark, is owned by SES Water, who are a key project partner and will help support landscape conservation alongside the archaeological work.

A legacy for the future

Findings will be shared through a pop-up museum, exhibitions, talks, and online resources, ensuring a lasting educational impact.

Cllr Denise Turner Stewart, Deputy Leader of Surrey County Council and Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities, said:

“Surrey has a rich and diverse history, and projects like Fetcham Springs help us preserve and share our heritage with future generations. This initiative will provide valuable educational and volunteering opportunities, allowing residents to actively engage with archaeology and deepen their understanding of our county’s past.”

Stuart McLeod, Director for England (London & South) at The National Lottery Heritage Fund, added:

“Projects like this inspire people of all ages to connect with their local heritage. We’re proud to support Fetcham Springs, thanks to National Lottery players.”

Grace Wood-Lofthouse, Sustainability Manager at SES Water, commented:

“Water at Fetcham Springs has supported life for millennia. This project will help us better understand how to protect our landscapes for the future.”

For further details, visit the Surrey County Archaeological Unit website.

Image: Archaeologists at work – Cleaning a Roman wall at Fetcham Springs in 2009

Epsom Charity Hears Students’ Plea: Cut the Cost of School Uniforms

24 July 2025



As school doors close for the summer, an Epsom-based charity has shared powerful testimony from local students who say the cost of school uniform is putting their families under severe financial strain.

The Good Company, known for running the Epsom & Ewell Foodbank and wider anti-poverty initiatives, has been working with five secondary schools in the borough through its ‘**Cost of the School Day**’ project. Its aim: to listen directly to pupils on free school meals and help schools better understand the hidden costs that prevent some children from fully participating in school life.

“The most important takeaway for us has been listening to the voices of these students, and their personal journeys,” said one participating Deputy Headteacher. “It is so powerful to hear from the students themselves.”

A recurring theme across all schools was the financial pressure of uniforms — particularly the insistence on expensive, branded items.

“A problem I experienced when I was new to the school is the cost of uniform itself. It put my parents into the red,” said Mike, a Year 11 student.

The findings echo national research. According to the Children’s Society, the average cost of a secondary school uniform in the UK is £422 per year per child, while for primary pupils it is £287. A 2020 survey by the Department for Education found branded items account for a significant proportion of the cost, often required to be bought from a single supplier.

In response to these concerns, the UK Government introduced the Education (Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms) Act 2021, requiring schools to keep branded items “to a minimum” and ensure uniforms are affordable. But campaigners say implementation remains patchy.

Local Action, National Relevance

The Good Company’s report suggests that real change comes when schools engage with students directly and respond with practical steps. Among the suggestions from students and staff were:

- Reducing the number of compulsory branded items
- Expanding second-hand uniform schemes
- Partnering with local charities to provide direct financial support
- Promoting understanding among staff about the reasons students may not always comply with uniform rules

The charity is calling on more schools to engage with its free online resources and consider reviewing their own uniform policies.

“Let’s keep working together to make schools a place where all children feel they belong, no matter their financial background,” said Tom Sefton, Director of Participation and Prevention at The Good Company.

More Information

Schools or individuals interested in learning more or accessing free training resources can visit: goodcompany.org.uk/cost-of-the-school-day

To donate to the charity’s School Uniform Fundraiser, visit the same website and click on the pink donation button.

Coroner visits Surrey cricket hero’s mental decline

24 July 2025



Coroner’s Inquest visits the loss of former England and Surrey batting great **Graham Thorpe MBE**, who died in August 2024 aged 55. Following an inquest held this week at Surrey Coroner’s Court, his life and tragic death have returned to the headlines, casting fresh light on his legacy and personal struggles.

Born in Farnham, Surrey on 1 August 1969, Graham Thorpe rose through the county’s cricketing ranks with prodigious talent and steely determination. He made his first-class debut for Surrey County Cricket Club in 1988 and quickly established himself as one of the most technically gifted left-handers of his generation.

Thorpe’s early promise blossomed into a formidable career with Surrey, for whom he scored over 21,000 runs across formats. His stylish strokeplay, calm temperament, and ability to perform under pressure made him a linchpin for the county during the 1990s and early 2000s.

Surrey’s return to success in the late 1990s—including their Sunday League title in 1996 and County Championship victories—bore Thorpe’s fingerprints, and his bond with the club remained strong well beyond retirement. He later served as Surrey’s batting coach, mentoring a new generation of cricketers at the Oval.

Thorpe made an instant impact on the international stage, scoring a century on his Test debut against Australia in 1993. Over a 12-year England career, he compiled 6,744 Test runs at an average of 44.66, with 16 centuries—cementing his place among the country’s most reliable middle-order batsmen.

He was central to key series wins in the subcontinent, notably England’s victories in Pakistan and Sri Lanka in 2000, and was named a Wisden Cricketer of the Year in 1998. His unbeaten 200 against New Zealand in 2002 was widely hailed as one of the finest innings of its era.

A naturally modest figure, Thorpe’s contribution to English cricket went beyond runs. He embodied a quiet resilience and professionalism that won the admiration of teammates and opponents alike.

After retiring from playing in 2005, Thorpe remained in the game as a respected batting coach, including roles with Surrey and later as a key figure in the England coaching setup. He was part of the ECB’s elite coaching team and served as a mentor to many of England’s current generation of batters.

However, his career in coaching came to a sudden end in 2022 following the fallout from a video showing players drinking after a heavy Ashes defeat in Australia. Though not the subject of disciplinary action, Thorpe lost his role as England’s batting coach soon after—an event that proved devastating.

This week’s inquest at Surrey Coroner’s Court revealed the full extent of Thorpe’s mental health battle, casting a sombre shadow over his final years.

Thorpe had reportedly suffered from anxiety and depression since at least 2018. After the loss of his ECB coaching job in 2022, his condition deteriorated significantly. He became socially withdrawn, suffered from insomnia, and described feelings of shame and worthlessness.

His wife, Amanda, told the inquest that he had even asked her to assist him in dying, expressing an intention to seek assisted suicide in Switzerland. In April 2022, he attempted suicide and spent weeks in intensive care. Though he made a partial physical recovery, the psychological toll persisted.

On 4 August 2024, Thorpe tragically died after being struck by a train at Esher railway station. The coroner concluded that he had taken his own life. His family chose to speak publicly in the hope of raising awareness and encouraging open conversation around mental health in sport.

Surrey County Cricket Club paid tribute to Thorpe, calling him “one of the finest cricketers the club has ever produced.” The club has honoured his legacy with a commemorative gallery at the Oval and moments of silence at matches.

Teammates and former England captains described Thorpe as a “warrior at the crease” and a “gentleman off it,” highlighting both his cricketing prowess and quiet dignity.

Thorpe’s story has also reignited national debate about the mental health pressures faced by elite athletes and the need for more robust support structures—both during and after their careers.

Graham Thorpe’s life was rich in achievement, marked by loyalty to Surrey, excellence for England, and a deep love for the game. But his death also reminds us of the vulnerabilities behind even the most accomplished public figures.

As his family bravely noted, “Graham’s legacy must be more than his cricket. Let it also be a call to look out for each other.”

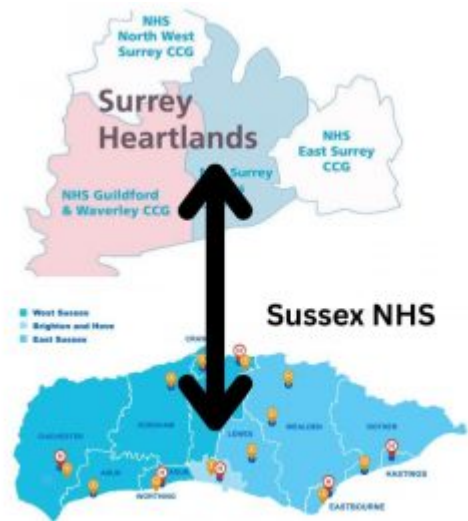
Thorpe is survived by his wife Amanda and their children. He remains, to many in Surrey and beyond, a hero of the game—and a symbol of the need to treat mental health with the seriousness it deserves.

If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health, contact Samaritans at 116 123 or visit www.samaritans.org.

Image: Graham Thorpe selfie in 2005. Attribution: Jguk at English Wikipedia Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported

Surrey and Sussex NHS Boards to merge

24 July 2025



Hundreds of jobs are at risk as two key NHS boards for Sussex and Surrey prepare to merge as part of a money-saving drive by the government. NHS Sussex and NHS Surrey Heartlands – two integrated care boards (ICBs) – are expected to have merged by next April, shedding many of the 1,350 staff who currently work at the two organisations. The changes are part of the latest round of NHS reforms which include the abolition of NHS England and the scrapping of independent patient voice watchdogs known as Healthwatch. Sussex ICB chair Stephen Lightfoot spoke about the forthcoming changes at Brighton and Hove City Council’s Health and Wellbeing Board at Hove Town Hall on Tuesday (22 July).

ICBs bring together NHS organisations, councils and others to plan and commission health services in their area, with the aim of improving health and reducing inequalities. Mr Lightfoot, who will stand down in September, said that ICBs were told in March to halve their running costs – from £39.83 to £18.76 per head of population – by December. Further bad news followed when an analysis of national funding allocations suggested that Sussex was overfunded by £186 million. Mr Lightfoot said that NHS Sussex had a £4.5 billion budget for NHS services in Sussex but the analysis indicated that it should be £4.3 billion and was 4 per cent overfunded. Mr Lightfoot said: “That doesn’t sound a lot on a percentage basis but £200 million is a significant sum of money. Over the next three years, when our demand continues to increase, we’re going to have to reduce our expenditure. We’re going to have to work very hard to make better use of the money that we have.”

He said that this would not affect the budget for delivering healthcare throughout the area – but, he said, combining Sussex and Surrey was the only safe and reliable way to deliver sustainable services. Mr Lightfoot spoke about “the massive scale of this task (and) the huge impact it’s having on our staff ... 1,350 people are worried if they’ve got a job. And of course a significant number of them will not have a job in the coming year.” He added: “We’re not alone. The government also confirmed it’s going to rationalise all patient safety regulators. That involves Healthwatch organisations which are going to be closed, not immediately, but over the next 18 months to two years.”

It would be the first time since 1974 that patients would be without a statutory independent voice, the meeting was told.

Sarah Booker-Lewis LDRS

Doctors’ strike to hit Epsom Hospital

24 July 2025



Hospitals across South West London are bracing for disruption this week as resident doctors begin a five-day strike on Friday, 25 July. The week-long strike action by British Medical Association (BMA) members comes as the NHS faces one of its busiest summers in recent years, with a spike in emergency admissions driven by heatwaves and increasingly complex patient needs. Resident doctors – those who have completed their initial medical degree and are now in postgraduate training or gaining experience in non-training positions – were awarded an average 5.4% pay rise for this financial year, following a 22% increase over the previous two years. However, the BMA says wages are still around 20% lower in real terms than in 2008 and has committed to strike action in demand of “pay restoration.”

The walkout will affect hospitals across England, including St George’s, Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals and Health Group (GESH). GESH medical professionals are warning the public to expect delays and to take preventative steps to avoid overwhelming already stretched services. “While we’re doing everything we can to prepare, these strikes will cause huge disruption,” warned Dr Richard Jennings, Chief Medical Officer for GESH. “Patients coming to an emergency department when it’s not an emergency will be waiting longer, or even directed to another service,” he added. Common reasons for hospital admissions during the heatwave have included respiratory issues, chest pain, shortness of breath and falls. Over 800 more people have attended emergency departments this summer compared to the same period last year. Between 1 June and 14 July, emergency department attendances at GESH rose to 37,167 – up from 36,328 in 2024 and 35,460 in 2023.

To maintain emergency services, consultants and other staff will be redeployed from routine care to cover A&E, operating theatres and hospital wards, resulting in many planned procedures being cancelled or delayed. Patients and staff at St Helier have already faced significant disruption this year, partly due to the hospital’s ageing infrastructure. In January, a roof collapse in the phlebotomy unit forced the last-minute cancellation of several urgent blood tests. Despite the strike action, patients are urged to attend appointments unless contacted otherwise, and to continue seeking help in emergencies. The NHS is also asking the public to consider other services first, such as NHS 111 online, pharmacies or GPs, which are unaffected by the strike. “We have a difficult week coming up and we need members of the public to help us – whether that’s using the most appropriate service for their health need or taking steps to prevent becoming unwell,” Dr Jennings said.

Health Secretary Wes Streeting has criticised the strike, calling it “completely unjustified” and showing “complete disdain” for patients. However, BMA resident doctors committee co-chairs Dr Melissa Ryan and Dr Ross Nieuwoudt said they had tried to compromise with the government during talks, and that strike action was a last resort. They said: “We have always said that no doctor wants to strike, and all it would take to avoid it is a credible path to pay restoration offered by the government. We came to talks in good faith, keen to explore real solutions to the problems facing resident doctors today. Unfortunately, we did not receive an offer that would meet the scale of those challenges. While we were happy to discuss non-pay issues that affect doctors’ finances, we have always been upfront that this is at its core a pay dispute.”

The strike will run from 7am on Friday 25 July, until 7am on Wednesday 30 July.

Harrison Galliven – LDRS

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Plea ahead of doctors’ strikes round 5

Big housing development proposed NW of Epsom and Ewell

24 July 2025



Over 2,000 new homes could be built on the Surrey border, to the right of Claygate and Esher, and above Epsom and Ewell. Plans for 2,003 new homes and a 104-bed care home are in the pipeline at Hook Park in Chessington, to the east of the A3 Esher Bypass and south of the A309 Kingston Bypass. If approved, residents say it could bring at least another 5,000 people into the area. Developers Poppymill Ltd envisions transforming the so-called derelict site into “a new family-friendly neighbourhood that centres around a huge public park and community spaces”. Around 50 per cent of the new builds could be affordable housing, of mixed tenures and with more than 600 homes for families. The proposed development site covers approximately 50 hectares of land and includes Chessington Equestrian Centre, ‘The Dell’ building and former scaffolding yards.

But residents claim the land is actually green belt status, preventing the urban sprawl of Chessington into neighbouring Surrey and providing an important green space. While the site is green belt, Poppymill argued the land is “compromised and inaccessible to the public” rendering it ‘grey-belt’, the developer claims. Details on the proposal are scarce, but initial planning documents indicated new terrace houses could be between two-four storeys tall, and apartment blocks could range from four-eight storeys high. No concrete plans have been announced, but Poppymill Ltd. has submitted a screening request which outlines the potential scheme.

The developer has asked the Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames Council for a formal opinion on what information it should supply for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) – this is called ‘scoping’ – ahead of a planning application. But Elmbridge Borough Council has also been asked for their view on the application, given the massive potential development is close to the authority’s patch. The prospective plans also hint at community space including room for retail or leisure uses, employment space, a public house, community centre and an active travel hub. Plans also include highway improvements such as a new vehicle access road from the Kingston Bypass and Clayton Road, pedestrian and cycle access and car and bike parking.

Residents who wish to comment on the scheme can do so on Kingston council’s planning website. Comments are open until July 24, 2025.

Aerial view of the Hook Park site outlined in red. (Credit: Poppymill Ltd consultation website)

Public meet tonight on Epsom and Ewell Borough Council future

24 July 2025



A public debate **TONIGHT** will ask whether Epsom and Ewell Borough Council could soon be abolished — and whether such a decision might happen without any vote or public consultation.

The event, titled “*Here Today, Gone Tomorrow? Devolution Explained*”, will take place at 7.00pm TONIGHT Wednesday 23rd July 2025 at St Joseph’s Catholic Church St Margaret Dr, Epsom KT18 7JQ. It is free to attend and open to all residents and businesses.

The meeting is organised by **Rotary Connections**, a local initiative of the Rotary Club aiming to bring together businesses, civic groups, and the wider community.

The panel will include local councillors:

Eber Kington – Residents Association and Surrey County Council and former long-serving Councillor on EEBC.

Bernie Muir, deputy chair of Surrey County Council, Conservative, who also serves on Epsom and Ewell Borough.

Steven McCormick – Residents Association serving both EEBC and Surrey County Council.

Julian Freeman, Liberal Democrat Councillor for EEBC

The discussion will be chaired by **Lionel Blackman**, local solicitor and a director of the Epsom and Ewell Times.

The debate comes amid growing speculation over local government reorganisation in Surrey. Proposals in recent years have raised the prospect of scrapping all district and borough councils in favour of one or more large unitary authorities. Such a move would end the independence of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, which has served the community since 1937.

Supporters of unitary reform claim it could bring savings and efficiency. Opponents argue it risks reducing local accountability and weakening the borough’s unique identity.

After initial addresses from each speaker organisers say the meeting will follow a “Question Time” format, allowing the public to pose questions directly to councillors on what these changes might mean for services, representation, and the future shape of local democracy.

Entry is free.

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Epsom and Ewell Considers New Community Councils as Local Government Shake-Up Looms

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council out – Community Council’s in?

and many more – search “local government reorganisation”.

Nurse demands 24 hour rail tickets to avoid night-shift double costs

24 July 2025



A specialist NHS nurse is calling for urgent train ticket reform after revealing she spends over £200 a month commuting to her job at Great Ormond Street Hospital. Alicia Arias, a paediatric cardiac intensive care nurse, has launched a campaign urging rail companies to introduce 24-hour train tickets. Her Change.org petition has already gained over 24,000 signatures. Alicia moved from London to Woking a year ago to save on rent and live in a house, said her monthly commuting costs regularly exceed £200 – despite using a discount Flexi Season ticket. She said: “Why am I living in Woking paying all of this money for trains that are always delayed?!”

Working 12-hour shifts, often overnight, Alicia said she is forced to buy two tickets for each shift: one to travel in and another to get home the next morning, as existing train tickets expire at 4:29am. “We go for a horrible night shift, we don’t have a break and then we have to pay for another ticket,” Alicia said. “It’s just not fair. It’s making it fair with 24hr tickets.” Working in paediatric intensive care, no day is the same. But every day can be gruelling. Alicia said: “I offer the treatment the last chance that kids have. It’s really hard but it’s really rewarding.” As a senior nurse, Alicia said her job ranges from teaching and supporting other nursing staff, sometimes taking over the patients, as well as looking after her own patients. “We are always short and we are always busy,” she said.

Although there are other hospitals in Surrey, Alicia said she never wants to leave her current job. “Working at Great Ormond Street Hospital is a great sense of achievement,” Alicia said. “It’s the best thing I’ve ever done – I love it.” Originally from Spain, Alicia said she was shocked by how expensive and inflexible British transport is. Alicia said she moved to the UK 13 years ago, but the “cultural shock” of how expensive and inflexible British transport is has only really come in the last year of moving to Woking. She explained in Madrid you can get transport passes for bus, train and rail for £70 a month. When Alicia lived in central London, she would cycle to work. “I take my bicycle from Waterloo to Great Ormond Street which is really busy,” she said. “I’m pretty sure I’m going to die on the bike one day.”

“I have sometimes regretted [moving to Woking],” Alicia admitted, explaining how she is constantly juggling to find the cheapest way to buy train tickets. Alicia said the campaign is not only for nurses but everyone. “But not only me but the cleaners, the maintenance workers, people in the kitchen, people who have lower salaries than me who are struggling more,” she said. “We’re all NHS. Not only shift workers in Surrey but everywhere in the UK. Shift workers that pay for two tickets and they do it quietly. No, it’s not fair.” Another campaign which Alicia started at the same time is her petition for an NHS railcard which has also reached nearly 3,000 signatures on the House of Commons website.

A Department for Transport spokesperson said: “While we are not planning to introduce 24-hour return tickets, we are overhauling the complex fares system to make rail travel simpler and more flexible for passengers. We’ve already delivered ticketing innovations such as contactless pay as you go to additional stations in Surrey this year, giving passengers the best value ticket for their journey, with additional stations expected to get the technology soon.”

Petition link: <https://www.change.org/p/make-train-day-tickets-last-24-hours-support-shift-workers>

House of Commons petition link: <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/729126>

Absence of CEO on audit Red Flag causes an outrage

24 July 2025



The Audit and Scrutiny Committee of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council met on 17th July. Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) expressed his outrage that the Chief Executive of the Council was not in attendance.

The Committee had previously agreed to request a report from the Senior Leadership Team of the Council explaining management responses to External Auditors, as reported to the Committee in February 2025. The attendance of the Chief Executive to discuss management responses and actions was called for.

Grant Thornton, the external auditors, had made the following “red flag” recommendation to the Council: “The Council should develop a clear approach towards transparency. The Council should be mindful of requirements to be open and accountable”.

The Chair (Cllr **Steven McCormick** – RA Woodcote and Langley) explained that the Chief Executive’s availability would be checked but he could not foresee an issue in her attending the July Committee meeting.

However, due to another commitment of the Chief Executive on the 17th July, the Chair had invited her to attend the September meeting of the Committee. Further, he assured Cllr Ames, the Committee could defer any particular matters requiring the CEO’s attention to the next meeting.

Cllr Ames was not satisfied with the failure of the CEO to attend and repeatedly expressed his outrage at the stalling of accountability. Accountability being a key element for the Council to improve, as stated in the auditors red flag recommendation.

His frustration was duly “noted”.

Related reports:

Annual audit of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

“Audit and Scrutiny” under scrutiny

Local Audit meet: unexpectedly interesting...

RA councillor replaces Independent member as scrutiny row erupts at Epsom Town Hall

Image EEBC YouTube. Cllr Ames.

Guildford going for new Town Council? Whither unitary authorities?

24 July 2025



Guildford could soon have its own town council for the first time in the hopes it would bring more local decision-making to its urban centre. The driving force behind this proposal is fears of a “democratic deficit” – with pending local government reorganisation looming, councils will be dissolved leaving some nervousness on how residents will be properly represented. The executive of Guildford Borough Council is looking at options for a formal ‘Community Governance Review’ to consider whether a parish council should be created to serve nearly half its residents in the currently unparished town centre. Members agreed to recommend the idea to the full council at an executive meeting on July 17.

If approved, it would bring Guildford in line with the surrounding villages (like Normandy or Ash) which already have their own parish councils. Unlike other parish areas like Shalford and Send, Guildford town has to rely solely on borough councillors to raise hyperlocal issues. Speaking at the meeting, Cllr Catherine Houston said: “Throughout this whole process of Local Government Reorganisation what has been missing has been the voice of the public, the imposition of this by the government without any consultation from people. We had the cancellation of the Surrey County Council election, so we have a democratic deficit currently going on within our county. This CGR allows people to decide whether they want to be represented at that very local level – that possibly could be lost, we don’t know – for an area of the borough which is not represented.”

Council reports state CGR aims to look at whether a town council would improve “community engagement, local democracy and service delivery”. The new body could also oversee things like town events, public toilets, benches, community grants and local planning consultations. If agreed, the new Guildford Town Council would be funded through a local council tax precept – a small extra charge already applied in parish areas. Normandy Parish Council required an extra £113.71, on top of ordinary council tax, for a Band D property for 2025/26. But other parishes vary. Around £300k could be spent in the first year setting up the new parish council which will be funded by Guildford council.

Boundaries, the number of councillors and a budget would likely be determined through consultation. The proposed town council would likely include wards such as Onslow, Stoke, Holy Trinity and Westborough. Technically, a CGR can only create parish councils and then, once established, can then agree to style itself as a town council. The earliest a town council would be created for the centre would be May 2027, with the elections to choose local representatives and possibly a mayor. Despite the proposed consultations, Guildford Borough Council, as it currently stands, will have the final say on whether to establish the new body.

Guildford high street buildings, town centre. (Credit: Emily Dalton/LDRS)