



Surrey company wins award for solar installation at Ewell's Bourne Hall

Ewell's largest landmark, **Bourne Hall**, is known for its distinctive modernist architecture and striking glass dome, making it a uniquely challenging site for the integration of renewable technology. A new solar installation, commissioned by **Epsom & Ewell Borough Council** to reduce carbon emissions and lower energy costs, has since earned **Titan Eco** the **Small Scale Project (<£250k) Award** at the **London Energy Efficiency Regional Awards 2025**.

Cllr **Liz Frost** (RA Woodocote and Langley), Chair of the Council's Environment Committee, described it as:

"Part of a series of works that will make this picturesque and historical landmark more sustainable for future generations."

Key outcomes:

- ~45,000 kWh generated annually
- Estimated £15,000 yearly savings
- Over 9 tonnes of CO₂ saved each year

Surrey-based **Titan Eco** delivered the installation in collaboration with **WC Evans & Sons Ltd**, who designed and installed the bespoke steel framework supporting **116 DMEGC all-black bifacial solar panels**. As Titan Eco's preferred supplier, **DMEGC** is known for the consistent quality of its panels and its transparent, responsibly sourced supply chain - aligning with Titan Eco's commitment to ethical procurement.

Sam Tilley, Managing Director of Titan Eco, said:

"Bourne Hall is a great example of how solar can be integrated into a historic site without compromising its character... Knowing the system is in place and making a real difference is particularly meaningful."

Titan Eco has also delivered solar installations at several other notable community sites, including the **Rainbow Leisure Centre**, **Epsom Playhouse**, **St Giles & St George's Church**, and **Ashted Peace Memorial Hall** - demonstrating an ongoing commitment to supporting public and community buildings on their journey to net zero.

Tita Eco

Related report:

Epsom and Ewell's solar powered spaceship

Surrey Uni Study: long Covid patients proving their illness is real challenges

People living with Long Covid often feel dismissed, disbelieved and unsupported by their healthcare providers, according to a new study from the University of Surrey.

The study, which was published in the Journal of Health Psychology, looked at how patients with Long Covid experience their illness. The study found that many patients feel they have to prove their illness is physical to be taken seriously and, as a result, often reject psychological support, fearing it implies their symptoms are "all in the mind".

Professor Jane Ogden, co-author of the study from the University of Surrey, said:



"We found that the problem isn't people with Long Covid refusing help - it's about the deep need for people to be believed. When a patient feels dismissed, offering psychological support instead of medical care can be misconstrued as insulting."

According to the Office for National Statistics, there are 1.9 million people who live with Long Covid in the UK. Long Covid symptoms include fatigue, difficulty concentrating, muscle aches and shortness of breath, which persist for many weeks, sometimes months, after the initial Covid-19 infection.

Surrey's study involved in-depth interviews with 14 people in the UK between the ages of 27 to 63 who had experienced Long Covid symptoms for more than four weeks. The group included 12 women and 2 men.

Saara Petker, clinical psychologist, co-author of the study and former PhD student at the University of Surrey, said:

"We found that our participants are living a life of constant uncertainty, struggling to find treatment. People told us that they didn't feel listened to, some said they'd lost trust in doctors, their social circles and even their own bodies because of the whole experience.

"Medical advice is crucial - but psychological support must be offered with care. If it's seen as replacing medical help, it can feel dismissive."

Image: License details Creator: Jose Luis Navarro. Copyright: CC BY-SA 4.0

Epsom based Toyota raises £1/2m for MND

Toyota has raised more than £500,000 to support people living with and affected by motor neurone disease (MND). It has also extended its partnership with MND Association for a further two years, into 2027.

Toyota joined forces with MND Association in 2021. The charity was chosen by the company's staff in memory of a much-loved colleague, Rachel Rollason, who suffered from MND, a terminal neurological condition that affects up to 5,000 people in the UK at any one time.

Since then, colleagues from Toyota (GB), Toyota Financial Services, Toyota Insurance Services and KINTO UK, have pushed themselves to the limits in a variety of fund-raising activities including taking part in marathons, a cycling challenge from Portsmouth to Newcastle, a Tough Mudder and a 100km walk along the River Thames which raised more than £120,000 in just two days.

Tanya Curry, MND Association's Chief Executive, said: "We are delighted that Toyota has chosen to extend its partnership with us. We are so grateful for everything they have done to support our work over the past four years, whether that's by volunteering, training to take part in an event, or fundraising. Thanks to Toyota, we have been able to provide support grants for life-changing wheelchair adaptations, while pushing forward with ground-breaking research into potential new treatments for this terrible disease. Over the next two years, the strong partnership between our organisations will continue to grow and allow us to accelerate progress in the fight against MND."

Scott Thompson, Toyota (GB) President and Managing Director, said: "I'd like to thank our staff for their efforts in helping us reach our fundraising target of £500,000. We already have plans for further fundraising, for example next month four senior team members: Jason Milton, Rob McKendrick, Carla Henson and Dariusz Mikolajczak, will take part in the London Marathon."

For more information, or to donate, visit <https://donate.giveasyoulive.com/campaign/toyota-london-marathon>

For more information about MND Association please visit www.mndassociation.org

Toyota GB

Image: From L to R: Charlotte Taylor, Senior Corporate Partnerships Executive, MND Association, Pete Collins, Senior Corporate Partnerships Development Executive, MND Association, Kish Laungani, Specialist Sustainability Programmes, Toyota GB, Isla Thomson, Assistant, CSR, Sustainability and ESG, Toyota GB and Rosemary Parkin, Assistant Press and PR, Toyota GB



Epsom Charity Celebrates Project Milestone with a BBC Radio Takeover

The Sunnybank Trust is celebrating a major milestone – five years of **Sunny Sessions**, its inclusive radio show dedicated to amplifying the voices of the learning disability community.

Founded during the lockdown by CEO **Dorothy Watson** and Futures Manager **Claire Dawson**, the show began with the goal of keeping the community connected during a difficult and isolating time. *Sunny Sessions* aimed to provide comfort, connection, and positivity through buzzing music, exercise segments, and relevant news updates.

Dorothy Watson, CEO of The Sunnybank Trust, said:

“We are proud to be celebrating five years of Sunny Sessions. What started as a way to connect people has become a vibrant platform run by and for the learning disability community. Congratulations to Jon Andrews, our dedicated producer, and many thanks to Surrey Hills Community Radio for hosting our show.”

To mark this milestone, The Sunnybank Trust is pleased to announce that the **BBC Breakfast Show** will host the anniversary celebration on **28 March 2025**, between **7 - 9 am** on **BBC Radio Surrey & Sussex**.

As part of the celebration, the show will feature an interview between **Emma Blackmore**, a Sunnybank reporter based in Bristol, and the consultants from **Understand Us**, a consultancy founded by The Sunnybank Trust in 2019.

Understand Us is a learning disability-led consultancy based in Epsom, offering services such as training, workshops, and audits to help businesses become more accessible to people with learning disabilities. For more information, visit understandus.co.uk.

During the interview, the consultants will share insights into their roles, discuss how businesses can benefit from Understand Us, and reflect on their favourite projects.

James Cannon, BBC Producer, said:

“We are incredibly proud of the journey Sunny Sessions has taken over the past five years. This anniversary and the feature on BBC Breakfast provide an opportunity to share the voices and stories of the individuals who have been part of the show’s success. Our mission has always been to amplify these voices and promote inclusion, and we are excited to take this next step in reaching an even wider audience.”

Today, *Sunny Sessions* is presented by **Jon Andrews**, who brings his passion and energy to the show as it continues to grow. The programme has expanded to cover a wide variety of topics, providing a platform for people to share their stories, engage in meaningful discussions, and raise awareness about issues that matter to them.

Jon Andrews said:

“I’m incredibly proud of what we have achieved with the radio show and excited to see where the next five years will take us.”

The Sunnybank Trust

Photo: **Jon Andrews from The Sunnybank Trust**, and **James Fieldus, a Sunnybank Reporter**. Photo by The Sunnybank Trust.

Woking Council private school loan scandal

A private school loaned millions of pounds at favourable rates by bankrupt Woking Borough Council has still to pay its overdue debts – with the local authority saying it is “taking appropriate legal advice” to get its money back. Greenfield School in Old Woking was lent £13.3 million by the now-bust borough, with the previous administration saying the money would help free up capacity within state schools.

Last year, £2.4 million of that was due to be paid back, but the school said it was short of cash and instead offered the council a town centre building it owned in exchange, worth considerably less than that. The council, which is in the process of offloading assets to pay off its own multibillion-pound debt, told the school in November last year that it did not have the capacity to take on any additional buildings.

Four months on, the two parties appear to remain apart on terms, with questions now being asked at Woking Borough Council’s



March 20 executive meeting over whether the school will be able to “regularise” its position. Councillor Dale Roberts, lead member for finance, said: “We made it clear that the strong preference of this council was that the school simply met their existing commitments. They are also aware that they are required to provide independent and professional advice on the viability of their plans to repay. Our needs must be front and centre to provide assurance that the school will be able to honour any revised terms and of course that means not just the repayment in November last year but for the whole of the arrangement.”

Cllr Roberts described the loans as “inappropriate” and that the “former administration had no business entering into any such arrangement”. He said: “I’d prefer not to comment on the legalities but I can say with some confidence that it was ultra reckless. The (previous administration) may or may not have acted beyond their legal powers but they certainly sprinted with blind ambition past the boundaries of good judgement.”

According to the papers published by Woking Borough Council, the unsecured loans between 2019 and 2021 helped the school to relocate into another catchment area and enter a different segment of the private education market. Woking Borough Council declared itself effectively bankrupt in 2023 and had to cut services while increasing tax by 10 per cent to help cover its financial meltdown. Greenfield School, which charges up to £17,010 a year, has previously told the council it “may not be in a position” to repay money owed.

Related reports:

No wonder Woking went bankrupt. Scandal of private school loans

Image: Greenfield School Woking (image Google)

Surrey Councils launch Local Government Reorganisation engagement

Surrey residents can have their say on the future of local government in the county, in a new survey launched by eight of Surrey’s district and borough councils.

An initial proposal for Local Government Reorganisation, which would see the county divided into two or three unitary councils, was published by district and borough councils last week, and they are now asking for the initial views of residents and local businesses.

Given that the current system of local government has been in place for the last 50 years, this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to change things for the better. Eight district and borough councils are therefore offering local people the opportunity to give their feedback on plans for the future governance of the county, to influence the next phase of the process.

Most district and borough leaders in Surrey support a move to three unitary authorities. They believe this would strike the best balance between efficiency and maintaining genuine local accountability, as well as maximising opportunities to support economic growth by ensuring that unitary authorities reflect the economic geography of the county. But regardless of any stated preferences, all district and borough leaders are keen that local people should have the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

The new unitary authorities would assume responsibility for the services currently delivered by Surrey County Council and the 11 district and boroughs. This transition would pave the way for the creation of a new strategic authority covering the county.

Councillor Hannah Dalton, Chair of the Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Residents’ Association (Majority Group) and co-chair of the Surrey Leaders Group, said:

“This is a pivotal moment for local government in Surrey. There are a number of compelling advantages to unitary councils – and cost savings is only one of them. We also need to ensure we create new organisations that can manage economic growth more effectively, and which recognise the importance of community, identity, and local democracy.

“Local Government Reorganisation provides us with an important opportunity to secure Surrey’s future prosperity, safeguard high-quality public services and ensure that decisions continue to be made close to the people they impact.

“The voice of our residents is what really matters. We want to hear what you think about the future of your local councils. Please get involved in the survey and give us your views.”

The survey is open for comments until Sunday 20 April.



Related reports:

Parliament motion to reinstate Surrey County May elections

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Local Government Reorganisation in Surrey: Key Proposals

An independent view on Epsom and Ewell Council's future

Local Labour view on Epsom and Ewell Council's future

Local LibDem view on Epsom and Ewell Council's future

Godstone “Sink-hole” residents to return

After a long wait, good news may finally be coming to some who were forced to evacuate after a massive sinkhole opened up in a Surrey town. Families living on the impacted street in Godstone have been told they may be allowed to return home this weekend.

The huge hole appeared on Godstone High Street on February 17 and was quickly declared a major incident due to its seriousness and complexity. Now scaled down to a 'significant incident' investigations are still ongoing as to what the cause is and how to solve it.

“We have some really good news for residents,” said Lloyd Allen, Infrastructure Team Manager for Surrey County Council. “We’re expecting them to return this weekend.”

Wearing a hi-vis jacket and standing in front of part of the enormous hole, Mr Allen said families on Godstone high street can once again sleep in their own beds. He warned that the news is subject to a couple of issues the team is investigating and depends on them getting the all-clear that water quality is up to standard.

Five weeks after the high street was almost swallowed up by the sinkhole, highway officials still do not know what caused the major incident. “The plan for the future is to carry on doing what we are doing,” said Mr Allen with no clear indication of when the saga might end. The infrastructure manager said he and the team, as well as specially hired geo technical engineers are analysing the investigation results and seeing if there is a tunnel network.

In a new video released by the county council, the highways team gave a latest update on Godstone with some crucial insights. Surveys have revealed a lot of anomalies in the area which could be deep sewers, series of tunnels or even potentially soak away from properties. Further investigations are still needed to pin down exactly what they are, the team said.

Afterwards, the team will plot a series of bore holes on the site that they can carry out to look under the surface. If more tunnels or voids are found, they can put cameras down and do some more testing. “But that work might take several months longer,” Mr Allen said.

Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth at Surrey County Council, said: “Highways Officers have used foam concrete to temporarily fill the hole to stabilise the area and to ensure it doesn’t get any bigger.”

“Specialist surveys are continuing in areas which were previously inaccessible, to determine the underlying cause of the collapse and how best to permanently repair the area so it doesn’t reoccur.”

“Due to the unprecedented nature of this incident, we expect the full-scale repair of the site to take several more months although we expect residents will be able to return to their homes whilst works are carried out, once it is safe to do so. We thank them for their ongoing patience as we deal with this complex incident.”

Related report:

Surrey sink-hole major incident

Image: Lloyd Allen, Infrastructure Team Manager for Surrey County Council, on Godstone high street. (Credit: Surrey County Council).



Banstead Dog licensing scheme deemed ‘foul’

Professional dog walkers say they were told “if you don’t like what we’re doing, take your dog somewhere else” at a public meeting about a new licensing scheme being introduced for several Surrey beauty spots.

Dog walkers have claimed the land managers are using the new licensing project as a ‘pay or go away scheme’ which they say it is more expensive than neighbouring schemes and has been “appallingly” managed.

New rules could see professional dog walkers pay £360 to use a Surrey beauty spot, Banstead Common, from April 1. Banstead Common Conservators (BCC) said the main reason for setting up the scheme was to ensure the safety of everyone who uses the Commons and to control commercial business on the land.

“There’s disdain for the profession and that’s been made very clear,” said Emma, a self-employed dog walker. She previously spoke to Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) of the BCC staff being “heavy handed”. Now, Emma said the BCC are “bullying people into submission” with the new licensing rules.

Calling the land managers “prejudiced”, the professional dog walkers said the BCC have presented “no evidence” that they are a danger to the public or conservation compared to any other person who walks over the heath.

“They are refusing to supply the legal standing for the scheme,” said Emma, “I just don’t know what else to do.” Dog walkers have said they welcome the licensing scheme in principle but accused the BCC’s proposition as ‘unworkable’, more expensive than others and without engagement or input from dog walkers.

Rather than just a side-hustle, professional dog-walking is a job or business that people pay their mortgage with. Jen, a dog walker for nearly 10 years said: “The chairman and another committee member were dismissive and incredibly rude when concerned dog walkers asked legitimate questions about the licensing scheme at a January meeting.”

For months the professional dog walkers have complained they have been “left in the dark” and there has been “no dialogue” with the managers implementing a scheme which could significantly change their working conditions. “Their attitude has spurred so much misery and alienation,” an anonymous local dog walker said.

The chairman of the BCC accused professional dog walkers of “lying” in their complaints and “being insulting” against the BCC at a public meeting earlier this year. Another member advised dog walkers if they were not willing to pay for the license they should “go back to where they came from”.

A BCC spokesperson said: “All of our engagement with any user of Banstead Commons is done with respect and in accordance with our statutory duties.” The BCC have said they have responded to all enquiries they have received “in a professional and timely manner” and have hosted three informal meetings about the licensing scheme with positive feedback.

The land managers have said they are using their powers under paragraph 18 of the Metropolitan Commons Banstead (Supplemental) Act 1893 act to restrict commercial activity. Despite repeated requests from LDRS and interested groups, the conservators chose not to specifically highlight which part of the act they are referring to.

The BCC said the scheme was a response to the increase in the number of dogs being walked commercially on the Commons in recent years and the pressure it puts on the land, wildlife and visitors. As land managers, the conservators said, they need to ensure businesses are insured and identifiable when they are operating on our sites.

Spanning 1,350 acres, the land – owned by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council – includes Banstead Heath, Banstead Downs, Park Downs and Burgh Heath. Although the BCC claim the £360 annual license fee offers a good deal for users at just less than £1 a day, professional dog walkers argue it is extortionate compared to other Surrey and London boroughs which are council-run.

Similar schemes are also being trialled elsewhere in Surrey. Nonsuch Park in Epsom, is running a pilot commercial dog licensing fee of £200 a year with a limit of six dogs walking at any one time. The licence will be managed by Epsom and Ewell Borough Council as well as the London Borough of Sutton Council. Charging £164.50 to use open spaces across the whole district, Tandridge District Council also runs a licensing scheme.

Although some dog walkers may call the response “overblown”, the BCC said it has clear legal responsibilities to “protect the integrity of Banstead Commons and visitor safety”. The group added it has also catered its response in line with a prevention of future deaths report for Natasha Johnston, a professional dog walker who tragically was mauled to death by eight dogs she was walking in Caterham in 2023.

“Unknown people shouldn’t approach unknown dogs,” said Jen. She said the part of the scheme she was most concerned about



was BCC staff being able to walk up to her and the dogs and check collars which could put the dogs and herself at risk. "It goes completely against my GDPR policy," Jen said.

As it stands, if a dog walker's license is revoked there is no process of appeal and no refund. "They are judge, jury and executioner," Jen said. She lamented that neither Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, the landowners, nor the Department for Environmental Food and Rural Affairs want to get involved and the BCC are "unaccountable".

"What's different between dog walkers and members of the public walking dogs?" the anonymous dog walker challenged, explaining everyone uses the land and has to pick up dog poo. Speaking to the LDRS, the dog walkers said they take out local community dogs that live in the area and provide a needed service.

A BCC spokesperson said: "Banstead Commons Conservators are looking forward to working together with licensed dog walkers operating on our Commons. We have set up clear reporting procedures with licensed businesses which as well as a direct staff member to report concerns, includes hosting an annual review meeting open to all licensed businesses and an invitation for two representatives to join our Banstead Commons Consultative Group.

"Banstead Commons are wonderful open spaces enjoyed by many residents and visitors from further afield. Under our Act commercial activity is controlled in order to protect the integrity of the Commons and the welfare of its users. With the increasing volume of professional dog walkers, including displacement from other areas that have already implemented restrictions, it has become necessary to take the responsible step of licensing this activity. This scheme will help regulate the numbers of dogs being walked commercially on our sites and ensure that companies are operating safely and treating Banstead Commons, its users and wildlife with respect and consideration.

"Unless there is an incident to manage, Banstead Commons Conservators will not be interfering with licensed dog walking companies when they are operating safely and adhering to the licence scheme [...] Banstead Commons Conservators are always compliant in their operations."

Related reports:

A dog's dinner of a licensing scheme?

Should Nonsuch Park go to the dogs?

Image: Four dogs in Banstead wood, ahead of the licensing scheme to be introduced. (Credit: Dog walker Emma)

Surrey leads lateral thinking about vertical farming

Can vertical farming be the key to improving and safeguarding the United Kingdom's food system? This is the central question behind a new research project led by the University that has been awarded £1.4 million by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

The Vertical Farming to Improve UK Food System Resilience (VF-UKFSR) project will investigate how vertical farming can improve the country's supply of nutritious leafy greens, essential for a healthy diet.

Vertical farming is a method of growing crops in stacked layers, often indoors, using controlled environments. Unlike traditional farming, it doesn't rely on soil or natural sunlight. It uses soilless techniques and artificial lighting to create optimal conditions for plant growth. This allows crops to be grown year-round, regardless of weather conditions and makes more efficient use of space and resources.

Dr Zoe M Harris, project lead from the University of Surrey's Centre for Environment and Sustainability, said:

"Our project is keen to explore how vertical farming can provide local, diverse, and culturally appropriate food, given its potential to grow a wide variety of crops. So far, there's been little in-depth analysis of the risks to our country's leafy greens supply nor a thorough examination of the benefits and trade-offs vertical farming could bring to the UK's food system. Thanks to this grant from UKRI, we're excited to change that and create a clear roadmap to unlock this potential on a larger scale."

The research team will work closely with farmers, industry, government and the community to make sure that the outputs of the project focus on real-life and immediate benefits.

The core team is made up of whole-system, environmental and social scientists, UK Urban AgriTech (UKUAT) and five farm partners - Flex Farming, Innovation Agritech Group, Farm Urban, GrowPura, and LettUs Grow.



Dr Lada Timotijevic from the University of Surrey said:

“Our research is all about identifying and understanding the risks to our food system and seeing how vertical farming can help tackle these challenges. We want to create tools that make it easy to see the impact of expanding vertical farming on considerations including food supply, land use, and the environment, so we can make smart decisions for the future.

“We’re also focused on understanding the public’s perceptions of vertical farming and the social conditions needed for vertical farming to succeed, as well as on working closely with farmers, industry, and policymakers to build a roadmap that supports its growth across the UK.”

The project’s leadership team consists of:

- University of Surrey: Dr Zoe M Harris, Dr Lada Timotijevic, Dr Lirong Liu, Dr James Suckling, Dr Damiete Emmanuel-Yusuf
- University of Aberdeen: Professor Astley Hastings
- University of Sussex: Dr Alexandra Penn
- UKUAT: Mark Horler

Image: Vertical farm. Credit ifarm.fi Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International

Will sale of Dorking offices compromise housing plans?

Dorking’s former Aviva building has been put up for sale. The offices in Pixham Lane are being marketed by Savills – with the asking price only available on application. Currently owned by Stonegate Homes, it was set to play a key role in Mole Valley District Council’s housing targets, having sat empty for years following the decision of insurance company Aviva to leave the Pixham Lane site in the town at the end of 2016. Failure to meet its targets can have a lasting impact and leave boroughs open to unwanted development.

Owners Stonegate Homes were contacted but did not respond, and calls have been going straight to answer machine. Planning permission was granted for the site – often referred to as the former Aviva Building – for 369 homes in a mixture of flats and townhouses. Savills describes the land as “a substantial former office building”. Built in 1957, it was eventually bought by Dorking-based developers Stonegate with a view to converting it into homes, but its future is now shrouded with uncertainty.

Savill’s marketing brochure reads: “The site is considered to be an excellent opportunity to acquire one of the most prominent development sites in Dorking to deliver a mix of flats and houses that are in close proximity to Dorking Station. The location enjoys views of the Surrey Hills and is within close proximity of open countryside. The site has potential for some additional planning gain for further additional houses to be delivered, subject to planning and any technical constraints. There is the option to acquire the whole or to purchase phases with offers invited on an unconditional and subject to planning basis.”

Senior Mole Valley District councillors have said they are keeping a close eye on the sale and how it will affect housing delivery. Councillor Margaret Cooksey, portfolio holder for planning, said: “We need the homes to be built; they were supposed to be affordable homes on the site plus other community facilities. We need those to happen. We will be watching closely.”

Image: Former Aviva site in Pixham Lane, near Dorking (image Google)