

The Royal Marines Band Collingwood at Epsom Playhouse

28 June 2025



Organised by Cllr **Dr Graham Jones** MBE (Lieutenant Colonel (retired) (RA Cuddington) the renowned **Royal Marines Band Collingwood** made a triumphant performance at the Epsom Playhouse on Friday night, delivering a rousing programme brimming with technical excellence, military precision, and heartfelt artistry. Conducted by Captain Phil Trudgeon and Warrant Officer 2 Bandmaster Jamie Gunn, the band captivated a near-capacity audience with a thrilling showcase of traditional military repertoire and popular favourites.

The evening began, fittingly, with the National Anthem performed with stately dignity, reflecting the band’s deep roots in national and royal service.

The opening item, **Overture to *Candide* by Leonard Bernstein**, displayed infectious energy and fizzing orchestration, setting a vibrant tone. Bernstein’s much-loved operetta is famed for its satirical bite, and the Marines captured its brilliance and wit with panache.

Next came John Philip Sousa’s **Who’s Who in Navy Blue**, a 1920 march celebrating American naval traditions, crisply articulated by the brass and percussion with authentic verve.

In a change of mood, the band shifted to the familiar strains of the **Top Gun Theme**, arranged by Laughton. Its soaring harmonies and stirring sense of adventure delighted the audience, showcasing the band’s ability to cross genres effortlessly.

The **Drum Static** interlude then brought the spotlight to the Corps of Drums. Their razor-sharp discipline, complex sticking patterns and synchronised movement brought rapturous applause.

Cape Helles by Young followed, a poignant musical tribute to the Gallipoli landings of 1915, performed with great sensitivity and power.

Alford’s lively **The Mad Major** quick march injected a welcome spark of lightness, its playful melody and military swagger a reminder of Alford’s enduring legacy as the “British March King.”

A show-stopping highlight came with Corporal Savage’s clarinet solo in **Artie Shaw’s Clarinet Concerto**, arranged by Cray. This 1940 swing-inspired concerto, with its swooping glissandi and jazz idioms, was delivered with aplomb and won a spontaneous ovation.

The first half concluded with two contrasting works. **In Ireland** by Lance Corporal Brooks explored traditional folk-tinged melodies with a fresh, lyrical approach. Finally, Frank Ticheli’s **Vesuvius** erupted with rhythmic fire and dramatic textures, a thrilling depiction of the famous volcano’s destructive power.

The second half began with **Maiden Legacy**, an arrangement by Captain Trudgeon, demonstrating the band’s ability to reinterpret newer repertoire with flair.

A stylish rendition of **Skyfall**, the James Bond theme popularised by Adele with band soloist Beth McGregor, delivered a rich, cinematic grandeur which clearly resonated with the audience.

For the finale, the band turned to a cornerstone of English wind music: Gustav Holst’s **A Moorside Suite**, originally written for brass band.

- The **Scherzo** sparkled with rhythmic energy,
- The **Nocturne** brought a serene, pastoral calm,
- And the concluding **March** was robust and dignified, the perfect platform for the band’s tonal power and ensemble unity.

Shenandoah, arranged by Frank Ticheli, offered a moving moment of reflection. This classic American folk tune, thought to date back to early 19th-century river boatmen, was performed with deep feeling and a sonorous blend. Played in memory of a young member of the band recently lost to motor neurone disease.

As dusk approached, the band performed the traditional **Sunset**, arranged by Green, a moment of quiet remembrance often associated with evening ceremonies in the Royal Navy.

The concert then closed with two of the Royal Marines’ most cherished musical emblems: **Heart of Oak**, the official march of the Royal Navy since the 18th century, and **A Life on the Ocean Wave**, the Royal Marines’ regimental march, based on Henry Russell’s 19th-century song. These stirring finales underlined the band’s powerful heritage and left the audience in no doubt of their world-class standing.

However, the audience would not let them go without an encore and with Eric Coates’ great Dambusters March all left satisfied.

The Royal Marines Band Service has maintained its traditions since the 18th century, combining musical excellence with operational service. The Band Collingwood, based at HMS Collingwood, continues to support Royal Navy and national ceremonial events across the UK and internationally. Its members are trained both as musicians and as deployable service personnel, maintaining a dual role unmatched in the military music world.

The evening was also attended by members of the local branch of the Royal British Legion (RBL), who noted in the programme that concerts like these are an enduring link between the public and the Armed Forces, highlighting the shared remembrance and respect for those who have served.

This concert was a brilliant reminder of the pride, tradition, and sheer artistry of the Royal Marines Band Collingwood, whose excellence lifted the hearts of all who were privileged to hear them.

Well done to Dr Graham Jones for bringing such a memorable evening to Epsom.

Image courtesy Steven McCormick Photography

Will the doomed Epsom and Ewell Borough Council rise from the ashes in other forms?

28 June 2025



Epsom, 26 June 2025 — Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has taken a significant step towards reshaping local governance in response to the wider reorganisation of local government in Surrey, voting to launch a consultation on the possible creation of a Community Council for the borough.

At a specially convened full Council meeting on 26 June, members debated a proposal introduced by Cllr John Beckett (RA Auriol), who set out the case for consulting residents on the potential establishment of a Community Council as a means of protecting local voices once Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is abolished under the forthcoming unitary council arrangements.

Opening the meeting, the Mayor’s Chaplain prayed for “wisdom as we look at conflicting interests, confidence in what is good and fitting, and the ability to work together in harmony even when there is honest disagreement.”

Cllr **Robert Leach** (Mayor) (RA Nonsuch) explained the urgency of the debate, stating: *“This item requires a proposal and a seconder... I would ask for you all to exercise some self-restraint... and keep your comments concise.”*

Cllr Beckett formally introduced the motion, drawing on the Council’s agreed strategic priorities for 2025–2027: *“Tonight, we have in front of us a report which follows on from the agreed strategic priorities... to explore the future local governance in the borough of Epsom and Ewell.”*

He described how the Government’s plans to create either two or three new unitary councils in Surrey — abolishing the twelve existing borough and district councils as well as Surrey County Council — had left many residents “extremely vocal in stating that they have had no real voice in the pre-decision-making process.”

Cllr Beckett continued: *“These changes are about centralisation of power and money at the expense of local democracy for our residents. This decision... gives the residents a choice. It gives the residents a voice.”*

Explaining why a Community Council could matter, he said: *“Community Councils provide a vital link between residents and larger proposed unitary authorities... They also aim to enhance local representation by providing a direct route for voices of residents and local communities on local issues and decision-making.”*

The meeting heard considerable debate about how the proposed consultation, budgeted at £300,000 from reserves, would work.

Cllr **Julian Freeman** (LibDem College) asked pointedly: *“Will we be using TikTok, Instagram, Snapper Chat... or are we just putting out bits of paper in various libraries and council buildings... And also have we set a threshold as to what would constitute adequate consultation?”*

Cllr Beckett responded that the Council’s communications plan meeting the following day would consider “all options,” including social media and traditional methods. He acknowledged concerns about digital exclusion, stating: *“We will be taking all options, both electronic and paper format, as to meet the needs of all of our residents.”*

Concerns over the financial implications were repeatedly raised. Cllr **Alison Kelly** (LibDem College) asked: *“Will we make it clear that there could be an extra level of tax required... and have we got any evidence that shows that the county council can’t run an allotment or all these other things any better than the new unitary authority?”*

Cllr Beckett emphasised that the £300,000 would be drawn from reserves and could be returned if the consultation failed to show support for a Community Council: *“If we don’t get to consultation two, those will go back into reserves because we won’t need them.”*

Several members, including Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) and Cllr **Phil Neale** (RA Cuddington), expressed scepticism about whether residents would genuinely engage with the consultation, and whether enough information was available to make an informed decision.

Cllr **Freeman** was forthright, describing the proposal as “a complete waste of time, money, officers’ time and effort, when we’ve got other priorities that are being neglected.”

Others robustly defended the initiative. Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) argued: *“It’s only right that while this Labour government talks about empowering local communities and devolution, we actually say to them, ‘we are going to practice what you preach.’”*

Cllr **Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) similarly supported proceeding, while acknowledging: *“So much is going on in local government that our residents aren’t really getting any opportunity to input on... We’ve got to at least ask our residents.”*

The meeting closed with Cllr Beckett reminding colleagues that the evening’s decision was only about launching the consultation, saying: *“Several of our colleagues seem to be jumping the gun... This is more than what LGR and other local authorities have done with our residents in the past.”*

The first recommendation — to approve a community governance review — was carried by 19 votes to 0, with seven abstentions. The second recommendation, authorising the Chief Executive and Head of Legal to finalise consultation materials and take necessary steps to progress the review, was carried by 16 votes to six, with four abstentions.

An Epsom & Ewell Borough Council spokesperson confirmed afterwards that consultation with residents will start in July, with further details to be published on the Council’s website.

In a press release following the meeting, Cllr Beckett said: *“We believe that parish councils would provide an essential link between Epsom & Ewell residents and a new unitary council... ensuring that resident and community voices in Epsom & Ewell are heard and considered by decision-makers in local government in the future.”*

The Council is expected to finalise the consultation questions imminently, with public engagement running through the summer.

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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?

Epsom and Ewell parents taking on the child smartphone challenge

28 June 2025



Local parents are joining a national movement to delay children’s exposure to smartphones, with a sold-out event next week highlighting local concerns.

Epsom & Ewell’s Smartphone Free Childhood (SFC) group is hosting *The Hidden Impact of Smartphones on our Children* on Wednesday 3 July, 7.30-9pm, at St Martin’s Junior School on Ashley Road. The event will feature contributions from local headteachers, youth speakers, and safeguarding experts.

The movement, which has already attracted nearly 150,000 signatories to its “Parent Pact” across the UK, encourages families to hold off giving children smartphones before age 14. Surrey parents have been among the strongest supporters of the initiative, which aims to reduce the mental health and online safety risks faced by children in a hyper-connected world.

Laura Baker, from Epsom & Ewell’s SFC group, said:

“It’s all about strength in numbers — if your child knows that other kids in their class won’t be getting a smartphone for a few years either, the peer pressure instantly dissolves.”

The event’s speaker line-up includes:

- Mrs Donna Dove, Health and Wellbeing Lead and teacher at St Martin’s, Epsom
- Mr Joe Hordley, Assistant Headteacher at St Andrew’s, Leatherhead
- Mrs Rachel Hall, Associate Headteacher at Glyn School
- Health Professionals for Safer Screens
- Advisors from the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, addressing online safety and child protection
- Young people aged 13, 18, and 24 sharing personal perspectives on growing up in a digital age

Local MP Helen Maguire is expected to attend, and educators from more than ten primary and secondary schools across Epsom and Ewell are anticipated, reflecting the growing concern among school communities.

The organisers say school policies on smartphone use vary widely across Surrey, as staff attempt to manage the impacts of cyberbullying, mental health pressures, misogyny, and distraction in class.

Parents behind the initiative argue that urgent action is needed to protect children’s wellbeing, rather than waiting for government regulation of Big Tech. The cultural conversation around children and screens has been driven by hard-hitting documentaries such as *Swiped* and dramas like *Adolescence*, adding momentum to calls for change.

Epsom & Ewell SFC hope the borough could follow in the footsteps of St Albans, Bromley, and Southwark in developing a “smartphone free childhood” community.

The event is free to attend, but places must be booked in advance. After an initial sell-out, a limited number of extra tickets have now been released.

Booking and further information:

Laura Baker
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✉ SFC.epsom@gmail.com

Netflix to mainstream in Surrey

28 June 2025



A Surrey film studio used by Netflix, the streaming giant behind hit shows such as *Stranger Things*, *Bridgerton* and *Adolescence*, will be made permanent after full planning permission was granted. The site was originally approved on a short-term basis because of its green belt location, and Runnymede Borough Council’s desire to see the area eventually become an office hub as part of its Longcross Garden Village plan. The cratering demand of office space, plus the growing rise of Netflix, saw the land be taken out of green belt – meaning the temporary restrictions no longer applied and its long-term future could be secured. Officers told the Wednesday June 25 meeting: “This building was erected in 2020 under a temporary permission and has been used continually since. Permission was granted originally for the building on a temporary basis for reasons of visual amenity and so as not to prejudice the ongoing phased redevelopment of the Longcross north site. Since then there has been a change in site circumstances in respect of the commercial redevelopment of the site. The building supports the existing studio use and therefore there are no reasons why the building can not remain on a permanent basis.”

The site was previously occupied by the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) with many of its old buildings used by Netflix as film studios including buildings within the Surrey Heath. The Longcross North site together with the former DERA land south of the M3 including Longcross Barracks, form the designated Longcross Garden Village and has been removed from the green belt through the 2030 Local Plan. The building is near to the northern boundary within the wider Longcross North site. The officer added: “The appearance of the building is appropriate in the context of the wider film studios site.” The application was unanimously approved.

Longcross Studios (image Google)

110-Home Scheme at Langley Vale Sparks Green Belt Fears

28 June 2025



A neighbour has spoken out against early proposals by developer Fairfax to build up to 110 new homes on farmland at Langley Bottom Farm in Langley Vale, describing the plans as a “devastating blow” to the character and heritage of the area.

Langley Vale, nestled between Epsom Downs and surrounding ancient woodland managed by the Woodland Trust, is described by residents as more than just a location — but a cherished community shaped by its open fields, green spaces, and rural setting.

“This isn’t empty land up for grabs,” one local resident told the *Epsom and Ewell Times*. “Our green belt is a living, breathing asset — a habitat for wildlife, a natural break from urban sprawl, and a place for families to enjoy the countryside. Once it’s gone, it’s gone forever.”

The concerns centre on potential impacts including increased traffic, pressure on schools and GP surgeries, and the loss of valuable farmland that has been cultivated for generations. Neighbours fear that if this initial consultation leads to formal planning permission, it would “irreversibly alter” the area and set a worrying precedent for green belt development.

In their public exhibition materials, however, Fairfax describes the proposals as sensitive and environmentally responsible. The scheme, which is subject to local consultation, would deliver up to 110 homes on 5.2 hectares of land, with half of the properties designated as affordable housing.

According to Fairfax’s consultation website and exhibition documents, the proposals include:

- a biodiversity net gain of at least 10%
- significant landscaping and green planting
- electric vehicle charging points
- improved footpaths and cycle storage
- a children’s play area
- new public green space
- contributions to local infrastructure
- funding to extend the Surrey Connect on-demand bus service

Fairfax argues that the site, currently an arable field, scores “relatively low” for biodiversity and offers opportunities to enhance wildlife habitats while protecting the adjacent ancient woodland with buffer zones.

The developer also points to the pressing local demand for housing, highlighting that Epsom and Ewell Borough Council faces strict targets for new homes, including affordable units. The homes would be built using energy-efficient methods and aim to promote sustainable travel, Fairfax says.

Residents were requested to give feedback by 16th June but the comments link is still live at the time of this post. Online at langley.your-feedback.co.uk or by contacting the project team by phone or post.

The plans are at a consultation stage only, but campaigners fear they could soon turn into a planning application. “The green belt is supposed to protect communities from precisely this type of development,” the neighbour added. “If we allow this, it will change Langley Vale for good.”

Image: Langley development layout. Courtesy Fairfax Homes.

Epsom Picturehouse blossoms with Pride

28 June 2025



Picturehouse Epsom is proud to announce a powerful new partnership with Blossom LGBT to launch OUT — a year-round celebration of LGBTQ+ cinema.

Together, we’re amplifying queer voices on screen and creating space for connection, reflection, and community — showing that Pride isn’t just a once-a-year event, but an ongoing conversation and opportunity to build lasting community.

About Blossom LGBT

Blossom LGBT is a national non-profit supporting LGBTQIA+ young adults aged 16-30. Based in Surrey, their mission is to ensure that no young person faces exclusion — social or economic — because of who they are or whom they love.

They work to break down systemic barriers of discrimination, poverty, and disadvantage, empowering the next generation to thrive.

At Blossom, we are dedicated to creating a world where LGBTQIA+ young adults can overcome discrimination, thrive in safe and supportive communities, and access the tools and opportunities needed to succeed with dignity and purpose. We are designed for the community, by the community.

It’s vital that young people see themselves reflected in film, not just to feel visible, but to know that their stories, identities, and futures matter. Representation can inspire confidence, spark ambition, and help young people imagine a world where they belong.

Our Venue: Epsom Picturehouse

Epsom Picturehouse is a brand-new six-screen cinema in the heart of Epsom Square. With a rich programme of arthouse and quality mainstream films, plus a stylish café and bar, it offers a perfect setting for inclusive, community-focused events.

We’re excited to open our doors to OUT and host a variety of screenings, discussions, and gatherings that celebrate the richness and diversity of LGBTQ+ lives and experiences.

Joe Stroud from Epsom Picturehouse said:

“I’m delighted that, at the heart of all this, we’re celebrating community. What better way to do that than by sharing powerful stories on screen and using them as inspiring conversation starters?”

What is OUT?

OUT is a long-running Picturehouse initiative that celebrates LGBTQ+ stories — from reclaimed classics to bold new voices. Now in its tenth year at Clapham Picturehouse, we’re thrilled to extend this initiative to Surrey, helping local audiences build connections and community through film.

Clapham’s OUT journey began in 2014 with a screening of *Dallas Buyers Club*, and has since included landmark titles such as Barry Jenkins’ *Moonlight*, the historic Best Picture winner at the 2017 Academy Awards. Now, it’s Epsom’s turn.

Upcoming Events: Brokeback Mountain + Q&A Panel — 6 July

Join Blossom LGBT for a special 20th anniversary screening of *Brokeback Mountain*, directed by Ang Lee and starring Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal — a landmark film for the LGBTQ+ community.

Following the screening, we’ll host an open and thoughtful Q&A with invited panellists, exploring the film’s emotional journey — touching on themes of love, repression, and resilience.

Together, we’ll reflect on how life for LGBTQ+ people has changed (and in some ways stayed the same), especially in rural communities. How do those experiences echo in today’s legal battles and cultural conversations?

The evening will feature invited guests, including Outline, an organisation supporting people with their sexuality and gender identity through a helpline, website, and support groups. Also attending are the Mary Frances Trust (MFT) LGBT Peer Support Group, as well as Walk and Talk 4 Men — a free support group for men to come together, walk, talk, and support their mental health while enjoying some fresh air.

This event is for anyone seeking connection — whether you’re exploring your own journey, supporting someone close to you, or simply curious to learn more. We invite you into a warm, inclusive space to listen, reflect, and be part of a growing community.

Mark your calendars for more upcoming events celebrating LGBTQ+ stories:

Sun 29 Jun

- reDiscover *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (15) at 17:10

Mon 30 Jun

- Out Queer Futures (Cert TBC) at 20:30
- reDiscover *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (15) at 19:45

Tue 01 Jul

- Discover — Preview *Hot Milk* (15) at 20:15

Wed 02 Jul

- *Brokeback Mountain* plus Q&A (15) at 18:30

Stay tuned for more film nights, conversations, and creative community events throughout the year. Whether you’re a long-time advocate or new to the conversation, there’s a seat here for you.

Let’s make Pride more than a moment — let’s make it a movement. See you at the cinema.

For more information about the organisers, visit blossom.lgbt or email Steph Elhaddad at Steph.Elhaddad@blossom.lgbt.

Student overdose leads to policy change

28 June 2025



A university student from Surrey could have been saved from an overdose if police had left a voicemail for her parents, an inquest jury has found. Despite needing to find her address, officers did not leave a message. Amy Levy, 22, deliberately took an overdose of her prescription pills at her student home in Bristol while on the phone to a friend on June 18, 2023. Her friend alerted the police as Amy’s condition worsened. Surrey Police and Avon and Somerset Police launched an urgent search to find the University of the West of England (UWE) student and tried to contact her parents, who live in Surrey, because they did not know her address. But when officers and staff tried to reach Amy’s parents, no one picked up the phone to the number showing ‘no caller ID’. The calls were left unanswered, unable to ring back and no voicemail was left despite the gravity of the situation. Amy was eventually located more than 90 minutes after the first police call. Sadly, she died in hospital on June 22, 2023 from an overdose of different medications which caused hypoxic brain injury.

In a statement, Amy’s parents said: “We are totally broken that Amy is no longer with us, but we are also so proud of Amy and grateful for the time we had her in our lives.” An inquest jury identified a “catalogue of missed opportunities” to save Amy. The five-day inquest from June 6, 2025 concluded if the police had found her sooner, she would have survived. The jury said that despite taking a deliberate overdose of prescription drugs, it was not possible to know her true intent. Robert Sowersby, Assistant Coroner for Avon, has now issued a report raising concern about the lack of guidance or training issued to officers and staff about leaving voicemail messages – especially in circumstances where they are trying to obtain important information in a time-pressured situation. He said it was “hard to understand” why all of the officers or police staff decided not to leave any voicemail or message despite both forces grading Amy’s case as requiring an “immediate” response, the most urgent category.

“Both police forces knew that Amy had taken an overdose at an unknown address and that her condition was deteriorating,” the report said. “Despite that factual background, none of the officers or call handlers who phoned Amy’s parents left a voicemail message.” The inquest found that because the missed calls were from an unknown number, Amy’s parents did not know that there was an emergency, or that the police wanted to speak with them, and had no way of calling them back. Assistant coroner Sowersby wrote: “It is probable that Amy’s location could have been obtained earlier than it was if the police had left a suitably worded voicemail for one or more of her parents.” Surrey Police attended the family home in person and received details of Amy’s current address, which led to officers being able to find her in Bristol, Avon and Somerset Police said.

Police inspectors from both forces gave evidence at the inquest. There was guidance in Avon not to leave voicemails when the incident in question concerns domestic abuse, but there is no general guidance about when to leave a voicemail message in other cases. Surrey Police provided the coroner with evidence of updated voicemail procedure indicating that callers must consider if it is appropriate to leave a voicemail or message. Mr Sowersby said: “With limited or no guidance, training or policy on when police and/or police support staff liaising with the public should leave a voicemail, particularly in circumstances where they are trying to obtain important information in a time-pressured situation, I am concerned that there is a risk that future deaths will occur unless action is taken.”

Iftikhar Manzoor, of Hudgell Solicitors, represented Amy’s parents at the Inquest and said her death ‘must lead to clear policies’ across UK police forces when the risk to an individual has been graded as the highest level of urgency. He said: “What has been truly shocking to learn has been the fact that there is no system in place with regard to leaving messages in a situation where somebody’s life is quite clearly at risk, and the only person posing a danger to them is themselves. The calls were shown as unknown numbers, and as the police chose not to leave messages and only made one call attempt, a huge opportunity was lost immediately, and the sense of urgency dropped. It was the bare minimum effort.”

Responding to the coroner’s report, Superintendent Chris Colley of Surrey Police said: “Our thoughts and condolences remain with Amy’s friends and family following what must have been a very hard couple of years for her loved ones.” He added: “We have now made changes to our procedure around the use of voicemails and telephone contact attempts, to ensure we are doing all we can to be there for people when they need us most.” A spokesman for Avon and Somerset Police said: “Our thoughts are with the family of Amy Levy, who died in extremely tragic circumstances two years ago. A private apology has been made to her family, which we wish to repeat publicly, and we are reviewing our organisational policies in line with the findings relating to this case.” Avon and Somerset Police also said they are looking at potential changes to force polices as guided by an Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) learning recommendation earlier this month. The spokesperson said: “We will ensure any necessary changes to help protect the public are adopted and will provide a further update to the IOPC and coroner in due course.”

HM Coroners Court Woking Surrey

Two unitaries will save money says Surrey leader

28 June 2025



Splitting Surrey into two could fill the ever-widening gap for council funding, County Council leader Tim Oliver claims. In a cabinet meeting yesterday (June 26), the Surrey leader and councillor said he hoped local government reorganisation will provide a new opportunity to re-hash the old services onto new council bodies, but innovate how they are delivered to residents. He said: “Looking at reorganisation, looking at what savings can be delivered, will be really important to hopefully completely fill the gap we’re likely to see as a result of the Fair Funding Review.”

Last week, the government launched its consultation across Surrey for the two competing submissions for changing councils structures: one option is to divide Surrey into East and West unitary authorities, and the other is to split the county into three, North, East and West. The leader claimed that splitting Surrey into three mega councils, as promoted by the opposition, would break even and make no savings, whereas the two-authority model could generate ongoing yearly benefits around £25m. But ‘Team Three’ councils have argued the separation would be more evenly balanced financially in terms of delivering services like adult social care, SEND provision and collecting tax. Documents reveal, according to the District and Borough council calculations, the three-divisional plan would save £22.5m annually four years in.

Cllr Oliver clarified saving money is by no means the only drive in reorganisation, but was a significant consideration for keeping local councils afloat with income funding changes from central government. Surrey has a high council tax base meaning it has more band H houses, paying at least £3,692.70 amount in 2025, than many other parts of the country. Cllr Oliver said it will mean the county will lose the equivalent round of government grants or funding allocations, leaving a net reduction in Surrey’s income. The central government has launched a review into looking at how local councils are funded across the country, called the fair funding review. Documents reveal the government is considering an “equaliser” for local government income, directing funding towards places that are less able to meet their needs through locally raised income using council tax with others.

Cllr Oliver added: “We will be even more reliant upon council taxes as the source of financing and it’s already something in the region of 80-85 per cent. So that is not going to be good news. Any new money coming into local government over the next three years, 76 per cent of that will be funded on the assumption that every council increases its council tax by 5 per cent each year, for the next three years.” Local authorities have the power to raise the tax by up to 5 per cent every year, although some choose lower increases. Legally, increasing council tax more than 5 per cent requires a local referendum. Bin collections, libraries, public toilets, fire services, parks, SEND provision and social care are all funded by council tax. If councils are unable to make ends meet with the money raised, services will have to be cut or streamlined to balance the books. The leader said: “It is therefore hugely important for every reason that if we are to continue to deliver the services at the level that we wish to, we find areas of savings or efficiencies. We have a very good track record of delivery efficiencies year on year but this will be significant.”

Related reports:

[Surrey’s partner organisations support county council plans for local government reorganisation](#)

[Surrey Councils launch Local Government Reorganisation engagement](#)

[Tim Oliver Surrey County Council leader - Surrey Live](#)

Epsom & Ewell Biodiversity Action Plan’s five-year review ratified

28 June 2025



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council’s Environment Committee has formally endorsed the progress made on its Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) 2020-2030, following a scheduled five-year review presented at its meeting on 24 June. The review reflects both local achievements and national legislative changes introduced through

the Environment Act 2021.

The Council’s Biodiversity Action Plan, which is linked to its Climate Change Action Plan, aims to protect and enhance local habitats and wildlife, supporting wider efforts to address climate change across the borough.

Key Achievements 2020-2025

The five-year progress report highlights a range of local initiatives, including:

- Integrating protected species considerations into the householder planning application process
- Improved grassland management across local nature reserves, Nonsuch Park, and Epsom Downs
- Establishment of an Ash Dieback Working Group to coordinate the management of diseased trees
- Enhanced mapping and management of veteran trees throughout the borough
- Creation of new ponds in Horton Country Park and Epsom Common Local Nature Reserves
- Development of new wetland habitat at Chamber Mead within Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve, delivered in partnership with the South East Rivers Trust

The review also noted Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve’s continued success, having secured its 18th consecutive Green Flag Award in 2024. Additionally, recent wetland restoration projects are enabling the reintroduction of water voles to Surrey for the first time in over two decades along the Hogsmill River.

Legislative Context

The Environment Act 2021 has introduced new statutory duties for local authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Among these measures:

- Most planning permissions must now deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain, with habitats protected for a minimum of 30 years
- Local authorities are required to produce biodiversity reports
- Mandatory Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) must be developed to support nature recovery

According to Natural England, the Environment Act marks a significant shift in legally protecting and enhancing biodiversity, setting targets in areas such as air quality, water, waste, and species recovery by 2030.

Background

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council’s Biodiversity Action Plan is a long-term strategy to safeguard and strengthen the borough’s ecosystems. It works alongside the Council’s Climate Change Action Plan, first launched in 2020 and refreshed for 2025–2029, which aims to reach carbon neutrality by 2035.

Councillor Liz Frost, (RA Woodcote and Langley Vale) Chair of the Environment Committee said: “We are committed to creating and maintaining habitats that support resilient ecosystems in our local nature reserves and green spaces across the borough. Our Biodiversity Action Plan plays a vital role in tackling climate change.

This five-year review has highlighted the vast amount of work, and wide-ranging activities, that we deliver. A prime example is Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, that was awarded its 18th consecutive Green Flag Award in 2024. Also, fantastic partnership work to create wetlands is enabling the reintroduction of water voles to Surrey for the first time in over 20 years along the Hogsmill River.

Thanks to our countryside team for their passion, hard work and expertise in shaping biodiverse habitats across the borough. Also, a huge thank you to our partners and volunteers, without their support we wouldn’t be able to enjoy such wonderful green spaces.”

For further details, residents can view the Environment Committee’s report on the Council’s website or visit the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) for information about biodiversity net gain measures.

Image: Comma Butterfly

Epsom and Ewell Council Tax Arrears Top £1.8 Million

28 June 2025



Council tax arrears in Epsom and Ewell have reached £1.8 million, according to new figures from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The amount contributes to a record £6.6 billion of outstanding council tax across England, highlighting a deepening crisis in household finances.

The local figure reflects the ongoing pressures of the cost-of-living crisis, with many households struggling to pay essential bills. National Debtline, the free debt advice service run by the Money Advice Trust, reports that one in four people contacting them for help has council tax debt, with an average shortfall of £1,958 per person.

Research from the Money Advice Trust found that, as of March 2025, around 2.2 million people in England — equivalent to 5% of households — were behind on their council tax.

Council tax is a critical source of revenue for local authorities, funding services including social care, waste collection, and local infrastructure. But with budgets increasingly stretched, councils have relied more on council tax income, pushing bills higher and making payment harder for some residents.

Currently, rules mean that if a resident misses a single council tax payment, they can become liable for the full annual amount, which can quickly escalate to court action and bailiff involvement.

In response, the Government has proposed extending the timeframe before enforcement action begins, giving people more opportunity to catch up on missed payments. The Ministry of Justice has also announced a consultation on strengthening oversight of the bailiff industry, with proposals to give the Enforcement Conduct Board statutory powers to regulate bailiff practices.

Steve Vaid, Chief Executive of the Money Advice Trust, said:

“Unless changes are made at a policy level, arrears are likely to keep climbing. At National Debtline, we’re calling for improved collection practices, as well as greater investment in council tax support schemes, to prevent people falling behind in the first place.”

National Debtline encourages any resident worried about their council tax payments to seek free, independent advice before their debts spiral. Their helpline is available on **0808 808 4000** or via **www.nationaldebtline.org**.