

Ewell students cruise to new careers

27 June 2025



Cruise industry giants have teamed up with three colleges to highlight the sector as an exciting, rewarding career pathway for school leavers. This included 12 Travel and Tourism students at Nescot college in Ewell, who have just completed their first Cruise Career Springboard programme, allowing them to dip their toes into a potential career in the cruise sector by visiting several incredible ships, hearing from industry leaders and seeing head office and shoreside roles in action.

The Cruise Career Springboard programme was developed and masterminded by Edwina and Matthew Lonsdale at Mundy Cruising and has been supported by key industry figures, who have come together to invest in the next generation. This includes representatives from the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) and leaders from numerous operators including Royal Caribbean, Celebrity Cruises, Silversea, Norwegian Cruise Line, Oceania, Regent Seven Seas, Cunard, P&O, Princess, Seabourn, MSC Cruises, HX Expeditions, Uniworld, AmaWaterways, Windstar and Viva. Former Managing Director and Vice President of Celebrity Cruises, Jo Rzymowska, an inspirational speaker and Non-Executive Director at Hays Travel joined the programme to mentor the Nescot students. Participants have also benefited from the wisdom of former Managing Director of Regent Seven Seas Cruises UK, Graham Sadler, and Debbie Dale, leading trainer for the sector.

The course, which took place over nine weeks and included students from St John Bosco College in Battersea and Itchen College in Southampton, also aims to improve diversity and inclusion, introducing learners from varied backgrounds to the wide range of on-board and shore-based opportunities. This could be anything from engineering to entertainment, HR to health and safety and destination management to deck duties.

This year the students visited six cruise ships and learnt about the product offer covering expedition, luxury, mainstream and river cruise liners. They also undertook classroom work, visited and heard about operations at company headquarters and prepared for a final presentation to industry professionals where they will pitch the opportunities for career pathways in the sector. Plans are already in place to embed the learning and experience into Nescot's future delivery and to launch a Level 4 qualification in Travel & Tourism with a pathway in the cruise industry from 2026.

Julie Kapsalis, Principal and CEO at Nescot said: "This programme is very close to my heart as a cruise addict – I've recently returned from my latest fantastic adventure. It's wonderful to share my love for this sector with my students. University isn't always the right route for everyone at eighteen, particularly once the cost is factored in. With that in mind, we aim to be innovative at Nescot, working closely with businesses to show students there are other exciting options out there. This includes apprenticeships and entry level roles which can be inspiring and fun with exceptional progression pathways. The Cruise Career Springboard has offered once-in-a-lifetime experiences, expert mentorship and the chance to learn about and try roles beyond the course. It's clear that the Cruise industry offers students a world of opportunity and we're working together to help them grab it."

Edwina Lonsdale, Managing Director of Mundy Cruising and Cruise Career Springboard creator said: "Many young people look at the cruise sector and don't realise it could be a career option for them, so we set out to change that. We want a diverse, enthusiastic workforce, both at sea and shoreside so linking up with colleges made perfect sense. I've been blown away by the continued industry reaction and how many individuals and operators have come on board to help us. We're incredibly grateful, as with their support, the Springboard programme can launch more careers than ever. I have also been struck by the enthusiasm and participation of the students – they have a great future ahead of them."

Eva Williams, Travel & Tourism Student at Nescot said: "Nescot's partnership with the Cruise Career Springboard programme has been amazing! We were so lucky to visit all the different ships and have big names in the industry chatting to us. I was genuinely surprised by how many people work behind the scenes to keep everything running – whole teams making things happen without ever stepping on deck. I'd never really considered the cruise industry as a career option before, but it's definitely on my radar now. I love the idea of playing a part in helping people's dreams come true."

Working in the cruise industry allows young people to access a wide range of careers and utilise skills that cover a range of jobs and functions. As a global industry, it also offers opportunity to work with colleagues around the world and to travel. Many who join the cruise line industry might begin on ships, but then pivot into shore-based roles as their career develops, or family commitments make travel more difficult. The industry can provide a lifelong, varied and dynamic career.

Industry professionals interested in finding out more about the Cruise Career Springboard can contact Edwina Lonsdale – edwina@mundycruising.co.uk

In addition to Travel and Tourism courses, Nescot offers a wide range of college courses for school leavers and adults, including Animal Care, Business, Computing and IT, Construction, Performing Arts, Childcare, Health & Social Care and Beauty Therapy. To find out more about studying at Nescot call 020 8394 3038, visit www.nescot.ac.uk or email adviceteam@nescot.ac.uk

Image: Students from Nescot, St John Bosco and Itchen Colleges are joined on Silver Spirit by Edwina Lonsdale – Mundy Cruising, Mentors Graham Sadler and Jo Rzymowska, Peter Shanks – Silversea Cruises and Julie Kapsalis – Nescot.

Epsom Choral Society ends term on a high note

27 June 2025



21st June, St Andrews, Northey Avenue: Fresh from their triumph at this year's Leith Hill Music Festival, Epsom Choral Society presented an end-of-term programme consisting of three wonderful contemporary items on a theme of jazz and improvisation. Plus a fourth – which earned its place by virtue of being a world premiere! The whole evening worked like a giant crescendo, starting quietly and ending with Will Todd's magnificent and sometimes wild *Mass in Blue*.

Jazz as a genre poses huge demands on a traditional choir. It's no longer enough just to master the notes, the rhythms and the dynamics. The whole concept of flexible swing rhythms can feel positively alien to those steeped in classical music. Full marks, therefore, to ECS conductor Julian Collings, for helping the choir to overcome what is, in essence, a new language to give us an evening of singing that was convincing, exuberant and full of vitality.

Hats off also to the supporting cast: saxophonist Alex Flower, bassist Ben Summers, drummer Tom Lee and pianist Peter Jaekel. Ultimate accolade must go to soprano Lisa Swayne for her stratospheric ululations that took *Mass in Blue* to a different level.

Opening the concert was Ola Gjeilo's (1978-) *Evening Prayer*. Gjeilo's reflective, not necessarily religious, compositions with sumptuous harmonies have made him a great favourite with choirs on both sides of the Atlantic. Composed in 2010, the powerful words of St Augustine were reverently and warmly sung, with all

three protagonists – choir, pianist and saxophonist – creating an atmosphere of contemplation within a framework of gentle and optional improvisation.

And thus, having been transported heavenwards, we were brought down to earth with a bump!

This fun little ditty *True Story* (words by Michael Rosen) was one of a song-set of ten by Russell Hepplewhite, who conceived of inviting ten living poets to document his/her personal response to the current world, and setting these to music. It's not clear whether the full set is ever intended to be performed all together, since they are being individually premiered this year by choirs from around the country.

The song chosen for ECS is set very simply for choir and piano – which makes it accessible for many choirs. Excellent diction was vital to the storytelling; along with a spirited enjoyment of the text – where one man's ecstasy at the birth of his son is mirrored against another man's wonderment at the hatching of a pigeon's egg.

The John Rutter (1945–) of the *Birthday Madrigals* is a totally different Rutter from the one of popular Christmas carols. These songs are settings of Elizabethan texts infused with the spirit of jazz, whilst perpetuating the great tradition of English part songs. That Rutter is capable of this level of technical mastery of the jazz idiom, together with his lightness of touch and superb invention, makes for a set of five miniatures indispensable to the choral anthology.

And ECS rose to the challenges, giving us an impressive array of singing – from the nimble, joyful and carefree to soulful blending of voices; from fearless high spirits to judicious balancing of the ladies' long, lyrical phrases against harmonious humming from the gentlemen. Optional piano accompaniment in the a cappella numbers provided subtle support for tricky shifting harmonies. What a treat to take us to the interval!

Ever since the 10th century if not before, man has made music to glorify his gods – from the monks' Gregorian chants to the masses of Haydn and Beethoven, each reflecting the conventions of their time. In 1991, Paco Peña created a fiery and rumbustious *Misa Flamenca* to celebrate the Almighty. So it seems appropriate, inevitable even, that in 2003, Will Todd (1970–) should decide to make use of a contemporary idiom to fashion his own offering.

Mass in Blue needs small but vital supporting resources – soprano solo, piano, bass, saxophone, drum kit. But smallness in scale does not mean smallness in achievements. Quite the contrary. What shines through is a superbly confident writing technique that is strong, clear, propulsive and above all, enjoyable for both singers and listeners alike.

No one should under-estimate the amount of hard work that the choir must have put in to meet the merciless technical challenges. There are sliding intricacies of jazzy rhythms, seemingly indecipherable within the confines of traditional notation; there are rapid changes of tempi, metre, dynamics and everything else going; there is the uber-cool, quasi-fugal and multi-layered *Benedictus* – all of these demanding agile and committed singing to maintain the driving momentum. Members of ECS embraced all these hurdles and more, and with the return of the mighty soprano adding fire to the quadraphonic build-up to a bone-shakingly thrilling finale.

Yes, we were gripped. All of us.

Job done. BRAVISSIMO!

Lynda Chang is a local musician and advocate of live music

Image: Mass in Blue – Lisa Swayne and Julian Collings

Epsom banking on more women business owners

27 June 2025



Epsom Metro Bank's Local Director, Sammie Zejnuli champions the need for more women business owners

Women-owned businesses are a significant and growing force in the economy, with women entrepreneurs leading a diverse range of industries and contributing to innovation and economic growth. In 2022, the Rose Review reported that a greater number of women in the UK founded more businesses than ever before, despite immense economic uncertainty.

While over twice as many female-led businesses were founded in 2022 than in 2018, we still need to go further because female entrepreneurs represent huge economic potential for the UK: £250 billion could be added to the UK economy if women matched men in starting and scaling businesses.

The Rose Review identified four key areas that women reported they needed more support in to be successful in business: mentoring, access to funding, networking and childcare.

I have witnessed first-hand some of the issues that women face when starting up a new business – particularly around access to funding. Women-led businesses often struggle to secure funding compared to their male counterparts, facing a “funding gap” at every stage of their business journey, and women are often more reluctant than men to take on debt to start up their own business.

There are organisations which can exclusively help women starting out. Both the Women in Business – the UK's leading women in business network – and many chambers of commerce have women in business groups centred around local meetings. While the Women's Business Network hosts online meetings every fortnight. For start-up funding there is the Female Founders Fund, Innovate UK and the Enterprise Hub, but grants will be subject to criteria.

My role is all about relationship banking which is central to the customer service we offer at Metro Bank. We have local directors and local business managers in each of our stores just to support the local businesses in our communities. We are active in our local communities and offer a unique perspective – working with key business influencers to help our business customers access what they need to grow and succeed.

Personally, I have seen that women in business prefer a warm introduction. Having someone they can talk to face to face about any business concern is really appreciated by our female customers. We can help our female business customers create warmer introductions to the advisers they need – be that angel investors, accountants and solicitors, to name a few.

Here in Epsom, some of the most successful women business owners are solicitors, as well as those in tech and the beauty industry.

We regularly hold networking events in our stores for local business owners and I would encourage any woman thinking about starting up a business to come along and have a chat with the women who have made the leap and can offer help and advice at every stage of business development.

Our experience also shows us that women can prefer to deal with women. Emergent female business owners often speak of their frustration at not being understood or even believed by the men they have dealt with in trying to get their new business off the ground.

We know our focus on a more personal approach is working and our relationship banking has helped us cultivate more female business customers – one in four of our sole proprietors are women and nearly one in five of all new business current accounts were opened by women last year.

Every woman's path is different and the hard work and challenges should not be underestimated. But the chance to be financially independent, in control of your work-life balance, and the immense job satisfaction is surely worth the chance. So, if that business idea has been buzzing around your head and you are thinking about taking a leap – go for it.

Sammie Zejnuli, Local Director, Epsom Metro Bank

Great Get Together Got its Act together.

27 June 2025



Sunday, St Joseph’s Church in Epsom was buzzing with laughter, music, and the spirit of community as residents gathered for The Great Get Together — a free, vibrant family event co-hosted by Good Company and Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network.

The event was officially opened by the Mayor of Epsom & Ewell, Councillor Robert Leach, and warmly supported by local MP Helen Maguire, whose presence reflected the significance of the day for the whole community.

From the moment the gates opened, visitors were welcomed into an afternoon packed with activities, entertainment, and delicious food — all completely free of charge. Families from across the borough came together to celebrate unity, diversity, and neighbourly spirit.

Children and adults alike were kept smiling with a variety of games and creative stations. Highlights included crazy golf, football, face painting, and colourful arts and crafts, all made possible by a team of tireless volunteers.

The entertainment line-up was a true showcase of local talent. Epsom’s own Ukrainian Renaissance Choir moved the crowd with their stirring songs, while Freedom Pulse Brass brought rhythm and energy. Helin Konyar, a graduate of Laine Theatre Arts, delighted both children and adults with her joyful Disney song set.

No community celebration is complete without good food — and this one delivered. Lezzet Kitchen, Turkish cooks, served up their famous filled flatbreads, freshly made on-site, alongside Noah’s pudding made by the Chickpea Project, thought to be the oldest dessert in the world.

One attendee summed up the day perfectly: “Today was truly unforgettable, filled with love, warmth, and a deep sense of safety. It was inspiring to see so many vulnerable refugee families brought together with the wonderful Epsom community.”

Thanks to the dedication of countless volunteers, The Great Get Together was a heart warming success.

Image: Epsom and Ewell Mayor Cllr Robert Leach (RA) and Helen Maguire MP at Epsom’s Great Get Together

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

27 June 2025



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) will meet Thursday, 26 June for an extraordinary session to decide whether to launch a formal Community Governance Review (CGR)—a move that could lead to the creation of one or more Community Councils across the borough.

The proposal comes in direct response to the Government’s initiative to abolish all 11 borough and district councils in Surrey, along with Surrey County Council, and replace them with fewer, larger unitary authorities. The Government is currently considering submissions for either two, or three new unitary councils for the county. The Government may still impose a single authority for the whole County. A decision is expected in autumn 2025.

If the borough and county councils are dissolved—as is widely anticipated in April 2027—Epsom and Ewell would be left as one of the few areas in Surrey without a “lower-tier” of local government unless it acts now to establish one. Unlike many other parts of the county, Epsom and Ewell is currently “unparished”, meaning it has no town or parish councils. The proposed Community Councils would fill that void.

What is a Community Council?

Community Councils are parish councils in all but name, capable of levying their own precept (a share of Council Tax) and taking on responsibilities such as managing parks, allotments, bus shelters, community centres, and street lighting. They may also act as local voices on planning applications and community development.

The proposal is for either:

- One Community Council to cover the whole borough, or
- Two Community Councils dividing the borough between East and West, with four different boundary configurations under consideration.

Maps, population data, and details of council assets in each option form part of the public consultation package.

Consultation and Timeline

If Full Council agrees to proceed, the CGR would begin in July 2025 with a twelve-week public consultation. The review process must be completed within 12 months if it is to inform the April 2027 reorganisation.

A second round of consultation will follow in early 2026, with a final decision due by June 2026. If approved, elections to the new Community Councils would be held in May 2027.

A £300,000 budget has been allocated to fund the consultation and planning stages, to be drawn from EEBC’s strategic priorities reserve.

What Would These Councils Do?

Community Councils could inherit some of the Borough Council’s functions and assets. However, this would depend on detailed financial and legal planning. Transfers of property and responsibilities would need to comply with any restrictions imposed under a potential Section 24 Direction—special powers the Secretary of State may use to restrict councils from disposing of assets in the run-up to local government reorganisation.

Significantly, the new councils would be able to raise funds independently through a local precept. While this could enable more responsive services, it also raises concerns about an increased financial burden on residents—particularly if a higher precept replaces services that were formerly funded by EEBC without any direct local taxation.

Too Many Layers?

One of the central arguments for creating large unitary authorities is to streamline governance, eliminate duplication, and reduce the cost of running multiple layers of local government.

But the creation of Community Councils risks reintroducing those layers, potentially replacing one borough council with both a unitary authority *and* one or more new Community Councils beneath it. Some have questioned whether such a system would actually reduce costs at all—especially if a new strategic authority is also established to coordinate policy between two or more unitary areas of Surrey.

Critics warn of a complex and potentially costly patchwork: unitary authority, strategic body, and newly-formed parish councils—all with their own budgets, meetings, officers, and elections.

EEBC, however, is keen to preserve a strong local voice. In a statement, Council Leader Cllr Hannah Dalton said:

“We’re navigating the biggest change in local democracy for more than 50 years. We want to make sure that, whatever the outcome of local government reorganisation, the voices of our residents and local communities continue to be heard in years to come – this is a vital element of local democracy.” Epsom and Ewell Times 28/05/2025.

What Happens Next?

Should the Council vote to proceed on Thursday, residents will be invited to participate in shaping the future of their local governance. A dedicated consultation website will go live in early July, with drop-in events, online surveys, and stakeholder workshops planned through to September.

Further updates will be provided via the Council’s social media and through local publications, including the *Epsom and Ewell Times*.

Have Your Say

Residents will be asked:

- Whether Community Councils should be created
- Whether there should be one or two (or more) such councils
- What functions they should perform
- How they should be funded
- What boundaries make the most sense

More information is available at www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk and by emailing: cgr@epsom-ewell.gov.uk

Related reports:

[Epsom and Ewell Borough Council out – Community Council’s in?](#)

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

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

[Surrey’s BIG debt question in local government reorganisation](#)

[Local Government Reorganisation in Surrey: Key Proposals](#)

Assisted Dying Bill Passes in Commons – Epsom MP Explains Absence

27 June 2025



In a historic moment for UK parliamentary debate, the Assisted Dying Bill passed its third reading in the House of Commons on **Friday 20 June 2025**, following a narrow but decisive vote. MPs voted **314 in favour** and **291 against**, a margin of just 23 votes, paving the way for the Bill’s progression to the House of Lords.

The **Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill**, introduced by Labour MP Kim Leadbetter, proposes to legalise assisted dying for terminally ill adults in England and Wales who are medically expected to live for six months or less. Under the Bill’s framework, individuals would be able to request life-ending medication, to be self-administered following a rigorous process of approvals.

That process would require sign-off by two independent doctors and a special three-member oversight panel comprising a legal expert, psychiatrist, and social worker. Earlier provisions for High Court authorisation were removed in the final draft to streamline implementation, a move both welcomed and criticised in equal measure.

Supporters of the Bill argue that it reflects modern values around personal autonomy and compassionate end-of-life care, allowing individuals the dignity of choosing how and when they die. They point to robust safeguards within the Bill — including mental capacity assessments, a residency requirement, and a mandatory waiting period — as protections for vulnerable people. Medical professionals would retain the right to opt out on grounds of conscience.

Opponents, including some religious leaders and palliative care specialists, argue that the Bill could open the door to pressure on the elderly, disabled or chronically ill to end their lives prematurely. They also warn that overstretched NHS and social care services might struggle to implement the regulatory framework effectively.

Among those unable to cast their vote was Epsom and Ewell’s Liberal Democrat MP, **Helen Maguire**, who has consistently supported the Bill in previous readings. Ms Maguire issued the following full statement to the *Epsom and Ewell Times* explaining her absence:

“I am disappointed to have been unable to attend the vote. I have consistently voted for this Bill.

My absence on the voting date of Friday, June 20th, was due to a pre-planned parliamentary trip. This visit was scheduled before the voting date was confirmed and unfortunately could not be moved.

This is an issue I care about profoundly, and I gave serious thought as to whether I should be away. In the end, I was paired with another MP who was unable to attend as they hold a different view from me, which meant that our absences effectively cancelled each other out in terms of the final result.

While this did offer some reassurance to my conscience, I appreciate that my absence may still be disappointing to those who had hoped to see a vote recorded in person. Please know that I have made it a priority to attend all other sitting Fridays when the assisted dying bill was debated, precisely because of how important I know these debates and votes are, particularly on such sensitive and personal matters.”

With the Bill now heading to the House of Lords for further scrutiny, attention turns to whether peers will support what could become one of the most significant moral and legal reforms in recent decades. While some in the Lords remain sceptical, others are warning against frustrating legislation that has cleared the elected chamber by a democratic vote.

Whether or not the Bill survives its passage through the Lords, the June 20th vote represents a shift in the national conversation — one that brings the UK a step closer to joining countries like Canada, New Zealand, and parts of the United States in legalising assisted dying under carefully controlled conditions.

Surrey Police officer inspires change to racism law in private places

27 June 2025



Surrey Police officer Sergeant Candice Gill is celebrating this week after successfully campaigning for an amendment to the law that will have a far-reaching impact.

While it is a criminal offence to racially or religiously abuse someone in public, this does not extend to incidents occurring in homes. This loophole left police officers and emergency workers with no legal protection from such attacks during home visits.

Candice experienced the impact of this first-hand. She says: “I cast my mind back to the day of a racially aggravated incident against me. I knew the man was racist. Once I was inside his house, he made it overtly clear. The abuse he threw at me was both damaging and humiliating, and there were no legal consequences.

“It seemed like a no-brainer to me that something had to change. But changing the law seemed way too big, far out of my remit, impossible even.”

Surrey Police Deputy Chief Constable Nev Kemp heard about this outdated gap in the law and committed to championing the cause with Candice.

He capitalised on opportunities to brief ministers and wrote numerous letters. Alongside Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend, Candice and Nev made a trip to Parliament to press the case for change.

When they learnt earlier this year that there was cross-party support in Parliament and the changes would be made, Candice and Nev were thrilled. Last week they received written confirmation that the government will make an amendment to the law, subject to the Police and Crime Bill receiving Royal Assent later this year. The government will introduce two new offences, ensuring that emergency workers are covered under the law when doing their jobs in private homes.

Candice says: “I am absolutely delighted to have heard that my proposal to have the law changed has been agreed.

“I hope the change will go some way into making all officers but particularly the officers who are ethnically or religiously diverse feel more protected and more valued while doing one of the hardest jobs out there. The positive impact is widespread across all police forces and other emergency services.”

Deputy Chief Constable Nev Kemp says: “More than once, I heard from colleagues that the impact of being singled out and attacked for simply being who you are was more profound than being physically assaulted.

“This important change wouldn’t have happened without Candice and is a reminder of the difference we can make with determination and teamwork. Letters of support from national leaders representing the ambulance service, fire and rescue service and the Police Federation have helped to confirm the difference it will make to emergency workers across England and Wales.

“Surrey is a consistently improving force, and this is further evidence of our pathway to becoming a leading force in fighting crime and protecting people.”

Policing Minister Dame Diana Johnson said: “Candice’s story is heartbreaking. Our emergency workers put themselves in harm’s way every day to keep us safe and they should never have to tolerate abuse due to their race or religion while simply doing their job.

“As part of our Plan for Change, this government is rebuilding the bond between the public and police, and part of that means ensuring our officers have the protections they deserve.

“By closing this loophole, we’re sending a clear message that racial and religious abuse directed towards those who serve our communities will not be tolerated, and I thank Candice, Deputy Chief Constable Nev Kemp and all those at Surrey Police who have campaigned for this important law change.”

Bus station app for visually impaired a first in Surrey

27 June 2025



Surrey County Council is now the first UK local authority to provide a new app to help guide blind and partially sighted passengers around bus stations across the county.

The Aira Explorer app allows customers to place a video call with a trained visual interpreter on speakerphone, who looks through the person’s smartphone camera to guide them around the bus station.

The service is now operating at bus stations in Guildford, Redhill, Staines and Woking.

All app usage at these locations will be free of charge, provided by Surrey County Council using some of its allocation from the Government’s Bus Service Improvement Fund.

Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth at Surrey County Council, said:

“We’re very aware that using buses and navigating bus stations can sometimes be difficult for people with visual impairments. We’re keen to make bus travel accessible for everyone and hope this will support people with sight loss to travel confidently and independently.

As well as helping blind and partially sighted bus users to locate their bus, interpreters can also direct them to a member of staff for assistance, read the timetable for them or explain the way into town.

This initiative is part of our wider investment in buses which also includes £6.3m to provide more ultra-low and zero emission community transport minibuses, £9m in bus priority measures to ensure Surrey buses turn up on time, and £1.4m in improving information for passengers at bus stops. Our Surrey LINK card gives young people half-price bus travel and we’ve expanded our on-demand Surrey Connect bus services to cover areas where there are limited fixed bus routes, giving more options to travel by bus for all residents right across Surrey.

We’ve worked with Govia Thameslink Railway, Sight for Surrey, the Sussex Sight Loss Council and the Surrey Coalition of Disabled People to get this trial underway, which we hope to extend if it proves popular.”

The app is being launched as part of **Better Transport Week**, the annual celebration of how better transport can help connect communities and bring people together. This year, the week takes place from 16 to 22 June and is funded by the UK Government.

Ben Curtis from Campaign for Better Transport, which organises Better Transport Week, said:

“Good public transport networks help connect us to the people we love, the things we need and the places that matter. That’s why I’m really pleased to see first-hand how Surrey County Council is working to improve the local bus network. Buses are key to keeping us connected, and the new Aira app will help ensure that everyone can access and use the county’s buses, building a fairer future for everyone.”

This initiative follows a successful roll out by Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR), who have also partnered with Aira.io to support visually impaired passengers get around their rail network more confidently.

More information is available on the Surrey County Council website.

Victory for parent power after axed bus route is replaced

27 June 2025



Campaigning parents whose children were told to bring torches and walk across unlit heathland by Surrey County Council have won a long-fought victory after it was announced that axed school buses would be replaced. Early this year Surrey County Council said it was saving money and cancelling the free bus service between Molesey and Esher High, advising children to instead walk through dark alleyways, unlit heathland and unguarded viaduct sluice gates. The council’s decision was made after bureaucrats decided the route was safe and that there would be no alternative provisions put on, to the horror of worried parents.

Now after months of campaigning, petitions and pressure from senior politicians to stop the ‘cruel and needless punishment of children’, the council has announced Falcon will trial an extra, paid for, 814 service from Molesey to Esher. Parents, though welcoming the news, are asking why the extra service could not have been announced at the same time, saving needless stress and worry, and why it took the community to fight back to make it happen?

Parent Kate Maxwell said: “This whole process has been so stressful on everyone involved, the parents, children, and schools, and for what? I’m thrilled they’ve seen sense but it could have been handled so much differently. They would have known it would cause a lot of problems for everyone, including the children already using paid buses. Surely, if they wanted, they could have put these arrangements in place when they axed the free buses instead of wasting everyone’s time. Why did it take the community fighting back to make this happen?”

In a letter to parents, Esher High School headteacher Andy King said they were pleased to share that an additional 814 bus would be running as a trial from September, following “strong and sustained advocacy from our school and parent community.” It added: “This outcome is the result of collective determination. When 81 of our students lost access to free coach transport, we were placed in a deeply challenging position – one we strongly opposed. But thanks to the powerful, united voice of our parents, carers, staff, governors and supporters, a positive step has now been taken. We want to thank everyone who spoke up, wrote in, and stood with us. Your efforts made the difference. While we regret that such a campaign was necessary, we are relieved that this decision has finally been confirmed. This will support our students getting to school safely, reliably, and ready to learn. At Esher C of E High School, we remain committed to doing what’s right for our students – and this is an example of what we can achieve together.”

MP for Esher and Walton, Monica Harding, has held meetings with the school and written to the council over the matter. She described it as a win for school children who were facing walks of up to three miles across unlit heathland with concerns about safety, after Surrey County Council decided to withdraw the Esher High School bus service. The MP added: “It’s a shame this decision took so long, causing so much uncertainty and stress for parents. Surrey must ensure that its policy making is joined up and reflects the lived experience of our children – I’m glad that this time local families have been heard. We now need to know that this much needed bus provision will be sustained over the longer term.”

Following Falcon’s decision to introduce an additional bus service to transport pupils to and from Esher High School, there will now be four buses on the 814 route. The extra service will initially run as a trial for the first half-term of the 2025/26 academic year with its use monitored before a decision is made on whether it is needed on a longer-term basis.

Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth at Surrey County Council, said, “We’re very aware of the challenges raised by parents and carers and have worked with Falcon to address these. As with all bus services, we need to ensure they are used to make them viable, so I encourage parents and carers to take up this new provision. This additional bus is being provided by Falcon at no cost to Surrey County Council.”

Image: Esher CofE High School headteacher Andy King (Image Google and Esher High)

MP Slams ‘Patchwork Repairs’ as local Hospitals Face £150m Backlog

27 June 2025



Liberal Democrat MP for Epsom & Ewell, Helen Maguire, has criticised the government’s response to the mounting repair crisis at Epsom and St Helier hospitals, warning that the very future of local NHS services could be at risk without urgent and substantial investment.

Speaking in the House of Commons this week, Maguire welcomed a recent £12.1 million allocation for Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust but described the sum as “a drop in the ocean” compared to the scale of need.

“Our current maintenance backlog alone amounts to £150 million,” states the St George’s, Epsom and St Helier Hospital Group (GESH), which manages the trust. “We estimate our backlog maintenance will rise by £180 million over five years — or £36 million per year.”

During Health and Social Care Questions in Parliament on 17 June, Maguire challenged Health Secretary Wes Streeting to visit the hospitals and witness conditions firsthand. “Patients and staff deserve safe and modern facilities, not patchwork repairs,” she told MPs.

Read the full exchange in Hansard

The Health Secretary acknowledged the scale of the challenge, saying both he and the Minister for Secondary Care, Karin Smyth MP, had met with local MPs about the issue. He cited a £207 million capital allocation to the NHS South West London Integrated Care Board — covering the broader region — and reiterated that the government was “reversing the trend” of underinvestment, blaming the previous Conservative government for leaving “a £37 billion black hole in NHS capital.”

However, Maguire was left unimpressed by the response.

“It is disappointing that the Health Secretary ignored my invitation to come down and see firsthand the scale of the challenge at Epsom & St Helier,” she said after the debate.

“If he spent a day in the shoes of one of our exceptional doctors or nurses, caring for patients amidst crumbling walls and leaking ceilings, I’m sure he too would share the grave concerns that I and my Liberal Democrat colleagues Bobby Dean MP and Luke Taylor MP have for our local hospitals.

“£12.1 million does not even begin to touch the sides compared with what our hospitals need right now.”

The MP also stressed the importance of not placing all hope in the new specialist emergency care hospital planned for Sutton. “Alongside the new hospital building in Sutton to ease the pressure on Epsom & St Helier, patients and staff deserve safe and modern facilities wherever they go, not just patchwork repairs and more uncertainty from this Government.”

A Local Crisis in Numbers

- **£150 million** - current maintenance backlog at Epsom & St Helier Trust
- **£36 million/year** - projected additional maintenance need over next five years
- **£12.1 million** - recent government funding allocated to the Trust
- **£207 million** - total capital funding to South West London Integrated Care Board

Background: New Hospital, Old Buildings

Plans for a new £500 million specialist emergency care hospital in Sutton — part of the controversial Health Infrastructure Plan (HIP) 1 scheme — have been met with both cautious optimism and concern that core services in Epsom and St Helier will be reduced.

Epsom and St Helier hospitals serve an ageing population, and the majority of the estate dates back to the early to mid-20th century. Campaigners have long pointed to leaking roofs, outdated infrastructure, and chronic staff shortages as urgent priorities.

While some capital funding is being made available for immediate safety needs, campaigners and local MPs argue that unless major investment is directed to the existing hospitals, they will continue to deteriorate, placing patients and staff at risk.

Photo: Maguire MP abseiling St Helier Hospital