



## Surrey's fire ruined mansion restoration plan

Plans to restore an 18th century house have been waved through. The National Trust has now revealed its designs to restore and refurbish Clandon Park House to celebrate the rich history and legacy wrapped around the building.

The Grade I listed home near Guildford was considered an architectural masterpiece when it was built 200 years ago. But Clandon Park House was tragically gutted by an accidental fire in 2015, destroying the roof and leaving most of the interior with blackened and scorched brickwork.

Illustrative designs show the trust's ambitions for Clandon Park House to become a new national treasure and a defining cultural hub, with space for workshops and social events. Guildford Borough Council unanimously approved the plans last week.

Restoring the inside of the mansion house, the scheme will refurbish and replace windows and doors, reinstating the stairs as well as providing a new accessible lift from the basement to the roof. Generous walkways will be carved out in the mansion house and the scheme promises to conserve historic collections, redisplaying them in creative ways.

Alterations to the basement will provide a cafe, toilets and other back of house bits. The project will restore the exterior of the building to appear as it did before it was engulfed by the fire, planning documents state.

Image: The Marble Hall could be used to hold events for the community. (Credit: Allies and Morrison/ National Trust)

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## Box Hill keeps its pie and mash

The iconic Surrey Hills will keep its classic English pie and mash shop after plans were approved for the takeaway in Box Hill. Posha's Pie and Mash Shop, in the rural Box Hill Road, Tadworth, was given the go-ahead at the second time of asking despite traffic officers again recommending its refusal. Surrey Highways said in January that the shop should be refused permission over concerns of cars reversing onto the main road, and the application was deferred to allow the owners to make the needed changes.

The new plan removed the on-site parking that had caused concern, but Surrey Highways was still unimpressed, saying cars would now park in the nearby streets, clogging roads and pavements. Councillors disagreed and thought the shop should be encouraged as it would bring trade to the area as well as much-needed food options. Councillor Paul Potter (Liberal Democrat; Brockham, Betchworth, Buckland Box Hill and Headley) said the parking and traffic issues were overstated given the generally low levels of cars using Box Hill Road. He said: "(The pie and mash) is a vital part for a lot of people up there. For a lot of residents in the mobile homes, they walk there, they don't drive - there are hundreds of mobile homes up there. It's a vital thing for the community."

Cllr Simon Bud (Conservative; Brockham, Betchworth, Buckland Box Hill and Headley) added: "It's a rural business in a rural area, that's what this is. They're trying something quite different from what you normally see, and how good that is to see in a rural area on a rural road. How refreshing to see a car-free development. I cycle here, and if more of us did, we wouldn't have this problem, would we? It's really great to see a business that's going forward and making it car-free."

The site has been used as a pie and mash takeaway with a seating area since August 2023. The application was to formally change its use from the old dog grooming parlour. The Wednesday, March 5 meeting of Mole Valley District Council heard from one speaker against the proposal. She told the meeting that Porsha's advertised on social media, which would draw in people from outside Box Hill. She said: "Cars park up on the pavement outside our house, which is the only pavement by the pie and mash. Indiscriminate parking narrows the road and interferes with the free flow of traffic and prohibits pedestrians from using the pavement. We also have a lot of teenagers who do their Duke of Edinburgh awards and walk along where the cars are parked with two wheels on the pavement. It is dangerous."

The plans were ultimately passed with the unanimous backing of the committee.

Image - Credit Google Street view May 2023 the business's food van



## Surrey services get fire e-bike removed from Amazon

A dangerous e-bike battery that caused a house fire in Surrey has been successfully removed from sale on Amazon, thanks to the proactive efforts of Surrey Fire and Rescue Service and Trading Standards.

The fire, which occurred recently in a Surrey home, was caused by an unsafe Unit Pack Power battery pack from a converted e-bike while it was being charged. This incident highlights the risks posed by substandard and unsafe lithium-ion batteries.

Following the fire investigation, Surrey Fire and Rescue Service's Fire Investigation team worked closely with Surrey Trading Standards to assess the safety of the battery pack. Their findings led to Amazon removing the product from sale, helping to prevent further incidents and protect consumers.

Matt Perry, Fire Investigation Officer at Surrey Fire and Rescue Service, said: "This fire serves as a stark reminder of the dangers associated with unsafe e-bike batteries.

"We are committed to keeping Surrey residents safe, and I am pleased that our partnership with Trading Standards has resulted in the removal of this hazardous product from the market. We strongly urge the public to be vigilant when purchasing batteries and always choose reputable retailers and manufacturers."

Surrey Trading Standards has also warned consumers about the risks of purchasing unregulated or non-compliant lithium-ion batteries online.

Amanda Poole, Assistant Director for Trading Standards at Surrey County Council, added: "Unsafe lithium-ion batteries pose a serious fire risk, and we are pleased to have taken swift action alongside Surrey Fire and Rescue Service to have this product removed from sale.

"Consumers should always check that batteries and chargers meet UK safety standards and be cautious of cheap or unbranded products sold online."

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service continues to raise awareness through its #BatteryWise campaign, which provides essential guidance on the safe use, storage, and disposal of lithium-ion batteries.

For more information on battery safety, visit Surrey Fire and Rescue Service's website and social media channels. If you have concerns about a potentially unsafe product, you can report it to Trading Standards via Citizens Advice.

Image: Credit AVD Fire - CC BY-NC 4.0 [illustration and not the case in question].

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## Surrey schools not swamped by private VAT escapees

Figures released by Surrey County Council suggest that state secondary schools admissions have not been overrun with private school pupils after VAT was added to fees by the Labour government.

While critics including Jeremy Hunt MP for Godalming and Ash had predicted up to 90,000 children could swarm the state sector if 20 per cent VAT was thrust on school fees, so far Surrey County Council said it has not impacted applications to join state secondary schools this year.

From January 2025, independent school fees have been slapped with 20 per cent VAT from the Labour government. The controversial policy, aimed at generating £1.5 billion to improve state education, drew up harsh criticisms from local residents. They accused the government of "punishing" hard-working families wanting to invest in their children's education.

As state school admission results came out last week, it marks the first indicator whether priced-out private school children have spilled over into the state sector. But Clare Curran, county council's cabinet leader for children, families and lifelong learning, said: "Surrey has not seen a significant rise in the number of applications for a Year 7 state school place for children currently in the independent sector compared to last year.

"For September 2025, 664 on time applications were received from Surrey residents with children in the independent sector, compared to 608 for September 2024, a rise of 56."

Not a mass exodus of children to the state sector, the policy appears to have not squeezed private schools out of business just yet. Panic over secondary school place shortages has also not materialised in these new figures. Admissions data shows that for Year 7



places there is a mild buffer on the number of families getting their first preference in school places this year.

Cllr Curran said: "While the percentage of applicants offered their first preference school has decreased for September 2025 (80.6%) compared to 2024 (83.1%), the 2025 figure is not dissimilar to the 2023 figure of 81.3%.

"The percentage of applicants offered one of their six preferences for September 2025 was 95.3%, which is comparable with last year's figure of 95.9%."

However, it is still early days for the new policy and the ripple effects of the change could have wider implications. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) said there might not be an immediate effect but the long-term effects could be more significant. The IFS estimated a 3-7 per cent reduction in private school attendance which could require additional £100-£300 million in state funding to manage the overflow within the state school sector.

MPs and educators have raised the alarm that private schools serving students with special educational needs and disabilities should be left out of the VAT tax raid. Sometimes children with an EHCP cannot have their needs met in a regular state school so private school with 1-2-1 support is necessary for their education.

Surrey has around 140 private schools: including primary, secondary and special schools. Fees vary between schools, but the cost of independent education in Surrey is above the national average.

Image: Rosebery School Epsom - Google

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## The Battle of Waterloo Road development

The Epsom and Ewell Borough Council Planning Committee has unanimously rejected a controversial proposal for a 12-unit residential development on Waterloo Road. Councillors cited concerns over poor design, excessive height, a lack of affordable housing, and the absence of parking provision.

The meeting, held on 6th March 2025, was chaired by Councillor **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodocote and Langley)/The application sought outline planning permission to demolish an existing two-storey building and replace it with a four-storey block containing seven two-bedroom flats and five one-bedroom flats.

However, councillors raised significant objections, particularly regarding the design and scale of the project. The Planning Officer explained that while an earlier proposal for a smaller nine-unit scheme had been approved on appeal, this new application was substantially different. "The proposal would maximise the number of units on the site to the detriment of the local character of the area," he stated.

Councillor **Bernie Muir** (Conservative Horton) was critical of the lack of parking provision, arguing that the development failed to consider residents with mobility issues. "More and more homes are becoming a complete barrier to people because they need a car to actually exist," she said.

Councillor **Jan Mason** (RA Ruxley) praised the planning officers' report, calling it "one of the best" she had seen in her 20 years as a councillor. She also criticised the design, saying: "You either make something outstanding so people say 'wow', or you ensure it blends in so well that it is unobtrusive. This does neither."

Another major point of contention was the failure to meet the council's affordable housing policy. Under planning regulations, 20% of developments of this scale should be designated as affordable housing, yet the applicant had only proposed 5%. Councillor **Chris Watson** (RA Ewell Court) called this a "cynical application", adding: "Anyone can pick up the policy and read it. There is no excuse for submitting something that so blatantly disregards our requirements."

Concerns were also raised about the impact on neighbouring properties. The proposed development would result in significant overlooking, overshadowing, and loss of privacy for nearby homes. It also failed to meet national space standards for several of the proposed flats.

Following the discussion, Councillor **Neil Dallen** (RA Town) proposed that the application be refused, seconded by Councillor Muir. The committee then voted unanimously in favour of rejection.

Councillor **Humphrey Reynolds** (RA West Ewell) remarked on the pattern of previous applications for the site being refused, noting that even successful appeals had not led to development. "Clearly, the developers know this is not right," he said.

The applicant now has the option to revise the scheme and submit a new proposal or appeal the decision.



Image: EEBC papers showing overlooking of proposed 4 storey building over neighbouring properties

## Sutton & Epsom Win But Gravesend Earn Vital Points

**Sutton & Epsom RFC 33 Gravesend 28.** Saturday 8th March.

Gravesend were the final visitors to Rugby Lane for this campaign, though there are a couple of road trips for the Black & Whites before the season concludes. In November, the Rectory Field crowd bore witness to yet another last-gasp defeat as the Kent team lost 23-22. On that occasion, it was a late Freddy Bunting penalty and heroic defence on the Sutton & Epsom line that thwarted a spirited comeback. This time, with the spectre of relegation looming, Gravesend had a degree of consolation with two bonus points in a 33-28 loss.

Angus Nelson made his Sutton & Epsom debut from the bench and became the 41st player to play in 1st XV league matches this season. The squad had eleven personnel or positional alterations from the one that triumphed at Thurrock the previous Saturday.

On a gloriously sunny afternoon, the visitors set the game in motion. The opening exchanges included the usual industrious forward play, ferocious tackling, and a pleasing desire to release the backs. For all the endeavour, the opening quarter remained pointless as well-drilled defences closed down the space and frustrating errors thwarted the telling moments.

Gravesend, having shown exemplary resilience against the Sutton catch and drive, escaped to the S&E half. Pouncing on an interception, the Kent team made a minimal gain, but from the next phase, scrum-half Nirees Kanaharajah kicked ahead. The ball rolled towards the line, and the cover was left prostrate and flailing haplessly as the Number 9 strolled past to score. Jack King split the uprights for a 7-0 lead for Gravesend.

No doubt, nothing focuses the collective mind of a team more than conceding the opening score, and Sutton's riposte was instantaneous. Swift handling and a break on halfway were exploited with a wonderful run by lock Josh Glanville, whose perfectly timed pass gave the glory to Adam Bibby, who touched down near the uprights. Freddy Bunting chipped over the conversion to level the scores.

S&E made early changes on the half-hour as props Johnson and Hilton were replaced by Boaden and Gibson. The hosts started to monopolise territory and possession as Adam Bibby's influence on proceedings increased with every passing minute.

As the first half was reaching its conclusion, Sutton & Epsom pressed hard for the lead. A simple penalty in front of the posts was declined and was kicked to the corner. The catch and drive routine ran into heavy traffic, and the Rugby Lane pack were held up over the line. Moments later, a delightful handling move looked certain to see winger Matt Symonds score in the corner, but he was obliterated by a thunderous covering tackle.

Gravesend were demonstrating heroic defence, roared on by the many Rectory Field travelling supporters who had made the journey. As is so often the case in the modern game, play was brought back for an earlier infringement.

**Take 2:** Penalty kicked to the corner, and on this occasion, a rather more favourable action for Sutton. The catch and drive was exploited to the full as hooker Sam Lennie scored. The familiar sight of a Bunting touchline conversion made it 14-7.

Shortly after, Mr Scoular ended the first period. At the break, the game was in the balance. The tenacious Gravesend defence meant that Sutton would need to work hard and play with quality to win. Equally, with memories of the reverse fixture, if the hosts' performance dropped, the visitors would no doubt take advantage of any lapses. As is always the case, the opening exchanges of the second half would probably determine the final outcome.

Sutton & Epsom made the perfect start to the second period. A delightful restart descended just outside the Gravesend 22 and was expertly taken, but formidable counter-rucking resulted in a penalty to Sutton. The familiar kick to the corner ensued.

From a scrappy lineout, S&E eventually secured the ball. First, Hegarty advanced, and then McTaggart got to within inches. The Rugby Lane XV was awarded a scrum near the posts. The ball was spun wide, and a long pass was propelled to Matt Symonds, and the winger juggled the ball before touching down in the corner. On this occasion, the Bunting conversion narrowly drifted wide as Sutton extended their advantage to 19-7.

The Black & Whites started to take control of the game but were being hampered by errors that thwarted their best moments. Gravesend were most unfortunate when they were awarded a penalty in their half. A prodigious clearance was picked up by the breeze and remarkably rolled the length of the pitch, and play returned to where it started.

This was to prove costly as, soon after, the ball was in the hands of Sam Lennie. The hooker is a genuine force of nature in open



play, and he had plenty to do, but bouncing off tackles and brushing defenders aside, he raced in for the try. Normal service resumed for the Bunting boot, and Sutton led 26-7 entering the final quarter.

Gravesend could have been thoroughly deflated by this turn of events, but they responded with renewed vigour. It was their turn to pressure the line with 5-metre lineouts. Sutton were stubborn in defence as they resisted the opposition pack.

Success was temporary as the visitors were awarded a penalty. The Black & White line stood firm and turned over the ball to clear. In the blink of an eye, the reinvigorated Kent team were laying siege once more to the S&E line. Despite a defensive effort to make Horatio proud, flanker Nathan Fouche crossed the whitewash. Jack King did the necessary, and the visitors trailed 14-26.

Hopes of a famous revival for the Rectory Field faithful appeared to be scuppered five minutes later. Another sublime break by Adam Bibby into the 22 put flanker Dan Jones in under the posts for his tenth try of the campaign. Freddy Bunting added the extras, bringing his season's tally to 207 points.

33-14 up and three minutes to go, it looked destined to be a case of plucky Gravesend returning home empty-handed. To the eternal credit of the visitors, they responded in the manner any coach would want from a team threatened with relegation.

They proceeded down the pitch, aided by a penalty. Their excellent lineout secured the ball and won another penalty. This time, the catch and drive was executed to perfection, and flanker Brad Money cashed in with the try. The conversion by Jack King meant that if they could score another try, they would gain not only one bonus point but two as the scoreboard read 33-21 with the match already in injury time.

The above scenario looked impossible as Sutton took the restart and attacked in the 22. Ten metres out, they dropped the ball, knocking it on, and it was fly-hacked towards touch.

The fairy tale writers reached for their quills. The ending was happily Hans Christian Andersen for Gravesend followers but felt more like the Brothers Grimm for Sutton. Incredibly, the ball stayed infield several times, and by the time play was halted for a Gravesend penalty, it was deep in the Sutton 22.

Once again, it was kicked in the corner, and the visitors took the 'double your Money' option as the flanker scored his second try, and his side's second, in time added on. Jack King made it four from four, and the referee concluded proceedings with Sutton the victors by 33-28.

For Sutton, Adam Bibby was exceptional in defence and attack as his personal performances continue unabatedly on an upward trajectory. In addition, the second-row firm of Glanville & McTaggart demonstrated not only remarkable fitness, popping up all over the paddock, but also great handling skills with telling passes.

After so many agonising defeats this campaign, only the coldest heart of Ebenezer Scrooge would begrudge Gravesend such a joyous finale. If the Kent club survive the drop, they may reflect on that eleventh-hour score as their moment of divine deliverance, and we wish them well in their final two fixtures.

The league goes into abeyance next weekend, and rugby supporters will be able to gorge themselves on the trio of Six Nations contests.

**Regional 2 South East returns on 22nd March, with the Black & Whites travelling to Whiteley Village to face Reeds Weybridge, whom they defeated in December 17-11.**

#### **Sutton & Epsom:**

Findlay, Scott, Bibby, Bunting (c), Symonds, Lennard, Munford, Johnson, Lennie, Hilton, McTaggart, Glanville, Tame, Jones & Hegarty.

Replacements: Boaden, Gibson & Nelson.

#### **Gravesend:**

White, King, Cooke, Sims, Huckle, Kite, Kanaharajah, Brooker, Dadson, Shorter, Bird, Hampshire, Money, Fouche & Chahal.

Photo credit Robin Kennedy

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## Could Woking's debt be shared by you after





## reorganisation?

Chris Caulfield of the BBC's Local Democracy Service brings us the latest twist in the awful Woking Borough Council debt crisis. Its £2.1 billion debt accumulated under a Conservative administration from unwise property dealings. The Labour Government is driving forward a reorganisation of Surrey's local government and there is anxiety that Woking's debt will be spread to a wider Council tax payer base as a result. Could Epsom and Ewell householders end up paying for the mistakes of Councillors they did not elect?

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Even if bankrupt Woking Borough Council sold everything it owned, it would still be more than **£1.5 billion in debt**. The huge figure was published as part of the ongoing reports Government commissioners must produce on the broken borough as it goes through the painful process of rebalancing its books.

The report stated that while the council, which declared itself bust in 2023 following a disastrous regeneration program that saddled residents with huge tax rises and massive service cuts, was taking steps to sell off its assets, the level of debt was still such that it needed significant government support. Published on March 6, the report revealed that the council had a core spending power of £16.9 million a year – but servicing its £2.1 billion debt was costing £1.3 million a week in interest alone.

“Even if everything else could be disposed of, the level of overhanging debt would still be significant, over £1.5 billion, as the level of debt far exceeds the value of assets,” the report stated. It added that some assets, such as the council's social housing valued at £400 million, had to be retained. However, if the council did nothing, the annual interest costs and loan servicing would average £70 million and £73 million a year respectively, “which would add significantly to the level of debt.”

The council was granted Exceptional Financial Support for the next two years, allowing it to cover interest and other revenue costs. However, the commissioners warned: “With no ability to repay the exceptional financial support through asset sales, let alone all the legacy debt, the position is not sustainable. Work is underway to determine the best exit strategy from the commercial legacy, which we are engaging with government on, and it is recognised that a long-term financial solution will not be in place for the 2025/26 budget process. However, the current position is not viable, and commissioners are keen to continue engaging with government on the route forward.”

Responding on behalf of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Baroness Taylor of Stevenage acknowledged the bleak situation but stated that the department was reassured Woking Borough Council was committed to radically overhauling its operations. Serious concerns remained over the task ahead and the potential impact on the impending reorganisation of local government – the dissolution of Surrey's boroughs, districts, and county council, to be replaced with either two or three larger unitary bodies with an elected mayor.

Baroness Taylor wrote: “I share your concerns about the capacity of the council to deliver this programme of change and encourage you to work with the council and the ministry to consider how we can best enable the council to improve, for the benefit of residents. We have been clear with councils in Surrey that commissioners have a vital role, not only in supporting Woking to continue to improve but also in responding to the invitation to all principal authorities in Surrey to provide proposals for local government reorganisation, to ensure that proposals are robust.”

Related reports:

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## An independent view on Epsom and Ewell Council's future

Epsom and Ewell Times has invited representatives of The Residents Association, Liberal Democrats, Labour and Conservative Party to share their policies on local government reorganisation. But today we publish newly independent Councillor Alex Coley's viewpoint.

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### Devolution to the middle

Just before Christmas the government in Westminster announced it would be reorganising local government by abolishing the lower tier of councils like Epsom & Ewell, in the name of devolution. From Whitehall's perspective, power will be devolved down to new, larger unitary councils across much bigger geographic areas. From the perspective of residents power is going up, up and away. For balance, let's call it devolution to the middle.

### Dissolution from the Ministry

There exists a patchwork quilt of small councils dotted across England like needlework, playing a unique role that dilutes and moderates the big, concentrated politics of national government. They represent the interests of local residents while collecting the bins, planning for housing and keeping the streets clean and tidy.

These councils and their councillors represent a range of political control that serves as the final layer of pluralist democracy with the greatest proximity to reality. The English don't like being 'done to' and the lower tier of councils which are closest to residents operate like a kind of natural filter against the sometimes harmful UV rays of Whitehall bright ideas. It's a kind of self-regulating eco-system that looks messy and manic under the microscope but serves an important purpose in the good governance and democratic health of the nation.

### Duopoly

The higher up you go with government the more it becomes a two party system. At the lower level, where residents experience local government most acutely, there's a huge range of political views openly held and discussed. Councillors are local people who live in the neighbourhood and know it really well and they know the local people really well too. Those local relationships are more important than the party flag.

That will be lost as the whole sector gets shrunk to a handful of people operating across much larger areas at a much higher level; as the obedient servants of one of two political parties. Soon, whole swathes of the country will be concentrated for or against the government of the day. There will be very visible winners and losers at each general election and no patchwork quilt to dilute and moderate the bright ideas which make for good headlines but poor outcomes.

### Bigger is not always better

Are we heading for an American style two-party state with no spectrum of voices or views? Or will it be more like King John and the barons across 12 mayoralty strategic authorities; a conspiracy against the public?

I believe that three unitaries in Surrey could work. A lot will depend on retaining some plurality of political groups and an affinity between voters and their elected representatives that goes beyond a party flag. I welcome reformation, and change is a constant, but we must keep democracy close to the people at a local level. Bigger is not always better.

I've done considerable research on the options in THIS REPORT, which I hope your readers will take the opportunity to read.

Cllr Alex Coley

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council

Ruxley Ward Councillor

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### Related reports:

[Local Labour view on Epsom and Ewell Council's future](#)

[Local LibDem view on Epsom and Ewell Council's future](#)



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# Epsom Ranks Among Surrey's Best for Train Punctuality

Epsom railway station has emerged as one of Surrey's most reliable stations for punctuality and service, faring significantly better than many other locations across the county. Despite serving three major London terminals—Victoria, Waterloo, and London Bridge—Epsom's train services remain relatively efficient, avoiding the severe delays and cancellations plaguing other areas.

## Government Push for Greater Transparency

The government has announced plans to improve transparency in railway punctuality by introducing live data screens at major stations across the country, including in Surrey. These digital screens will display real-time statistics on train cancellations and punctuality, offering commuters a clearer picture of service reliability. Data will also be made available online.

The latest figures highlight significant differences in performance across Surrey's rail network. While some stations suffer from frequent delays and cancellations, Epsom continues to provide a more dependable service for its passengers.

## Surrey's Worst-Offending Stations for Delays and Cancellations

Several stations in Surrey have been identified as the worst performers for punctuality and cancellations, frustrating thousands of daily commuters. At the bottom of the list is Woking, where only 72.2% of non-cancelled trains arrive 'on time'—defined as arriving within three minutes of schedule. Just above it, Guildford fares only slightly better at 74.2%.

Other stations in the lowest 10 for punctuality include:

- **Guildford** - 74.2%
- **Horley** - 74.8%
- **Gomshall** - 74.8%
- **Haslemere** - 75.2%
- **Reigate** - 75.6%
- **Dorking (Deepdene)** - 76.4%
- **Byfleet and New Haw** - 76.6%
- **Earlswood** - 76.7%
- **Redhill** - 77%

Some of these stations also struggle with cancellations, with Earlswood topping the list, where 11.7% of all scheduled trains simply do not arrive. This is followed by Salfords (11.7%) and Horley (8.4%). The full list of worst stations for cancellations is as follows:

- **Earlswood** - 11.7%
- **Salfords** - 11.7%
- **Horley** - 8.4%
- **Kempton Park Racecourse** - 7.4%
- **Sunbury** - 7.3%
- **Upper Halliford** - 7.3%
- **Chilworth** - 6.8%
- **Redhill** - 6.6%





- **Shepperton** – 6.6%
- **Gomshall** – 6.5%

## Epsom's Strong Performance

If Epsom were included in these rankings, it would rank significantly higher in reliability. The latest figures show that **87.7%** of its non-cancelled trains arrive on time or within three minutes, a notably strong performance compared to its Surrey counterparts. Additionally, the station has a low cancellation rate of just **1.6%**, offering passengers greater confidence in their daily commutes.

Natasha Grice, Director at Transport Focus, welcomed the initiative to improve the transparency of service reliability, stating: "Passengers tell us they want a reliable, on-time train service and will welcome improvements to information about the punctuality of their service and cancellations being shared more transparently. It's important that the industry uses this information to drive up performance."

Meanwhile, Woking MP Will Forster has launched a new cross-party group aimed at holding South Western Railway accountable for poor performance. "I'm disappointed but sadly not surprised Woking suffers from more delays than any other station in Surrey," he said. "My constituents in Woking, and passengers right across the South Western Railway network, deserve a fair deal as they travel by train. We should expect cheaper and more reliable services."

## A Positive Outlook for Epsom Commuters

While many Surrey stations struggle with delays and cancellations, Epsom's strong performance provides a welcome relief for local commuters. The government's move to display live data at stations will allow passengers to make more informed travel choices and hold operators accountable. As the debate around rail service reliability continues, Epsom's efficiency stands out as a positive example in an otherwise challenging landscape for rail users across Surrey.

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# Woodland Trust in Epsom and Ewell paradox

The Woodland Trust (WT) has highlighted that Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) is among the majority of local councils yet to declare a nature emergency or establish a dedicated nature recovery action plan. According to WT, EEBC has not embedded nature recovery into its policies nor committed to managing 30% of council land for nature recovery by 2030.

Ironically, within the borough of Epsom and Ewell lies Langley Vale Wood, one of the UK's four First World War Centenary Woods, and the sole representative for England. Owned and managed by the Woodland Trust, this expansive woodland spans approximately 259 hectares (641 acres) and features pockets of ancient woodland, diverse wildlife, and panoramic views over the North Downs.

Established as a living memorial to those who sacrificed their lives during the First World War, Langley Vale Wood stands as a testament to the importance of nature conservation and biodiversity. The site was purchased by the Woodland Trust in 2014 and has since seen the planting of around 180,000 trees.

Despite not having a standalone nature recovery action plan, EEBC has implemented biodiversity initiatives. The council is currently five years into its second ten-year Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), which runs from 2020 to 2030. Councillor **Liz Frost**, (RA Woodcoate and Langley) Chair of the Environment Committee, emphasised the council's commitment to biodiversity:

"Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is five years into its second ten-year Biodiversity Action Plan. The current plan contains five objectives with 27 targets to support. It aims to ensure both the long-term protection and enhancement of biodiversity within our borough and prioritises our resources so that they are used effectively.

We work closely with local volunteers and partners to take action to support biodiversity in the borough. For example, last year we worked with the South East Rivers Trust to build a new Wetlands on the Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve, which is helping to improve the water quality of the Hogsmill River. This is a globally-important chalk stream and is supporting biodiversity in the area, including species whose numbers have dwindled, such as water voles, fish and eels.

The council also has an in-house ecologist who scrutinises all planning applications and advises on their impact on biodiversity, and how any impact might be mitigated.

Another example of how biodiversity action is embedded in council strategy can be found in the Proposed Submission Local Plan



in which, following the Regulation 18 consultation, we included increased energy efficiency standards for new homes and the allocation of additional sites in the urban area. The Council's Local Plan also contains specific policies relating to biodiversity and geodiversity which, once adopted, will require development to have regard to nature recovery, and to Surrey County Council's Local Nature Recovery Strategy once this has been adopted by Surrey."

EEBC has also adopted a five-year Climate Action Plan (2025-2029), approved by the Environment Committee in October 2024. While EEBC has not formally declared a nature emergency, its biodiversity and climate strategies indicate a commitment to environmental sustainability. The council's involvement in Surrey's Local Nature Recovery Strategy further demonstrates its role in regional efforts to promote nature recovery.

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