

Mental Health and Justice in Special Epsom Film Screening

19 June 2025



A powerful evening of film and conversation is coming to Epsom Picturehouse on Monday 23 June, as local mental health charity *Mary Frances Trust* teams up with national organisation *Women in Prison* to present a special screening of the acclaimed documentary *HOLLOWAY*.

The event, beginning at 7.30pm, will include a live Q&A with guest speakers exploring the intersection of trauma, mental health, and the women’s prison system — themes at the heart of both the film and the work of Mary Frances Trust.

Directed by BAFTA Breakthrough Brit Daisy-May Hudson and Emmy-nominated filmmaker Sophie Compton, *HOLLOWAY* invites six women back to the now-closed Holloway Prison, where they form a women’s circle to share deeply personal stories of incarceration and survival. The result is a compelling portrait of systemic failure and personal transformation, as the women trace the roots of their journeys through trauma and into healing.

Created through a trauma-informed, co-creative process, the film features contributions from Aliyah Ali, Mandy Ogunmokun, Sarah Cassidy, Lady Unchained, Gerrah, and Tamar Mujanay. It won the Audience Award at the BFI London Film Festival and has prompted vital discussions wherever it has been shown.

Following the screening, audience members will hear from a panel of guest speakers:

- **Karryn Robinson**, London Prison Services Manager at *Women in Prison*, who leads the Unsentenced Women project at Bronzefield Prison. Karryn has previously worked as a trauma specialist counsellor, Crisis Team Manager at MIND, and as a domestic abuse advocate within the Probation Service.
- **Megan Siarey**, Delivery and Strategy Lead for Co-Production and Community Engagement at *Mary Frances Trust*.
- **Sophie Compton**, Emmy, Grierson and BIFA-nominated director of *HOLLOWAY* and *Another Body*.

The evening promises to be a moving and enlightening experience for anyone interested in mental health, justice reform, and the power of community-led support.

Event details

Epsom Picturehouse

Monday 23 June, 7.30pm

Tickets available at: [picturehouses.com](https://www.picturehouses.com)

Watch the trailer and find more details via Mary Frances Trust:

<https://www.maryfrancetrust.org.uk/mft-co-hosts-special-screening-qa-holloway-at-epsom-picturehouse/>

Image: Contributor Mandy opens up about her early childhood trauma during the women’s circle. Six women who had been imprisoned in Holloway Prison took part in the women’s circle over 5 days, returning to the now-closed Holloway Prison to tell their stories.

Menuhin Hall’s Summer Festival Returns for Three Weeks of Music and Community

19 June 2025



The Menuhin Hall, one of Surrey’s premier venues for classical music, will once again host its annual Summer Festival from Friday 13 June to Friday 4 July 2025. Set within the tranquil grounds of the Yehudi Menuhin School near Cobham, the festival will feature an exciting line-up of performances by the school’s talented pupils, returning alumni and acclaimed guest artists.

Across three weeks, audiences can look forward to a programme ranging from family-friendly events and solo recitals to orchestral and choral works of significant scale and emotional depth. Visitors are invited to bring picnics and enjoy the setting before performances, with generous intervals designed to enhance the relaxed and celebratory atmosphere.

Programme of Events

Summer Solos

Friday 13 June and Friday 20 June – Grounds open 5.30pm, Concert at 6.30pm

Sunday 15 June and Sunday 22 June – Grounds open 1.30pm, Concert at 2.30pm

This four-part series highlights the individual talents and musical progress of the Yehudi Menuhin School pupils. Audiences will hear a broad repertoire including Brahms’s Hungarian Dances, Tchaikovsky’s Valse Scherzo, Lutosławski’s Subito, and Chen Gang’s *Sunshine Over Tashkurgan*. There will be a 60-minute interval for refreshments and picnicking in the beautiful school grounds.

Seven Sayings: Triumph

Saturday 28 June – Grounds open 4pm, Concert at 5pm

An inspiring evening featuring Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5, described by E.T.A. Hoffmann as “one of the most important works of the time”, performed alongside Korngold’s Suite for Left Hand Piano and Strings Op. 23.

Family Day: Pictures at an Exhibition

Sunday 29 June – Activities and food from 1pm, Family Concert at 3pm

Family Day offers a chance for children and their families to explore music in a playful and accessible way. The afternoon includes outdoor games, arts and crafts, and refreshments. A special interactive performance of Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*, led by broadcaster and pianist Keelan Carew and ten young pianists, will take the audience on a journey through whimsical musical scenes, from enchanted castles to Baba Yaga’s forest hut. The concert is particularly suitable for children aged 3 to 9, though all are welcome.

Spotlight Concert: Piano Gala

Tuesday 1 July – Concert at 7.30pm

The final Spotlight event of the year showcases the school’s finest young pianists performing a programme of Chopin, Debussy, Ravel, Berg and Schubert. Highlights include Debussy’s *Suite Bergamasque*, Ravel’s *Sonatine*, and Chopin’s ballades, recently featured in the Oscar-nominated film *A Real Pain*.

Leavers' Picnic

Wednesday 2 July - Grounds open 5pm, Concert at 6.30pm

This special occasion marks the final performance by the school's leavers. Works by Ravel, Schumann, Liszt and Kodály will be performed, with a symbolic presentation of musical scores to those moving on. The evening includes a 60-minute interval for refreshments.

Seven Sayings: Reunion - The Festival Finale

Friday 4 July - Grounds open 5pm, Concert at 6.30pm

The festival concludes with an emotionally powerful programme featuring James MacMillan's *Seven Last Words from the Cross*, performed by the Senior Orchestra, Chamber Choir, conductor Jonathan Bloxham, and the award-winning vocal collective SANSARA. The second half includes Arvo Pärt's *Fratres* and Tchaikovsky's *Serenade for Strings*, performed by current pupils and alumni.

Ticket Information

Tickets range from £10 to £28.50, with half-price concessions for under-30s.

To book, visit www.menuhinhall.co.uk or contact the Box Office on 01932 559400 / boxoffice@menuhinschool.co.uk.

About The Menuhin Hall

The Menuhin Hall is an award-winning concert venue located on the grounds of the Yehudi Menuhin School. It is both a professional resource for the school's pupils and a valued part of the local cultural scene, hosting concerts by visiting artists and community ensembles. The hall has been recognised by RIBA and the Civic Trust, among others, for its architectural excellence.

About The Yehudi Menuhin School

Founded in 1963 by renowned violinist Yehudi Menuhin, the school provides an exceptional music education for gifted children aged 9 to 19, regardless of financial background. Alumni include Nicola Benedetti, Nigel Kennedy, Alina Ibragimova and Tasmin Little. Located near Cobham, the school offers a holistic education, with pupils dividing their time between academic and musical studies, and regular opportunities to perform both in the Menuhin Hall and throughout the local community.

For more information, visit www.menuhinschool.co.uk.

Surrey house of distinction gets £200K to repair

19 June 2025



One of the great Surrey buildings will have another £200,000 of repair work after its owners said they were “morally obligated” to maintain the special 19th century site. Pippbrook House is a Grade II* listed building, ‘a distinction’ English Heritage only bestows on about 5 per cent of all listed properties. The decision to increase the repair budget from £1.4m to £1.6m was made by Mole Valley District Council’s cabinet on Tuesday, June 17, so that parts of the building that were damaged by a historic leak in October 2023 can be fixed – and to make it easier to finish the roof repairs.

Councillor Nick Wright, cabinet member for leisure and community assets, said the council had a ‘moral obligation” to repair the famous Dorking building. He added: “It is very much a valued local asset. We do need to find other creative ways of funding some of the work that needs to be done, but you can’t do that if you’ve got holes in your roof. We’re not denying that there are challenges there, there are significant challenges...but these works are necessary.”

In February 2023, the council originally approved a budget of £3.1m for works required to fix Pippbrook House – with £1.6m coming from Mole Valley and the rest obtained through grants. Unfortunately for the council, it was unable to bring in any external cash, limiting the overall scale of what could be achieved. This caused the council to change course and in November 2023 £1.4m was released to begin necessary work to weatherproof Pippbrook House.

The new work will also open up two rooms that cannot be used due to ceiling damage, the meeting heard, matching one of the council’s objectives of bringing Pippbrook back into use. Pippbrook House was built between 1856 and 1858 and designed by the architect behind Midland Grand Hotel at St Pancras station, George Gilbert Scott. Cllr Gary Sevenoaks, who chairs the council’s scrutiny committee, said questions needed to be asked as to why the council was unable to secure a grant for the remaining £1.5m needed to fully repair the building.

Pippbrook House (image Google)

Epsom Therapy Garden in the Running for BBC Green Award

19 June 2025



A tranquil corner of Epsom that has quietly blossomed into a hub of therapy and conservation has earned recognition in the BBC Radio Surrey Make a Difference Awards.

St Ebba’s Therapy Garden, located on the former cricket ground of the old hospital site, has been shortlisted for the *Green Award*, which honours individuals or organisations that have made a significant impact on their local environment.

Developed through a partnership between Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, Surrey County Council, Natural England and Surrey Wildlife Trust, the garden offers a sanctuary for people with complex mental health and neurodevelopmental needs. Many of those who benefit from the garden have found it difficult to engage with more traditional clinical settings.

Now a finalist for the BBC accolade, the garden’s blend of therapeutic purpose and ecological design has struck a chord with both its users and supporters. Local businesses and volunteers—including those from a vocational programme for adults with learning disabilities—have also played a key role in shaping the space.

Therapists trained in nature-based interventions use the garden to support individuals coping with anxiety, depression, trauma and other conditions. Designed to nurture both human wellbeing and local biodiversity, the garden includes native hedgerows for birds and hedgehogs, pollinator-friendly plants for bees and

butterflies, and sensory features such as grasses and scented geraniums.

A young person who receives therapy at the garden described it as “a nice, relaxed environment,” adding, “The garden is a good place for me to calm down. I feel comfortable being there.”

One parent shared how the outdoor space had transformed her daughter’s ability to engage with therapy. “She loves the outdoors but is often too anxious to leave the house. This is a safe place for her to enjoy and it has hugely improved her wellbeing.”

Another parent praised the impact on their autistic son, who volunteered to help build the garden. “He was nervous at first, but came back so proud of what he’d achieved. He’s gained confidence—and we’re so grateful he had the opportunity.”

With the BBC Radio Surrey awards set to highlight community champions across the region, supporters of St Ebba’s will be hoping the garden’s unique combination of therapy and conservation will earn it the Green Award title.

For more information about the services offered by Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, visit: www.sabp.nhs.uk
 Follow them on Twitter: @sabpnhs or Facebook: facebook.com/sabpnhs

Gatwick Diamond authority denied

19 June 2025



Merging Reigate and Banstead Borough Council with its neighbour Crawley has been ruled out – in a decision that has left drivers behind the move “disappointed” with the Government. This week leaders from the 11 boroughs and districts, together with the county council, were told the Government planned to survey residents over merging into either two or three mega councils.

The council was told it would not be allowed to move forward with its preferred option because it had also backed the creation of three unitaries – and the rules stated councils could only support one idea, and they had to cover all of Surrey. The government also said the plan lacked enough detail on cost savings. They had wanted to form, at £13 billion plus, the largest economy in the sub-region, and to be conjoined by the world’s busiest single runway airport in Gatwick.

The news was relayed to the councils by the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, Jim McMahon. He said: “I understand this will be disappointing; however, this consultation process allows for consultees to comment on whether the Secretary of State should implement one or other of the two proposals received, including the proposal co-signed by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council. If, in the future, there remains an interest in changing the boundary between Surrey and West Sussex, there are other mechanisms for doing so and this process does not prevent that. I also note your desire for the Gatwick Diamond economic area to be within the area of one Strategic Authority so as to best provide for economic growth. I want to make clear that the decision not to include your proposal in the consultation does not preempt devolution options for the wider area, including establishing or expanding a Strategic Authority that includes all councils making up the Gatwick Diamond.”

Leader of Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, Councillor Richard Biggs said: “We are disappointed that the Government will not be including our joint proposal with Crawley within the consultation. I am pleased that we took the opportunity to highlight to Government the important contribution that our combined area makes to the national economy, as well as its economic growth potential. While we accept the Government’s decision, we will continue to advocate for joined up economic and infrastructure planning and investment across both authorities. In terms of local government reorganisation, we are now focused on trying to secure the best available model of local government in Surrey – which we continue to strongly believe is three unitary councils. A three unitary model in Surrey will achieve the best balance of delivering value for money for our residents whilst maintaining strong local connections and identities and delivering high-quality service.”

Chris Caulfield

Epsom and Ewell Times adds:

The **Gatwick Diamond** is a term used to describe a key economic area in the South East of England, centred around **Gatwick Airport**. It includes parts of **Surrey and West Sussex**, notably towns such as **Crawley, Reigate, Redhill, Horsham, and Haywards Heath**.

Key features of the Gatwick Diamond:

- **Economic significance:** It is one of the UK’s most dynamic business regions, home to over **45,000 businesses** and supporting around **500,000 jobs**.
- **Transport hub:** Gatwick Airport, one of the UK’s busiest international airports, makes the area a major transport and logistics hub.
- **Sectors:** It hosts a mix of industries, including **aviation, engineering, financial services, professional services, and advanced manufacturing**.
- **Strategic location:** Situated between **London and the South Coast**, with excellent rail, road, and air links.

Purpose of the name:

The term is used by **local authorities, business partnerships, and regional planners** to promote regional cooperation, attract investment, and plan infrastructure in a way that supports sustainable economic growth. The **Gatwick Diamond Initiative** is a public-private partnership that actively markets the region for inward investment.

So, when Reigate and Banstead refer to the “**Gatwick Diamond economic area**”, they are aligning with this identity and economic cluster, arguing that the area’s interests may be best served by a unified strategic authority.

Additional reporting – Sam Jones.

Gatwick Airport (Credit Gatwick Airport)

Debate Opens on the Future Shape of Surrey’s Local Government

19 June 2025



Residents across Surrey are being asked to help shape the future of local government in what is being described as the most significant shake-up in over half a century. A government consultation launched this week invites public views on two competing proposals to reorganise Surrey’s local councils into unitary authorities.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is offering two options for reorganisation:

- A **two-unitary model** (East and West Surrey), proposed by Surrey County Council and supported by Elmbridge and Mole Valley.
- A **three-unitary model** (East, West and North Surrey), backed by a majority of Surrey’s borough and district councils, including Epsom & Ewell.

Councillor Hannah Dalton, Leader of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council and Chair of the Surrey Leaders Group, is urging residents to take part:

“Residents have consistently told us that they want decisions made by people who know and understand their communities,” she said. “Over 60% of respondents to our April survey preferred a three-unitary model. We believe it delivers better services, stronger accountability, and a future that works for every part of Surrey.”

The government consultation runs until **5 August**, and is the only opportunity for the public to influence which of the two options is pursued. Dalton emphasised the importance of local voices in the process:

“We’ve been assured by the government that every response will be treated equally. This is your only chance to shape how your area is governed for future decades.”

The consultation follows the rejection of a third submission from Reigate & Banstead and Crawley Boroughs, which will not proceed.

Financial Concerns and Woking’s Shadow

Both proposals are said to be financially viable, according to Councillor Dalton, but depend on government action to address what she described as “**unrecoverable debt**”—most notably in Woking.

“We welcome the Government’s recognition that this debt cannot be managed locally. But we await details on what support will follow after 2026/27,” she said.

The issue of Woking’s financial crisis looms large in the background, with some viewing reorganisation as an opportunity to draw a line under past mismanagement—but others fear it could result in spreading liabilities more broadly across the county.

Streamlining—or Complicating?

While the proposals are framed as streamlining governance—abolishing the two-tier system of borough/district and county councils—there is growing concern that new layers may be introduced in their place.

The two-unitary model envisages an **elected Mayor** and a **Strategic Authority** overseeing countywide functions. At the same time, **Neighbourhood Area Committees** (formerly “Community Boards”) are being piloted to handle hyper-local matters. In towns like Epsom, where no town council currently exists, discussions have begun around establishing new local councils to fill the vacuum left by a dissolved borough council.

Some commentators have questioned whether the term “unitary” has become misleading in this context—raising the possibility that what was intended as simplification may, in practice, become a **reconfiguration of complexity**.

Clash of Visions

Surrey County Council’s Leader, Cllr Tim Oliver, argues the two-unitary model provides the best platform for efficient services and future prosperity:

“Two unitary councils will simplify services, save money and strengthen communities.”

In contrast, EEBC and its allies believe three smaller authorities would be more responsive and rooted in local identity. They also point to stronger alignment with community geography, opportunities for targeted infrastructure growth, and better democratic accountability.

How to Take Part

The government consultation is open until **Tuesday 5 August 2025**. Residents, businesses, community organisations, and parish councils are all invited to contribute their views.

Ways to respond:

- Online: [surrey-local-government-reorganisation](https://www.surreylocalgovernmentreorganisation.co.uk)
- Email: lgreorganisation@communities.gov.uk
- Post: LGR Consultation, Fry Building 2NE, MHCLG, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF
- Paper forms: Available at all 52 libraries across Surrey

Further details and background on each proposal can be found at the **Surrey Local Government Reorganisation Hub**: www.surreylgr.co.uk

Related reports:

Surrey’s partner organisations support county council plans for local government reorganisation

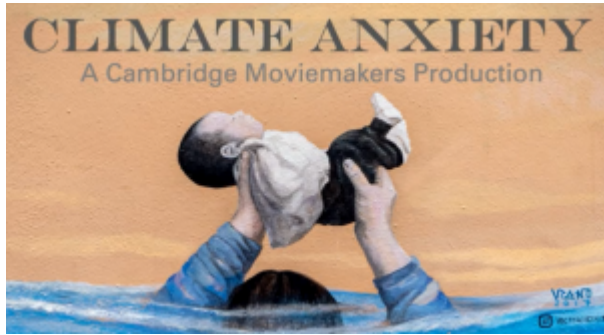
Surrey Councils launch Local Government Reorganisation engagement

Surrey’s BIG debt question in local government reorganisation

Local Government Reorganisation in Surrey: Key Proposals

Green Thinking Takes the Spotlight at Epsom Picturehouse

19 June 2025



Cinema-goers in Epsom are being invited to watch, reflect, and act, as a national eco-film initiative gains local traction.

A new strand of community-focused cinema, “Green Screen,” has arrived at Epsom Picturehouse, offering audiences more than just a night at the movies. Instead, it aims to foster conversation and local action around the pressing issue of climate change.

Following its Epsom debut on Earth Day earlier this year — hosted by The Woodland Trust and focusing on the conservation of Langley Vale Wood — the next Green Screen event is set for **Wednesday 9th July 2025 at 8pm**, this time in partnership with **Extinction Rebellion Epsom & Ewell**.

The evening features three short films tackling different aspects of the climate crisis. First up is *#ClimateScam?* (40 mins), a documentary from Cornwall Climate Care which addresses climate change denial and misinformation. It’s followed by *Climate Anxiety* (17 mins), a film from Cambridge Movie Makers exploring the psychological toll of environmental collapse. Finally, *Plan Z: From Lab Coats to Handcuffs* (23 mins), produced by A2Y Productions, tells the story of scientists who risk their careers and freedom by engaging in direct environmental activism.

But it’s not all on-screen. After the screenings, the audience will be invited to stay for a 40-minute panel discussion and Q&A featuring local voices — a doctor, a scientist, an engineer, and a community organiser — all bringing their perspectives to the urgent environmental questions raised by the films.

Joe Stroud of Epsom Picturehouse said:

“We’re proud to see Green Screen take root in Epsom. It’s a strand that thrives when communities take ownership — the films are the catalyst, but it’s the community that brings together their perspectives, expertise, and passion.”

The Green Screen series is a nationwide initiative by Picturehouse Cinemas, transforming theatres into spaces of environmental learning and grassroots conversation. Events across the UK have seen audiences inspired to take local action, supported by partnerships with schools, charities, businesses, and environmental organisations.

True to its ethos, the Epsom screening will extend the invitation to connect beyond the credits. Attendees are encouraged to continue conversations in the Picturehouse’s meeting space over a free tea or filter coffee — if they bring a reusable cup.

Extinction Rebellion Epsom & Ewell, the local host for the July event, is part of the global climate action movement and is active in local campaigning and awareness-raising through non-violent action and community engagement.

Epsom Picturehouse itself is a relatively new addition to the town, having opened in June 2024. Located in Epsom Square, the six-screen venue blends modern programming with vintage touches and a strong focus on community. Its café-bar offers a menu of pizzas, toasties, cakes and drinks, helping turn cinema visits into a more social, immersive experience.

Anyone interested in organising a future Green Screen event in Epsom is encouraged to contact the venue at epsom.marketing@picturehouses.co.uk.

For more information about the 9th July event, readers can contact Warren Bunce of Extinction Rebellion Epsom & Ewell on **07539 069659** or by email at epsomewell@extinctionrebellion.uk.

Epsom and Ewell Youngsters Join Thousands for Day of Outdoor Adventure

19 June 2025



Over 2,000 Beaver Scouts and Rainbows take part in Surrey's Bazzaz event

Young adventurers from Cuddington, Epsom, Stoneleigh, and Ewell were among more than 2,000 Beaver Scouts, Rainbows, and volunteers who gathered at Merrist Wood in Guildford last weekend for *Bazzaz* – Surrey’s flagship activity day for 6- to 8-year-olds.

Held every three years, *Bazzaz* offers a rare opportunity for children to immerse themselves in over 100 action-packed activities, ranging from caving and rock climbing to tomahawk throwing, circus skills, go-karts and inflatable obstacle courses. The event aims to build confidence, teamwork, and resilience through fun and challenge.

Despite soaring temperatures, participants were well-prepared with sun hats, sunscreen and plenty of water. A midday highlight was an unexpected treat as the **Red Arrows flew overhead**, returning from the King’s Birthday celebrations in London.

Feedback from the young participants was as bright as the weather:

“I had lots of fun and I liked the train ride,” said Sam, aged 7, from Epsom.

“Caving was the best because it was challenging and I made a new friend,” added Matthew, 7, from Guildford.

Emily, aged 5, from Woking, said: “It was awesome! I enjoyed climbing because I haven’t tried that before.”

Milly, 6, from Haslemere, shared: “I liked making my dad a Father’s Day card.”

And Noah, 7, from Banstead, summed it up simply: “I liked doing all the activities with my friends.”

The event was supported by an army of adult volunteers, without whom such experiences would not be possible. Richard, a Beaver Scout leader from Surrey, said: “It was a brilliant day for everyone. Some activities were pure fun, others focused on building *#SkillsForLife* — all of them gave the children something special to take away.”

About Beavers and Rainbows

Beaver Scouts (ages 6–8) and **Rainbows** (ages 5–7) are part of the UK’s long-established Scouting and Girlguiding organisations. Together, they offer thousands of children a safe and inclusive environment to learn through play, develop life skills, and enjoy the outdoors.

Nationally, the Scout Association offers over 200 different activities — from abseiling to coding — supported by more than 100,000 volunteers. But demand continues to outpace capacity, with nearly 30,000 young people currently on waiting lists across the UK.

To find out more about volunteering with Scouts in Surrey, visit surrey-scouts.org.uk

Queen of Dictionary Corner Brings Word Magic to Epsom

19 June 2025



Epsom Playhouse set to host a celebration of the English language on 15 October

Britain's best-loved lexicographer, **Susie Dent**, is heading to Epsom Playhouse this autumn with her brand-new live show, *Word Perfect* – a joyous celebration of the quirks, curiosities, and hidden histories of the English language.

Best known for her long-standing role in **Countdown's** *Dictionary Corner* and its comedy spin-off *8 Out Of 10 Cats Does Countdown*, Susie will take to the Epsom stage on **Wednesday 15 October**, promising an evening packed with surprising etymologies, linguistic delights, and audience interaction.

Ever wondered why a group of crows is called a "murder" or why owls form a "parliament"? Curious whether the colour orange predates the fruit? Or perhaps baffled by Gen-Z slang and fearful that local dialects are fading fast? Susie aims to explore these questions and many more in her witty and engaging style.

"The English language will never stop surprising and delighting me," she said ahead of the tour. "It is as wayward as it is majestic, while the dictionary is as full of magic, drama and adventure as you will find anywhere. I can't wait to walk down some more of its secret alleyways with the *Word Perfect* audiences, and to hear their own questions about our curious mother tongue!"

Following the success of her 74-date tour *The Secret Life of Words* (2018–2024), *Word Perfect* builds on Susie's mission to share the joy of words with audiences across the country. The show is a blend of fascinating facts, storytelling, and humour – all rooted in her encyclopaedic knowledge of English.

In 2024, Susie Dent was awarded an **MBE** for services to literature and education, the same year she published her debut novel *Guilty by Definition*. This autumn will also see the release of her latest books: *Words for Life*, and *The Roots We Share: 100 Words That Bring Us Together*.

Tickets for *Susie Dent: Word Perfect* are on sale now via nothird.co.uk/susie-dent or directly from the Epsom Playhouse box office.

For more on Susie's work, visit: susient.com

Epsom Square's Music Festival in the round

19 June 2025



Saturday 14th June. In a town better known for its racecourse than rock and roll, Epsom discovered a new spirit last weekend with the first-ever Epsom Square Music Festival – an ambitious, joyful celebration of grassroots talent and community spirit.

"We just wanted to get more music into Epsom," said Toy, the festival's organiser, speaking from Metropolis (formerly Epsom Social) which served as the hub of the day-long event. "As a new venue, it felt right to do something for the community."

The result was ambitious by any measure: three outdoor stages and over 100 performers across 39 acts, playing everything from acoustic soul to funk and rock. The diversity wasn't only musical, either. "We had performers as young as four, maybe younger," Toy said, "and then, of course, we had the proper grown-ups too." The result was a line-up that reflected the whole community, mirroring Epsom in all its lively charm.

The festival came together in just six weeks, a feat made possible by local support and backing from sponsors such as Epsom Picturehouse, Go Epsom, Epsom & Ewell Families, and music retailers Guitar Guitar and Realistic Music Academy, both of which sponsored their own stages. "We're so lucky in this town," said Toy. "There are so many individuals who are brilliant at what they do that, if you decide to throw together a music festival in six weeks – it's entirely doable," she laughed. "Though next time, I'd like a bit more lead time."

Toy, who also runs the Realistic Music Academy, knows the town's creative undercurrent better than most. Attracting performers was "actually really easy", she said, as she "just put out a post, and suddenly we had 38 acts signed up... the interest is absolutely there."

The crowds clearly agreed. Nearly 500 free tickets were 'sold' in advance, but many more drifted into the square over the weekend, drawn by the buzz of the music and conversation.

On stage, highlights came thick and fast from a variety of performers, but it was local newcomers Vault, a four-piece with an average age of just 14, who perhaps best captured the festival's mission. "This is the only way for us to get out there," they said. "There should be more venues – other than Metropolis, there's not many places for us to play."

Toy, who also runs Realistic Music Academy, agrees. "There's definitely a need for more places to play music in Epsom," she said. "I'd love to do this again next year. I just want more of it – more stages, more performers, more everything."

But beyond the lively crowds and standout performances, the weekend carried a deeper message: local music matters, community matters – and when Epsom comes together, it's capable of creating something genuinely special. A triumph of town spirit – and, with any luck, the start of something much bigger.

For those who love jazz Epsom's own Epsom Jazz Club stages monthly live jazz nights with quality national and international artists at the Epsom centrally located Comrades Club in The Parade Epsom. The next jazz evening at 7.30pm is Thursday 26th June featuring Atlanticus. See www.epsomjazzclub.com for details.

Donovan Livesey

Photo is of the band "Vault".