

Surrey schools shorter Summers?

4 June 2025



Summer holidays could be shortened in Surrey in favour of a longer October half-term break, after a county council decision. The change by Surrey County Council (SCC) means the October half term will now be two weeks long instead of the normal one week, with five days taken off the usual summer holiday period in July 2027 instead.

A public opinion survey carried out from December 2024 received 3,775 responses. Approximately 56 per cent of people agreed with having a two week autumn half term, while 36 per cent opposed the idea. Clare Curran, SCC Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning, said the results from recent public consultations with schools and residents show “there is a clear appetite for change”. She said 60 per cent of schools that responded were in favour of a two week autumn half term, 30 per cent were against, and a further 10 per cent were undecided.

The two week autumn half-term break for community and voluntary controlled schools will begin in the 2026/27 academic year. Cllr Curran added: “This work is in response to the national conversation regarding school term times, and the feedback received by the council from schools, school staff, and families regarding the challenges of differing term dates. It is our intent to facilitate the council, schools and multi academy trusts working in partnership to set term dates that are consistent across the county.” The school year will still have 195 days, including five INSET days, the council said.

Related reports:

Surrey schools not out for so long in summer?

Thames Island Festival given go-ahead

4 June 2025



The show will go on for an exclusive summer concert on a private island in the Thames. D’Oyly Carte Island has been given the go-ahead to host three days of music and entertainment as part of the Weybridge Festival over July 4-6, 2025.

The private island, inaccessible to the public for part of the year, opened its grounds last year for Weybridge Festival and celebrated music ranging from Motown and Soul to 70s’ and 80s’ soft rock.

In January 2025, the festival plans were put on hold as Elmbridge Borough Council decided to stop the event going ahead due to “serious health and safety concerns”. After four months of working on risk assessment and escape plans, the weekend concert can now go ahead.

A unique location, only one bridge serves as the connection from the mainland to D’Oyly Carte Island. Officers raised the alarm that the evacuation routes in the event of a fire or an emergency were not enough for the requirements.

Owner of the Island and event organiser Mr Andy Hill said: “It’s an island, it’s surrounded by water, it’s 50 yards from the mainland. My experience of human beings, if confronted with burning to death or taking on 50 yards of the Thames—I know what I would do. People that are confronted with death will do a lot of things to avoid it.”

Mr Hill explained people can evacuate via the bridge in 5 minutes and 3 seconds—just 3 seconds over the legal time. He also added there will be a ferry that is available for the “odd straggler who can’t get on”.

The environmental officer said she is “still concerned about Mr Hill’s attitude and competency to health and safety, and fire safety”. Officers stressed their key concern was the evacuation plan as they were not satisfied proper emergency routes and exits were in place. The environmental officer said the barge is not licensed to carry people.

Councillors recognised Mr Hill had put plans in place like an evacuation plan and alternative routes. But Cllr Paul Hughes, chairman of the licensing committee, said: “I really encourage you to carry on working as there are clear issues that need to be resolved.”

Mr Hill said after the meeting: “We have worked very closely with the Fire, Police and Health & Safety for the last four months to ensure the events in 2025 are as safe and enjoyable as they were in 2024 and we very much thank these services for their valuable input. We are very grateful to the three Councillors at the TENS hearing who listened to the points made by all parties and concluded that the extensive safety measures that have been put in place will result in a safe and fabulous event with some sensational performers.”

Related reports:

Surrey’s D’Oyly Carte Island concerts cancelled.

Bridge to private D’Oyly Carte Island, Weybridge. (Credit: Google Street View)

Interview with the New Mayor of Epsom and Ewell - Cllr Robert Leach

4 June 2025



Cllr **Robert Leach** (RA Nonsuch) was elected Mayor of the Borough of Epsom and Ewell at the Council meeting on 13th May 2025. The *Epsom and Ewell Times* put some questions to the new Mayor about his plans, priorities, and personal reflections as he embarks on his year of office.

EET: You are championing three charities during your Mayoral year. Could you tell us why you chose these particular charities?

Mayor Robert Leach: As my role relates solely to the borough of Epsom and Ewell, I focused on charities that primarily operate here. I was looking for organisations with the capacity to actively participate in fundraising, and which support those less fortunate in our community.

I've chosen:

- **Good Company**, which runs the foodbank, Epsom Pantry and other services that provide basic food provisions.
- **Citizens Advice Bureau**, which offers vital help with financial, legal, family and administrative issues—often stepping in when people have no one else to turn to.
- **PHAB**, which promotes physical and mental activity for all ages and abilities.

I believe three is the maximum I can support properly, though I recognise that there are many other excellent charities locally. I hope to support them in other ways, such as by attending their fundraising events.

EET: What are your priorities for the year ahead?

Mayor Robert Leach: My main priority is to build a stronger sense of cohesion across the borough and foster a feeling of self-worth among its residents. I'm the Mayor for all—regardless of politics, religion or beliefs.

I'm also launching a *"Friend of the Mayor"* scheme, aimed primarily at children (though adults are welcome too). The idea is simple: a Friend of the Mayor promises not to hate anyone—or at least to try not to. Disagreement is fine, disapproval too, but hatred fuels everything from petty disputes to international conflict. This is just a small, local step to push back against that.

EET: What do you think could be improved about the Borough?

Mayor Robert Leach: Overall, I believe the borough is well run and well-resourced. There are, of course, a few minor housekeeping matters that could be improved. And I do miss the old Rolls-Royce mayoral car with the crest!

EET: What are you most looking forward to in your new role?

Mayor Robert Leach: Meeting people. I hope I can encourage and thank the vast army of volunteers who work so hard for their neighbours. I'm especially keen to spend time with children and young people. Encouraging and engaging with the next generation will be a special part of this year.

EET: What hobbies might have to take a back seat during your Mayoral year?

Mayor Robert Leach: Music is my main hobby. I play in a 15-piece dance band and often deputise in another. I've already had to excuse myself from at least one gig, but I've promised the bandleaders it's only for a year!

As a pensioner with diabetes, I've also been working to get match fit for the job. I've lost over three stone and am trying to reduce my intake of cake and wine!

EET: Any final message for our readers?

Mayor Robert Leach: I want to be a residents' Mayor. I encourage all local organisations to consider inviting me to their events—there is no charge. You might even like to host a *"Meet the Mayor"* evening.

Becoming Mayor is a great honour, and I look forward to carrying out my duties with enthusiasm and commitment.

Image credit: Epsom and Ewell Borough Council.

23 Epsom Dads take on Welsh mountains for charities

4 June 2025



A group of 23 dads in their 40s and 50s from the Epsom area will take on their 2025 hike - the 'Carneddau to Coast' challenge across the rugged mountains of North Wales.

The Epsom Trailblazers are back for their fifth charity hike. On 14th June, the group will tackle 11 peaks, 30km and 1,700m of ascent in one day, all in aid of two amazing charities.

Established in 2016, the Trailblazers' charity hikes have raised over £55,000 in recent years, and this year's target is a massive £10,000 for their chosen charities - one local (Queen Elizabeth's Foundation for Disabled People) and one national (The Brain Tumour Charity).

The bi-annual walking challenges plus many months of training routines have helped the Trailblazers become great friends as well as shaking off some excess kilos in the process.

According to four-times Trailblazer John Croome: "The Trailblazers have all been training really hard this year, hiking endless repeats of the Box Hill ascent every weekend in preparation for the Carneddau challenge and getting in shape any way we can.

“We think we are ready, and are really looking forward to the hike to raise much-needed funds for these great charities.”

The Brain Tumour Charity is the largest dedicated funder of research into brain tumours globally, and has a special connection to the group, with a best friend of a Trailblazer currently undergoing treatment for a brain tumour. Supporting their work will help to save and improve the lives of everyone affected by a brain tumour.

The Trailblazers have also chosen to support the Queen Elizabeth’s Foundation for Disabled People as their local charity this year – the Surrey-based charity supports disabled people of all ages to maximise their independence and achieve their potential. Again, the group has a personal link with the charity with one of the Trailblazers working hard at the charity every day.

Firzana Khan, Community Fundraiser for The Brain Tumour Charity, said: “We’re incredibly grateful to the Epsom Trailblazers for choosing to support The Brain Tumour Charity on their epic Carneddau to Coast challenge.

“Their determination, camaraderie and generosity are truly inspiring, especially as they walk in support of a close friend affected by a brain tumour. Every step they take helps us move closer to our goal of doubling survival and halving the harm that brain tumours cause. We’re cheering them on every inch of the way!”

The Trailblazers 2025 challenge: <https://www.givewheel.com/fundraising/8095/trailblazers-2025-carneddau-to-coast/>

Surrey Uni on space mission to darken the skies

4 June 2025



More than 8,000 low Earth orbit (LEO) satellites already orbit Earth, and projections estimate a rise to 60,000 by 2030, partly driven by the development of mega-constellations. The rate of growth means the issue of light reflecting from satellites back to Earth is pressing for astronomers and stargazers, as images from the Vera C Rubin Observatory in Chile have highlighted.

To combat this problem, satellite operators have begun experimenting with mitigation strategies, including dark coatings and changes to satellite position, though the negative impact on ground-based measurement persists. Surrey NanoSystems, with a heritage in ultra-black technologies, have developed an innovative new solution: Vantablack 310 is a handleable, customer-applied coating, resistant to the challenging LEO environment.

The technology will be trialled on Jovian 1, the first satellite mission from JUPITER – the Joint Universities Programme for In-Orbit Training, Education and Research. The mission, scheduled to launch in 2026, will carry payloads from the Universities of Surrey, Portsmouth and Southampton, AMSAT-UK, and one designed, built and tested by students from the three universities, giving them invaluable hands-on space industry experience.

One side of the shoebox-sized CubeSat will be coated with Vantablack 310, marking the first UK-led initiative to explore solutions for reducing satellite brightness. The initiative aims to not only improve space sustainability but also demonstrate the efficacy of Vantablack 310 as a hull-darkening solution. Researchers from the University of Surrey are developing ways to evaluate the experiment from Earth.

Dr Keiran Clifford, Senior Technologist and project lead at Surrey Nanosystems, said:

“The proliferation of satellite constellations is expected to bring huge societal benefits in technology areas, including global communication and remote sensing. Unfortunately, the current brightness of these satellites severely disrupts ground-based astronomy.

“Our latest coating technology, Vantablack 310, offers super-black performance across a wide range of viewing angles, while remaining robust to the challenging LEO environment. We’re proud to be working with our partners at the University of Surrey to deliver innovations in the satellite sector, ensuring sustainable and equitable access to a night sky for all.”

Astha Astha, the postgraduate astrophysics researcher at the University of Surrey who will develop tests to measure how much Vantablack 310 reduces light pollution when viewed from Earth, said:

“Studies show that satellite mega-constellations could increase sky brightness by up to 1% in the worst-affected regions, posing a serious threat to astronomical observations and dark sky preservation. Our project directly tackles that challenge by exploring innovative ways to reduce satellite reflectance. It brings together key areas of Surrey’s expertise — astrophysics, space engineering, and nanotechnology — with Surrey NanoSystems, which itself spun out of the University’s Advanced Technology Institute.”

The relationship between Surrey NanoSystems and the University of Surrey is deeply rooted in research and innovation. As a spinout company in 2006, Surrey NanoSystems leveraged the University’s expertise in nanomaterials and advanced manufacturing techniques to develop its groundbreaking Vantablack® technologies.

Image: Artist’s impression of a large satellite constellation in low Earth orbit circling above the LOFAR telescope. Credit: International Astronomical Union Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International

Redesigning the Surrey skyways?

4 June 2025



Quicker, Quieter Flights on the Horizon for Heathrow and Gatwick Passengers and Neighbours

Passengers at Heathrow and Gatwick are set to enjoy quicker flights and fewer delays under new government plans to redesign flight paths, aimed at modernising one of the world’s busiest airspaces.

Announced on Monday (2 June), the largest overhaul of UK airspace since the 1950s will prioritise London’s crowded skies, promising more efficient, direct routes for aircraft. The changes are expected to support expansion at Heathrow and growth at Gatwick, while also cutting delays and noise pollution for communities under the flight paths.

Transport officials say the new UK Airspace Design Service (UKADS) will be fully operational by the end of 2025, run by NATS (En Route) plc (NERL). With 2.7 million flights expected this year alone, the new system will help manage soaring demand more sustainably, with fewer planes circling while waiting to land.

Local residents living near Heathrow and Gatwick could benefit from quieter skies, as modernised ‘skyways’ will allow aircraft to climb more quickly after take-off and descend more smoothly, reducing noise and emissions.

Heathrow’s expansion, including its long-discussed third runway, is expected to generate over 100,000 new jobs, while Gatwick is also poised to gain from increased passenger capacity and investment. Aviation Minister Mike Kane said the changes would “turbocharge growth in the aviation industry”, with faster and more reliable journeys for holidaymakers and business travellers alike.

Local airports, airlines and residents’ groups are watching closely, with officials promising that community consultation will remain central to the process. The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) will oversee the implementation, ensuring transparency and evidence-based decisions.

Rob Bishton, Chief Executive of the CAA, said: “Modernising our airspace is key to enabling growth and helping mitigate impacts like noise.”

Martin Rolfe, CEO at NATS, added: “We have one of the busiest and most complex airspaces in the world. To maintain our performance as traffic grows towards 3 million flights per year, we have to modernise. UKADS is a crucial step.”

Karen Dee, Chief Executive of AirportsUK, called the move “a vital step in making our airspace fit for the 21st century,” while Tim Alderslade of Airlines UK said the changes were “long overdue” and would reduce delays, improve resilience, and lower carbon emissions.

The government’s plans also pave the way for future air travel technologies such as drones and flying taxis, with London’s airspace set to lead the way.

Local residents can expect more information as the CAA and NATS engage with communities to design the new routes, with a full consultation expected by September 2025.

The Department for Transport says it is determined to strike the right balance between economic growth and protecting communities from excessive noise and pollution.

Notes to Readers:

- UKADS will be led by NATS (En Route) plc (NERL).
- Heathrow’s expansion plans, including a potential third runway, will benefit from the new airspace design.
- The initial focus is on modernising London’s airspace, but future phases could benefit airports nationwide.
- A consultation on the regulatory changes will begin later this year.

St Martin’s journey from darkness to light

4 June 2025



Ashtead Choral Society and Kent Sinfonia - Dvořák Triumph. St Martin’s Church Epsom 24th May.

Let me get straight to the point. This was a special evening and, at least for me, unexpectedly so. Dvořák’s *Romance for Violin* and his *Stabat Mater* are very much ‘B-list’ on the concert repertoire and don’t feature on the Classic FM ‘Hall of Fame’. You must wonder why when the performance by Ashtead Choral Society, Kent Sinfonia, and Christian Halstead on solo violin was so enthralling from start to finish.

Halstead set the tone for the evening with Dvořák’s restless *Romance for Violin*. You might expect a straight love song from the title ‘Romance’, but Halstead made the most of this restive paean to foreshadow what was to come.

Now, the *Stabat Mater*. It is one of those pieces that is, to my mind, not very interesting when listened to as a recording. But, wow! It comes to life in a performance setting, as Music Director Dr Andrew Storey demonstrated, navigating the orchestra, soloists, and choir through Dvořák’s journey from darkness to light.

Each movement is compelling, and on Saturday night in Epsom it felt like reading a great book. As each chapter ended, I wanted to get on to the next one and find out what happens next. There is too much to write about in this review, but to give you a flavour: we were treated to solo quartets that felt appropriately ‘cathedral’ rather than ‘opera house’; soprano and alto choruses that sparkled; tenor and bass choruses plucked from the depths of Bohemia; and, oh, the magical end where Storey closes with 140 performers quietly triumphing over tragedy.

This concert was a very good end to the Ashtead Choral Society season. But there is good news: if you missed this concert and want to experience Dvořák’s *Stabat Mater* for yourself, Epsom Choral Society will be performing it next season. Even better news: Ashtead Choral Society’s next season will include a mouth-watering line-up: Elgar’s *Dream of Gerontius*, Bach’s *St John Passion*, and Handel’s (rarely performed oratorio) *Theodora*.

www.ashtead.choralsociety.org.uk

Jane Pickles, 26 May 2025

Today is World No Smoking Day - Surrey steps up

4 June 2025



Surrey unveils inspiring stop smoking stories: boosts free support and offers exclusive app access

This Saturday 31st May is World No Smoking Day and Surrey County Council is stepping up its mission to help residents quit smoking with the launch of a compelling new series of video case studies, a significant funding boost, and free access to the popular Smoke Free App.

The video case studies, produced in partnership with One You Surrey, feature Tara and Tobias who have successfully quit smoking. These powerful testimonials aim to inspire others to take the first step toward a healthier, smoke-free life. Watch the videos below:

This initiative is backed by new government funding, part of a national drive to create a Smokefree Generation. The additional resources will allow residents to have even more choice when finding the right free, personalised support to quit smoking.

One You Surrey is the healthy lifestyle service for Surrey residents including a comprehensive stop smoking programme, which includes FREE:

One-to-one support with trained mentors

Nicotine replacement therapies and e-cigarettes delivered to your door

The choice of telephone or face-to-face weekly appointments. See where your nearest location is via: [How can I quit smoking? | Healthy Surrey](#)

New Digital Support: Free Access to the Smoke Free App

Surrey residents can now access six months of free premium features on the highly rated Smoke Free App, offering residents 24/7 support to help you when your cravings hit. Plus, you will receive up to 12 weeks supply of free first choice stop smoking aids, including patches, chewing gum, e-cigarettes and more. The app offers:

Daily missions and motivational messages

Progress tracking (money saved, health improvements)

Craving management tools

Access to expert advice and community support

To activate your free subscription, visit: [smoke free app](#)

Whether it’s your first time trying to quit, or you’ve tried before, it’s never too late to ditch the cigarettes.

Mark Nuti, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for Health & Wellbeing and Public Health said: “As an ex-smoker, I know it’s not easy to quit on your own, so I am proud that Surrey County Council is offering even more tools to help people quit smoking. With inspiring local stories, expert support, and now a free app, there’s never been a better time to go smoke-free.”

To start your journey, visit [oneyousurrey.org.uk](#).

Epsom and Ewell Summer Festival at Bourne Hall

4 June 2025



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is pleased to announce that Bourne Hall will host a Summer Festival on Saturday, 14 June 2025 from 11am until 6pm.

The free event promises fun for all the family, with live music, children’s entertainment, food and craft stalls and games.

Throughout the day, the main stage will host a variety of live music performances, featuring talented local artists and bands. Enjoy a diverse range of musical genres that will keep you entertained and dancing all day long with a DJ host.

Browse the market to discover a range of unique treasures from local craft and artisan sellers, as well as delicious food and drink. The Flying Saucer Café will also be open from 9am until 6pm, offering a range of tasty treats and refreshments.

In addition to this, local community sports group, NEAT, will be hosting a variety of children’s games and activities. Their fun and interactive setups are sure to be a hit with kids of all ages!

Anyone bringing children to the event might be interested in the Ultimate Fun Party –a pre-bookable event from 11am until 12.30pm. Children will be amazed by the tricks of a talented entertainer, while the large disco will have everyone moving and grooving plus there’ll be crazy bubbles and foam! The Ultimate Fun Party is aimed at children aged 5 to 11 and costs £10. It can be booked on the Bourne Hall website.

Cllr Clive Woodbridge, Chair of the council’s Community and Wellbeing Committee, said,

“Bourne Hall provides such a valuable community space, and I’m pleased to see their festival return for another year.

“This year there is a huge focus on opportunities for children to play and have fun, and for families to spend quality time together. The Ultimate Fun Party, along with games by NEAT, live music and a variety of food vendors are sure to be a hit – I can’t wait to see all of this in action!”

The Bourne Hall festival is annual event with a different theme each year. Previous iterations have included Sustainability, The Herald of Spring and New Beginnings. This year’s festival will run from 11am to 6pm.

Bourne Hall’s address is Spring Street, Ewell, Surrey, KT17 1UF.

[www.bournehall.org](#)

Live Music: 13:00 – 18:00

Enjoy a diverse range of musical genres that will keep you entertained and dancing all day long with a DJ host.

Ultimate Fun Party: 11:00 – 12:30

A fun party aimed at children aged 5 – 11 years.

Tickets cost £10 each and include admission for one child and one adult.

Adult supervision is not required throughout the party; however, adults must stay on the premises for the duration of the event. Book via Bourne’s Hall website: [www.bournehall.org](#)

Children’s Games and Activities: 12:00 – 18:00

Local community sports group, NEAT, will be hosting a variety of children’s games and activities. Their fun and interactive setups are sure to be a hit with kids of all ages.

The seeds of NEAT (New Era Academy Training) were planted when Ben and Grant met as youth coaches at Chelsea FC. Both shared a love for football and a dream of passing on their skills to the next generation. You can learn more about NEAT here: <https://weareneat.co.uk/>

Market Stalls: 12:00 – 18:00

Explore a vibrant array of market stalls showcasing local crafts, products, and more. It’s the perfect opportunity to support local businesses and find unique treasures.

Food Stalls: The Flying Saucer Café 09:00 – 18:00, Food stalls 12:00 – 18:00
A selection of food stalls will be available, offering a range of tasty treats and refreshments.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council out – Community Council’s in?

4 June 2025



Earlier this month, at a meeting of the full Council, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) agreed new strategic priorities for 2025-2027, with the number one priority being to explore future local governance in Epsom & Ewell. This week, Councillors will attend a briefing on Community Governance Review (CGR) and will, with the Mayor’s agreement, schedule an extraordinary full Council meeting on Thursday 26 June 2025. At the extraordinary Council meeting, Councillors would agree whether to commence with a CGR in Epsom & Ewell, that could eventually lead to the creation of new community councils.

Community councils provide a vital link between residents and larger unitary authorities, which will be critical as a result of imminent local government reorganisation in Surrey. They aim to enhance local representation by providing a direct route for the essential voices of residents and local communities, ensuring that residents are aware of local issues, and are involved in decision-making they are affected by.

Councillor Hannah Dalton, Leader of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, said “We are navigating the biggest change in local democracy for more than 50 years. As a priority we are working to ensure 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. We will keep residents informed and updated throughout this process.”

In the coming days, Councillors will be briefed on the CGR process and possible geographies for establishing community councils in Epsom & Ewell:

Should full Council decide to commence with the CGR, the process will include a public consultation which would take place summer 2025, with any final proposal being consulted on in early 2026.

EEBC council meetings, including extraordinary full Council meetings, are open to the public to observe and are also live streamed: details on how to watch meetings can be found on the council’s website: [Epsom and Ewell Democracy](#)

In light of the plans for local government reorganisation, which will see the formation of new unitary councils and the dissolution of all current district, borough and county councils in Surrey; EEBC approved an amendment to the Council’s Four-Year Plan earlier this month, replacing it with strategic priorities for 2025-2027. Prior to the 9 May final submission deadline, Epsom & Ewell with nine of the eleven Surrey district and borough councils submitted a proposal to government to create three unitary councils in north, east and west Surrey. The county council and two other district and borough councils favour a two unitary model. Council leaders ruled out the creation of one unitary council for Surrey in February this year.