



Run for humanity in Epsom and Ewell

27 May 2025



On Sunday, 18th May 2025, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Association (AMYA) in the Southwest Region of England hosted a remarkable charity run that brought together people from across the local community in a spirited show of unity and compassion.

Held at Auriol Park, a public park in the Borough of Epsom and Ewell, the event ran from 10 AM to 2 PM and served as a vibrant platform for both raising funds and awareness. With over £8,000 collected on the day, the event was a resounding success. All proceeds went to AMYA's partner charity, *Humanity First*.

Humanity First, established in 1995 and registered with the UK Charities Commission, operates in 66 countries across six continents. It runs eight core programmes that have collectively transformed millions of lives through disaster relief efforts, sustainable development, and community empowerment. The funds raised through this event will directly support the charity's response to various crises around the world, including the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.

Participants came from across the region, with residents of Kingston, Worcester Park, Tolworth, Malden Manor, New Malden, Surbiton, Epsom and Ewell all playing their part in contributing to this noble cause.

The day began with a competitive 10K run that set the tone for the rest of the event, as runners, supporters, and volunteers came together with a shared purpose. Alongside the run, attendees enjoyed a variety of activities, including inflatable attractions, food stalls, and exhibitions that added a festive and welcoming atmosphere for families and supporters alike.

Beyond the fundraising, the event provided an invaluable opportunity for the public to learn more about the Islamic principle of serving humanity. In Islam, service to others is not just encouraged — it is considered a vital part of one's faith and spiritual fulfilment.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Association, known for its strong emphasis on community welfare and interfaith cooperation, exemplifies this teaching by actively engaging in charitable activities across the UK and internationally. By organising such events, AMYA not only raises funds for critical humanitarian efforts but also helps foster mutual understanding and a sense of shared responsibility within the wider community.

Faran Shaheen
Regional Press Secretary for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Association (AMYA) UK

Another Surrey borough heading for bankruptcy?

27 May 2025



Surrey Heath Borough Council's desperation to fight off bankruptcy crystallised further after it agreed to sell a car park and land in order "to keep the lights on". The council has to make huge cuts this year to balance its budget after long-delayed audits revealed millions of pounds was missing from its balance sheet. This included more than £8m wiped off its reserves effectively overnight and the downgrading in value of its major assets bought as part of a £100m regeneration project.

On Tuesday, May 21, the council agreed to sell Woodend Road car park in Deepcut and land on London Road in Camberley to begin to claw back desperately needed cash. Failure to balance its books would result in the loss of support given to the community through things such as meals on wheels type services, funding for Citizens Advice Bureau, children's play parks, and other non-statutory provisions. It comes as the council must shed £1.74m this year through savings, reduced interest payments and a further £500,000 from "service delivery reviews". The purpose of any potential disposal of land, the meeting heard, is to bring in money for a council "in financial distress and we cannot incur further related costs".

Shaun Macdonald, leader of Surrey Heath Borough Council, said: "Car park, play parks, discretionary services, the support we give to the local community will go in the blink of an eye, so yes these are tough decisions but these were the tough decisions we were elected to make in order to protect the most vulnerable in our society. Two to four play parks can be renovated (instead) for young people to enjoy for the next 15 years. How many young people will benefit from that? Citizen's Advice Bureau funding, it can also support, potentially the provision of meals in people's homes."

These are the first tranche of sales the council is deciding on. Decisions made are being based on what the council considers is best for the entire borough, rather than the specific area affected. Car parking in Surrey Heath is particularly vulnerable as, by law, it does not need to be provided — and any council that declares itself bankrupt cannot spend money on discretionary services that do not pay for themselves. Parking in Surrey Heath loses money.

The London Road land sale, described as a "small plot", is said to have no value financially to the council but incurs unnecessary costs. Cllr Murray Rowlands (Labour: St Michaels) said it had been "blighted with fly-tipping and parking" and was "a serious problem that affects the whole of that part of Camberley." Cllr Macdonald added that it was "a fly tippers' paradise."

The Deepcut car park sale proved more divisive, and not just among the opposition members who were calling for the sale to be halted on the grounds that it would deprive the area of much needed parking spaces. Deepcut is undergoing a massive transformation with the former military barracks being turned into a huge redevelopment.

Cllr Cliff Betton (Liberal Democrats: Mytchett and Deepcut) said: "I fully understand the need for the council to raise funds from the sale of assets surplus to requirements. We have to have a balanced budget at least until the time the new unitary authority comes into being. After that, Surrey Heath Borough Council will cease to exist and it will be up to others to make decisions for the people of Deepcut. Everyone knows there are plans approved for Deepcut and it's now renamed Mindenhurst; 1,200 homes are being built, some are already completed and there are still another 800 still to come. Parking for the old Deepcut village pre-Mindenhurst was ok, it worked, sometimes a bit crowded but the car park was well used. But this will see just eight car park space increases in a village with 800 new homes, a ratio that doesn't even meet Surrey County Council's standards. If we want to build a better future for Deepcut, and Mindenhurst is part of that, we cannot build in parking blight from the outset. Woodend Road needs to stay as a car park."

Cllr Kel Finan-Cooke, property and economic development portfolio holder said: "We would prefer to not have to make decisions like this. We would prefer to not be in a position where we are need to achieve capital receipts to keep the lights on at Surrey Heath for the next two years but that's the situation we are in. We don't want to have to consider the sale of lands but we absolutely must."



Woodend Road Car Park in Deepcut (image Google)

Surrey sent on a U-turn on SEND by MPs?

27 May 2025



Surrey County Council has made an apparent U-turn on MPs' engagement with SEND cases. The leader of Surrey County Council has pleaded with MPs to not "talk down" children services but work constructively and the council denied it was closing down channels of communication.

Liberal Democrat and Conservative MPs wrote separate letters to Clare Curran, the councillor in charge of children's services, after she sent an email saying the department would respond to fewer constituent SEND cases raised by members.

MPs had expressed their shock and concern in respective letters over Cllr Curran's statement that the service "will no longer provide a response to individual cases where a more appropriate alternative route is available".

But at a full council meeting on May 20, Cllr Curran said she is "not closing down any channels of communication". The cabinet member said: "I set aside any impression that I may have given that I don't want to hear from MPs or that any lines of communication are being cut back, closed or shut down which is absolutely not the case."

Cllr Curran said she just wanted to reiterate and remind MPs that in some cases where a final decision has been taken, the appropriate route for the family to follow without delay, is to use a formal appeals panel.

Cllr Eber Kington, from the Residents' Association and Independents group, raised the issue at the meeting. He argued it was important that councillors and MPs did not have "communication barriers put in place by children's services" if their input was "not deemed appropriate or convenient".

At the meeting, Woking's MP Will Forster, who is also a county councillor, asked if Cllr Curran thinks the policy fits with the council's "leave no one behind" approach. The Lib Dem MP said he had about 40 active SEND cases.

The leader of Surrey County Council, Tim Oliver, explained that Surrey has over 16,000 children with education, health and care plans (EHCPs), one of the highest in the country.

In a speech to full council, Cllr Oliver urged MPs to "not talk down" Surrey's SEND service and "wilfully mislead the public". He encouraged MPs to "use your position to speak up for Surrey in Parliament, not to talk down a service that needs urgent national reform and support this council and government to implement reforms that work for our children, their families, and for all councils across the country."

Strikes could still impact half-term Gatwick flights

27 May 2025



Gatwick Airport's largest carrier EasyJet is expecting to run its full schedule during the busy half term period despite industrial action taking place by their oil refuellers. Strike action by baggage handlers, which would have run at the same time, was suspended to allow Unite members to vote on new terms - lessening any potential disruptions.

More than 100 Red Handling workers at Gatwick Airport including baggage handling, check-in and flight dispatchers had been set to walk out over what they said were late and missing pension payments - but this has been put on hold for at least a fortnight after the union Unite received proof pension contributions had been paid. Staff at Redline Oil which fuels easyJet, Air India, Uganda Airlines, will continue taking action between Friday May 23 and Tuesday May 27 after unanimously rejecting the company's pay offer.

A London Gatwick spokesperson said: "We are aware of the proposed industrial action from Redline Oil and are working closely with them and our airlines to minimise impacts to passengers. Passengers should contact their airline directly for more information."

A spokesperson at RED Handling UK said: "We welcome Unite's decision to postpone industrial action for two weeks pending a final ballot. We are pleased to have responded positively and fully to all historical issues raised, resolving every point quickly and collaboratively. We will continue to work with Unite the Union to work towards a solution to ending the dispute. Throughout the process, we have been honest and transparent with the Union and all of our staff, keeping them fully up-to-date with progress and timescales. We committed to supporting them and have put systems in place to ensure a proactive and open dialogue with our teams in the future. We are hugely grateful for the support of the team and for their commitment and positivity, which has helped us to achieve our best performing 'on time performance' for the period in company's history."

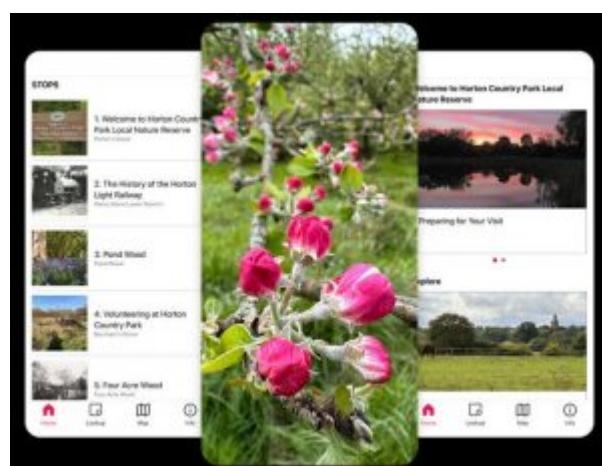
Unite has said Red Handling also agreed to cover the loss of interest on any contributions not paid and an independent audit carried out to ensure missing pensions contributions does not happen again. Regional officer Ben Davis said: "Red Handling has returned to negotiations and made an improved offer and therefore Unite has suspended strike action to allow members to be balloted on the proposals."

The remaining day of strike action by baggage handlers on June 1 is still due to go ahead pending the outcome of the ballot.

Gatwick Airport (image Gatwick)

Epsom's nature reserve goes digital

27 May 2025



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has launched a new digital tour that showcases local beauty spot, Horton Country Park Local Nature Reserve. The tour is available to download now via Bloomberg Connects. Epsom and Ewell Borough Council created the tour to help both first-time and returning visitors explore the history of Horton Country Park Local Nature Reserve.

This is the second tour to be launched on Bloomberg Connects by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council; in September 2023, Nonsuch Park went live on the app, allowing users to peruse the formal gardens at their leisure.

Horton Country Park Local Nature Reserve covers 200 acres and is situated in the northern half of the borough of Epsom and Ewell. There are 14 stops along the tour, which include Pond Wood with a mention of the bomb crater which was left from an air raid in 1941; volunteering at Horton Country Park; as well as the community orchard where residents can pick apples in the summer season. It also highlights the Horton Light Railway, which once ran through the area, serving the largest hospital cluster of its kind in Europe at the time. The entire walking tour takes approximately 2.5 to 3.5 hours, but can be enjoyed at any pace, returning to the start at any of the designated turning points.

The new digital tour of Horton Country Park Local Nature Reserve is packed full of information, interesting facts, photos, history and more. It is the perfect accompaniment to enhance the experience of those visiting Horton Country Park Local Nature Reserve and makes information accessible to people anytime, anywhere.

The tour is an important part of the council's Arts, Culture and Heritage Strategy. One of the aims of the strategy is to increase access to culture and heritage in Epsom & Ewell, allowing people to engage with our colourful and varied cultural past in new and engaging ways.

Councillor Clive Woodbridge, Chair of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Community and Wellbeing Committee, said,

"I am delighted to support the launch of our latest free-to-enjoy digital tour about the Horton Light Railway at Horton Country Park Local Nature Reserve. Showcasing the richness of our borough's heritage, the tour is a great way to spend time outdoors, learning about the importance of the railway and its vital contribution to the borough's hospital cluster."

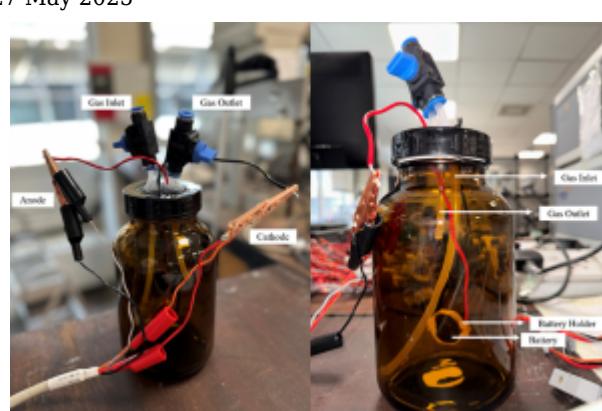
The Bloomberg Connects app is available for download from Google Play or the App Store.

You can also view the tour of Horton Country Park Local Nature Reserve here:

<https://links.bloombergconnects.org/6Ggw/175fz8wz>

Surrey battery leads

27 May 2025



Scientists at the University of Surrey have made a breakthrough in eco-friendly batteries that not only store more energy but could also help tackle greenhouse gas emissions. Lithium-CO₂ 'breathing' batteries release power while capturing carbon dioxide, offering a greener alternative that may one day outperform today's lithium-ion batteries.

Until now, Lithium-CO₂ batteries have faced setbacks in efficiency - wearing out quickly, failing to recharge and relying on expensive rare materials such as platinum. However, researchers from Surrey have found a way to overcome these issues by using a low-cost catalyst called caesium phosphomolybdate (CPM). Using computer modelling and lab experiments, tests showed this simple change allowed the battery to store significantly more energy, charge with far less power and run for over 100 cycles.

The study, published in Advanced Science, marks a promising step toward real-world applications. If commercialised, these batteries could help cut emissions from vehicles and industrial sources - and scientists even imagine they could operate on Mars, where the atmosphere is 95% CO₂.

Dr Siddharth Gadkari, Lecturer in Chemical Process Engineering at the University of Surrey, and corresponding author of the study, said:

"There's a growing need for energy storage solutions that support our push toward renewable power while also tackling the growing threat of climate change. Our work on lithium-CO₂ batteries is a potential game-changer in making that vision a reality."

"One of the biggest challenges with these batteries is something called 'overpotential' - the extra energy needed to get the reaction going. You can think of it like cycling uphill before you can coast. What we've shown is that CPM flattens that hill, meaning the battery loses far less energy during each charge and discharge."

To understand why the CPM worked so well, teams from Surrey's School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering and the Advanced Technology Institute used two approaches. First, they dismantled the battery after charging and discharging to study the chemical changes inside. These post-mortem tests found that lithium carbonate, the compound formed when the battery absorbs CO₂, could be reliably built up and removed - an essential feature for long-term use.

They then turned to computer modelling using density functional theory (DFT), which allows researchers to explore how the reactions unfold on the material surface. Results showed how the CPM's stable, porous structure offered the ideal surface for key chemical reactions.

Dr Daniel Commandeur, Future Fellow at the University of Surrey and corresponding author of the study, said:

"What's exciting about this discovery is that it combines strong performance with simplicity. We've shown that it's possible to build efficient lithium-CO₂ batteries using affordable, scalable materials - no rare metals required. Our findings also open the door to designing even better catalysts in the future."

The discovery opens new doors for developing even better low-cost, easy-to-make battery materials. With further research into how these catalysts interact with electrodes and electrolytes, lithium-CO₂ batteries could become a practical, scalable way to store clean energy, while helping reduce carbon in the atmosphere.



Feast of Finals see Sutton & Epsom RFC runner-up

27 May 2025



On Saturday, Dings Crusaders RFC hosted a veritable feast of four finals. A large and enthusiastic crowd was bathed in unbroken sunshine.

The day began with the amuse-bouche of Ashley Down Old Boys downing the colours of Hastings & Bexhill to the tune of 34-20. Next came the hors d'oeuvres, as Cheltenham North overcame Honiton 38-32. The penultimate plate served up a thrilling 28-24 win for Ealing Trailfinders over Old Bristolians.

The afternoon culminated in the main course: the Papa Johns Regional 2 South Plate Final between Sutton & Epsom and Drybrook. The latter, having lost this fixture 42-29 to Reed's Weybridge last year, came into this match on a season of unbridled success. Champions of the Regional 2 Tribute Severn League and winners of the Forest of Dean Combination Senior Cup with a 37-27 triumph over Cinderford, Drybrook now completed a trophy treble by vanquishing Sutton 36-27.

Freddy Bunting initiated proceedings, and the Squirrels dominated the early exchanges. A penalty was advanced to the 22. Having secured possession from their throw, Drybrook cut through the defence but lost the ball near the line. Fortunately, the referee brought play back for an earlier infringement. Fullback Haydn Lewis stepped up to give Drybrook a 3-0 lead. Sutton's start was further hampered by a cut to Ewan McTaggart's eye that temporarily forced the gargantuan lock off to be bandaged up.

The first signs of recovery came from a searing break by Tom Lennard that brought Sutton close to the enemy 22. Awarded a penalty, Sutton drilled it into the corner. McTaggart returned, the ball was won, and hooker Sam Lennie crossed the whitewash for the first try of the afternoon. Captain Bunting added the extras to give Sutton a 7-3 lead.

Invigorated, Josh Rea made a fabulous break that led to another penalty on the 22. However, the doughty Drybrook defence held firm. The game flowed end to end. On the half-hour mark, Sutton were awarded a penalty and Drybrook's Jack Moss was shown a yellow card. Opting for a try over points, S&E were rewarded as Sam Lennie forced his way over for a second try. Though the conversion missed, the Sutton supporters were soon celebrating again. McTaggart and Glanville secured the restart, and Adam Bibby jinked his way 40 metres to score a stunning solo effort. Bunting converted, taking Sutton to a 19-3 lead.

As has so often been the case in this annus mirabilis for Drybrook, it was their talismanic captain Mitchell Bourne who provided inspiration. He powered over the line from a catch-and-drive, with Lewis adding the conversion from the flank to close the gap to 19-10.

Approaching the break, Sutton were awarded a penalty near halfway. With clock awareness, Bunting knocked over the long-range effort to give Sutton a 22-10 lead at the interval.

The second half began swiftly. Drybrook's Mitchell Baldwin made a searing 40-metre break before flanker Bailey Watts applied the coup de grâce. Lewis converted to make it 22-17. With momentum on their side, Drybrook surged forward again. Cai Rogers made a stunning break, and McTaggart received a yellow card for high contact. Drybrook capitalised, scoring twice in five minutes. Cai Roberts crossed to level the match at 22-22, and Mitchell Baldwin added another try. Lewis converted to take the lead 29-22.

In a parallel to the first half, Sutton responded. McTaggart returned just in time for another attacking lineout. Lennie completed his hat-trick. Though Bunting missed the conversion, the score stood at 29-27.

Moments later, the pendulum swung again. Bibby was shown a yellow card, meaning the influential centre would miss most of the remainder. Sutton were awarded a penalty from 45 metres, but Bunting's kick narrowly missed.

Drybrook came close again with a clever kick that exposed Sutton's cover, but the defence scrambled back just in time. However, the respite was brief. Replacement Ioan Jones strode over for the crucial score, converted again by the nerveless Lewis to make it 36-27.

Sutton fought to the final whistle but could not close the gap. Drybrook's celebrations began at the final whistle.

Though Sutton came up short, their performance capped a season of definite upward trajectory. Drybrook were worthy winners, concluding a triumphant campaign—one that may require a carpenter to extend their trophy cabinet.

Teams:

Sutton & Epsom:

Scott, Ghumra, Bibby, Bunting (capt.), Huie, Lennard, Findlay E, Johnson, Lennie, Boaden, Glanville, McTaggart, Rea, Jones, Hegarty.
Replacements: Hilton, Madadangoma, Duey, Tame, Davies, Nelson, Symonds.

Drybrook:

Lewis, Chappell, Price, Baldwin, Roberts, Morgan B, Rogers, Jelf, Addis, Morgan L, Moss, Watkins, Watts, Peaper, Bourne (capt.).
Replacements: Hale, Morgan C, Greenway W, Rowley, Tinker, Greenway R, Jones

Image credit: Iain Frazerr

Surrey MPs unite against County on SEND silence

27 May 2025



Surrey MPs have slammed the council for apparently closing down discussions on constituent SEND cases. In a rare case of unity between parties, both the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives have written separate letters to Surrey County Council criticising its decision.



The letter comes after MPs were advised last week that Surrey County Council "will no longer provide a response to individual cases where a more appropriate alternative route is available". But a council spokesperson said the most suitable route for parents wanting to challenge a decision is by a formal appeal.

Posting on X, formerly Twitter, Zöe Franklin, Lib Dem MP for Guildford said: "This latest correspondence is further proof of the council's contempt for children with SEND requirements across our county." Lincoln Jopp, the Conservative MP for Spelthorne, wrote on Facebook: "It is deeply troubling that Cllr Curran has written to all Surrey MPs seeking to restrict the level of engagement Surrey County Council will have with us on SEND matters. This decision risks families not getting the real help they need."

Surrey County Council has come under fire in recent years for having one of the highest SEND tribunal appeal rates in England. Around 198 SEND-related complaints have also been upheld against it by the Local Government Ombudsman since the start of 2022.

The county council's most recent Ofsted SEND area inspection found that children with SEND had "inconsistent experiences and outcomes". But the Surrey authority would say it is on an improvement programme and is significantly investing in supporting SEND children both inside school and out.

The Lib Dem MPs claim many parents come to them with their case "only after they have exhausted all routes or have been unable to receive a reply". Liberal Democrat MPs Al Pinkerton, Chris Coghlan, Helen Maguire, Monica Harding, Will Forster and Zöe Franklin have written to Surrey County Council's Cllr Clare Curran to express serious concerns over the council's new policy on Special Educational Needs (SEND) casework.

The Lib Dem letter read: "The decision to sever communication between our offices and the Council contradicts the principles [of improving outcomes and processes] and ultimately harms the very people we are all here to serve: the residents of Surrey."

The Lib Dem MPs claim the council did not contact the group in advance to discuss her concerns before making this decision which effectively closes a vital avenue through which desperate families have previously sought help. They urged Cllr Curran to change her mind and continue a constructive relationship.

Conservative MPs Dr Ben Spencer, Rebecca Paul, Lincoln Jopp, Greg Stafford, Jack Rankin, The Rt. Hon. Claire Coutinho and The Rt. Hon. Sir. Jeremy Hunt have also penned a letter to the cabinet member to voice their concerns. The Conservative politicians said that "limiting engagement with MPs who advocate for constituents in this way is likely to be concerning for the public".

Similar to their Liberal counterparts, the Tories explained consistent complaints raised by their residents were based on communication in sharing updates, following legal time frames and chasing up consultation responses. Claire Coutinho MP said she spent "around a third of my constituency surgeries helping parents dealing with SEND and EHCP cases."

The Tory MPs' letter noted that Dame Kate Dethridge, the DfE's regional director, saw MPs' inboxes as a "useful weathervane" on whether the council's system is working.

The MPs wrote: "Where these issues arise, and particularly there appears to be a pattern or repeated concerns being raised, we must be able to advocate and engage, both on individual cases and on policy and service delivery issues." But, the Tories added that if the decision stands, they would like further clarity on the scope of future engagement with MPs.

Cllr Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning said: "We know and appreciate the important role MPs play for their constituents, and value strong relationships with our MPs, both about council services and policies, and their advocacy on behalf of Surrey to the national government. We have clear channels of communication between all Surrey MPs and the council.

"The recent communication sent to all MPs was to remind them that the correct process for families who are dissatisfied with a final council decision is to challenge it by way of a formal appeal. This is the appropriate and most effective route for families, and information on how to do this is always included when families are notified in writing of the council's decision."

Illegal dumps dump a dumps in Surrey

27 May 2025



Persistent and ongoing fly-tipping problems have forced the permanent closure of a Surrey recycling centre, Reigate and Banstead Borough Council has said.

The Lower Kingswood site in Stubbs Lane has been plagued with illegal dumping despite being plastered with warning posters saying flytipping was a criminal offence - and that continued misuse would result in its closure.

The council has said it will continue to monitor the site after its Monday, May 19 axing in an effort to deter any further tips.

The flytipping, it added, was not only a nuisance but risked contaminating recycling turning it into useless landfill.

Cllr Hannah Avery (Conservative, Horley Central and South), is the executive member for neighbourhood services.

She said: "We're grateful to the many residents who do the right thing when recycling their waste."

"Unfortunately, fly tipping at our recycling sites, which can contaminate this recycling, undermines the efforts of the responsible majority."

"I want it to be easy for residents to recycle as much as they can, so am really pleased that all households in the area local to Stubbs Lane can now use our full collection service and are able to recycle all the materials collected at Stubbs Lane, with the exception of textiles, from home."

The council said its efforts to curb the illegal fly tipping, including fixed penalty notices, failed to prevent large volumes of non-recyclable waste being dumped at the site.

Reigate and Banstead run an alternating waste collection service. Week one - which it calls blue week, collects food as well as paper and cardboard - with a fortnightly garden scheme for members.

The second week, dubbed green week, collects food, paper and cardboard - with a fortnightly mixed recycling and general refuse of anything that can not be recycled.

The council said it has reminded all its residents, businesses, and charities they must dispose waste responsibly and that failure could result in prosecution or a £400 fixed penalty notice.

Stubbs Lane flytipping (image RBBC)



Cleanliness is next to Godliness in Epsom

27 May 2025



On Sunday, 4th May, the sun was shining — and so were the smiles of Councillors Steven McCormick (RA Woodcote and Langley) and James Lawrence (LibDem College). While Steven knew what to expect having joined the group several times before, James was astonished to be greeted by a 110-strong team of volunteers, all equipped with litter pickers, high-vis jackets, and green and grey litter bags (more on those later), gathered and ready in Rosebery Park.

The volunteers, from ASEZ WAO and the World Mission Society Church of God, had travelled from Surrey, London, and as far afield as Manchester, Guildford, and Birmingham. Their mission: to clean up the parks and streets of Epsom as part of a "Reduce Plastic" campaign — an initiative backed not just by words, but by real action.

The event began with inspiring words from the councillors. Councillor James expressed his surprise at the turnout, admitting he had expected a group of around 11 but was delighted to see 10 times that number. "This is wonderful — amazing," he said. "It's so pleasing to see so many young faces in the crowd... so many people think activism is just shouting something online, but it's fantastic to see people actually doing something."

Councillor Steven added: "Hopefully people will just put litter in the bin — I know it's a big ask — but what you're doing is great and sets a really good example. You don't just explain it, you actually do it. Really good job."

Although Councillor Neil Dallen (RA Town) was unable to attend in person, he sent a message of encouragement via email, which was read out by a representative: "Best wishes to you all. This country depends on volunteers in many ways. A clean and tidy town encourages others to keep it clean and discourages littering and graffiti."

The mostly young adult volunteers were uplifted by the councillors' support, giving them a resounding cheer and calling out, "We love you!" Following the speeches, a short presentation was given on plastic pollution, highlighting the dangers of microplastics and encouraging people to think about how they can reduce plastic in their daily lives — something we can all take part in.

Afterwards, the councillors and volunteers set to work along three key routes in Epsom, including the town centre, the car park near Lidl, Epsom Square, Rosebery Park, and Mount Hill Gardens — all areas where litter had been reported. Recyclable and non-recyclable waste were carefully separated, with recyclable items placed in green bags and non-recyclable in grey ones.

Members of the local community praised the volunteers, and several even signed up for future events. Other environmental groups also offered words of encouragement, recognising the volunteers' hard work. By the end of the day, about 40 bags of rubbish had been collected and left at an agreed pick-up point, where they were retrieved by a ranger from Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) and taken to the recycling depot. The EEBC depot had kindly supported the volunteers by providing around 30 litter-picking kits, which proved invaluable.

The day stood as a shining example of successful collaboration between community volunteers, councillors, and council staff. More activities are already being planned by ASEZ WAO, based at the World Mission Society Church of God on East Street, in partnership with Councillors Steven and James. These include further plastic awareness events, potential upcycling initiatives, and of course, more litter picks.

Epsom was recently ranked the second-best place to live in England, and the volunteers are hopeful that, with continued community effort, it will claim the top spot next year. They are committed to working alongside the community and the council to inspire civic pride, keep our streets clean, and make our local area a pleasant place for everyone. As Councillor Neil noted, by setting a good example, we hope others will be inspired to keep Epsom clean and discourage littering and graffiti.

Olivia from ASEZ WAO summed up the spirit of the day, saying, "The event was brilliant — I loved it. I really hope it makes a difference, and if you have the time, I'd definitely recommend getting involved in something like this."

Joe Adams