

# Epsom and Ewell's Record-Breaking Poppy Appeal

13 March 2025



The **Royal British Legion's** Epsom and Ewell branch has once again demonstrated the remarkable generosity of the local community, raising a record-breaking total of **£79,366.99** during the 2024 Poppy Appeal. This astounding figure, collected throughout the borough in November, marks an increase of **£16,000** from the previous year—an incredible achievement as collectors and supporters returned in full force after the pandemic.

Poppy Appeal Organiser **Amy Johnson**, alongside her dedicated deputies, coordinated an army of volunteers, young and old, who braved the autumn chill to collect donations across the **Ashley Centre, Sainsbury's Kiln Lane, local schools, shops, businesses, and various poppy stands** throughout Epsom and Ewell. The generosity of local residents ensured that the borough, known for its strong community spirit, once again surpassed expectations.

A special note of thanks goes to the **Ashley Centre and Sainsbury's Kiln Lane management teams**, whose continued support provided vital collection points for this year's appeal.

Reflecting on the significance of the funds raised, **Barb Warwick, Chair of RBL Epsom and Ewell**, stated:

"As we sadly say farewell to the last of our WWII service men and women, our mission now is to ensure that the new generation of Armed Forces personnel and their families receive the support they need, no matter where or when they serve. We are secure in the knowledge that Epsom and Ewell, the smallest borough with the biggest heart, will rise to this challenge."

The Royal British Legion continues its vital work providing welfare and support to serving and former members of the Armed Forces and their families. Anyone in need of assistance, whether they have served in the past or are currently in the Armed Forces, is encouraged to reach out to **barb.warwick@virginmedia.com** for confidential support and guidance.

With the borough's unwavering dedication, Epsom and Ewell have once again shown their commitment to remembering and supporting those who have served. **Lest we forget.**

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## Golf course housing tees off Green Belt preservers

13 March 2025



Over 200 homes will be built on a golf course in an "epoch making moment" for Surrey's green belt. Elmbridge Borough Council's planning committee approved developer Claudel Venture Holdings Ltd's vision for the 43 hectare site in Hersham on Wednesday, March 11.

The former 18-hole golf course off Assher Road will be transformed into a mix of 57 houses and 164 apartments with 246 parking spaces. Half of the homes will be affordable including social and affordable rent as well as shared ownership.

As well as the 221 homes, the plans feature a GP surgery, café, play areas and a natural green space in the form of a country park.

Debates around the proposal centred on whether the golf club was previously developed grey belt land or not. "It is almost an epoch-making moment," said Councillor John O'Reilly. "It is probably the first major application where the green belt will be so compromised."

Green belt land keeps countryside spaces free from development and stops the urban sprawl of towns merging together. Building on the green belt is only allowed when special circumstances can be demonstrated. But planning officers found

the scheme would not undermine the openness of the green belt.

Michel Phillips, a professional adviser speaking against the scheme for the objectors, called it a “fallacy” the golf club is developed land as it was recognised as green belt land in a 2016 review. He told the committee: “There is no policy for Elmbridge to slice and dice the greenbelt to please development objectives.

“You have all been elected on a promise to protect the greenbelt. [The residents’] plea to you is to honour your commitment to Elmbridge citizens.,

The decision was made despite over 800 objections (some from the same address) were sent against the plans, criticising the loss of countryside views for the neighbours and invasion of privacy.

Doubts were cast over whether a GP surgery would want to move into the proposed medical building. The developer acknowledged that it cannot ‘force’ the NHS to set up a new surgery on the site. Instead Claudel Venture Holdings said it would add another ten affordable units , in the shape of one and two-bedroom homes, and contribute £150,000 towards the NHS.

Speaking for the applicant, Mr Edwards said: “The planning inspector concluded that the need for affordable housing is acute and ever worsening and exceeds the council’s assessment that 296 affordable homes need to be built annually.” He told the committee that the proposed affordable homes are “important as Elmbridge is one of the most expensive boroughs in the country”.

Ward councillor for Hersham Village, Cllr Wendy Gibbs said the affordable housing on the development “doesn’t go far enough” to provide much-needed three-bedroom homes. She slammed the developer for not flats not being inclusive enough with lifts and areas for prams. Some councillors raised concerns whether housing associations would take up new affordable properties.

Although Cllr Judy Sarsby said she disliked the “overbearing building”, she acknowledged there are 2,500 families currently on a housing waiting list and a hundred families which are homeless. Members from either side of the political spectrum, from Conservative to Liberal Democrats agreed the proposed housing development was in a useful location near the station and would provide social and economic benefits in the area.

Currently private land, only golfers and those using the public footpath to the River Mole are allowed to access the green. But the applicant has proposed a green space of 21.8 hectares as part of the development to help mitigate the new homes on the former golf course.

Residents complained the site floods every year from rain and stressed the flood waters could be redirected to the surrounding homes. To combat the flood risk, the applicant is proposing to raise the level of the land meant for residential development to deal with the water run off.

Transport improvements include new footpaths, bus stops and a signal crossing on Molesey Road is also part of the development. Around £110k is being put towards Hersham station for rail improvements. But some councillors said the money “won’t touch the sides” of what is needed and that the station is from a “bygone” era.

Artist’s impression of proposed Hersham golf club development. (Credit: Claudel Venture Holdings Ltd / Elmbridge Borough Council planning documents)

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## Leatherhead to get new cinema and bowling alley?

13 March 2025



A new cinema or bowling alley could “breathe new life” into Leatherhead as part of major regeneration plans aimed at “reversing the trend of brands leaving the town”. Plans for the high street, Swan Centre and Bull Hill will be put on display this week with people invited to have their say on the proposals that will be among the biggest changes to the town in years. Mole Valley District Council and Kier Property are working together on the project and have said they were “excited to share” the new layouts that feature “significant updates” based on feedback from 2024.

A spokesperson for the project said: “The proposals... aim to breathe new life into the Swan Centre and Leatherhead High Street. This will be through investment in upgrades to the look and feel of the centre. We are also proposing to open up the main entrance to provide specific units to bring exciting and quality chains and independent restaurants and operators to Leatherhead.” The new layout will also include what is being described as a ‘cultural building’ on the first floor ‘to potentially include a cinema, bowling, activity centre to provide a great new entertainment offering in the town centre.

They added: “This investment will be a catalyst to improve the quality and variety of offer in both the Swan Centre and Leatherhead High Street, reversing the trend of brands leaving the town and shop closures.” To take the development

further, the council and Kier Property - working together as a joint venture called The Leret Partnership, is calling on residents to give their views on the updated proposals.

Among the updates and refinements are an increase in public green space and new building layout in Bull Hill with two drop-in sessions being held this week to give people the opportunity to take a closer look. Both sessions will take place in the former Clinton Cards site within the Swan Centre. The first will run from 2pm to 8pm on Thursday, March 13, with the second taking place on Saturday, March 15 from 10am to 4pm. They are also being hosted on the Leret Partnership's website.

Image: Swan Centre Proposal from the Leret Partnership (MVDC)

Related reports:

River Mole to attract visitors to Leatherhead?

Leatherhead town on the way up?

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## Jane Wilson-Howarth visits her Epsom alma mater

13 March 2025



North East Surrey College of Technology (Nescot) welcomed **Jane Wilson-Howarth**, world renowned physician, author, zoologist and an authority on travel health to the college yesterday. Jane inspired and motivated our learners with two very special talks about her journey as a published writer, and her love for animals in her fascinating encounters with the wildlife in Madagascar.

Jane studied at the college in the early 1970s when it was known as Ewell Technical College, completing her Ordinary National Diploma in Sciences. She was delighted to return to her alma mater, now known as Nescot.

Jane's first talk reflected on her career as an author and her time at the college. She spoke about how a letter-writing habit in childhood helped her writing abilities. She explained to students that writing is an essential and useful skill and emphasised the importance of finding your passion, "It doesn't matter what it is, if you're passionate about something, it will come across in your writing", said Jane.

For her second talk, Jane spoke about her travels in Madagascar and her fascination and love for the wonderful wildlife on the island especially the lemurs. Our Animal Care students, some of whom have been to Madagascar on a college trip last year were fascinated to hear her experiences and reflections - including being bitten by a scorpion.

Jane was also given a tour of the college including the Learning Resources Centre (LRC) that featured an eye-catching and creative display of her fiction and non-fiction books, a selection of photographs from her travels and various newspaper articles. Students are able to borrow and browse Jane's books from the LRC. At the end of her visit, Jane was delighted to be awarded with the Nescot Honorary Fellowship by Principal and CEO, Julie Kapsalis.

Julie Kapsalis, Principal and CEO said, "It's been an absolute pleasure to welcome Jane back to her old college as one of our most illustrious alumni. A big thank you to Jane for sharing her extraordinary career as a writer and zoologist with our students and staff.

"It's a privilege to award Jane with an Honorary Fellowship. We introduced the award in 2023 for the college's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary to recognise excellence of former students and members of the local community. It is the highest accolade the college can bestow."

Speaking about her visit, Jane said, "It's a real pleasure to come back to Nescot. I was here from 1970 to 1972 and had a really good science education at the college and that gave me the confidence I needed. It's been so wonderful meeting and speaking with students today. I was so touched by the time and effort that went into creating the wonderful display of my published work in the college's Learning Resources Centre and the beautiful drawing I received of a leaf tailed Gecko by one of the students. I was especially thrilled to receive an Honorary Fellowship from Nescot. Thank you to everyone at the college for making me feel so welcome and for such a memorable day."

Image: Jane-W-H-Nescot-Honorary-Fellowship-Award-and-Julie-Kapsalis-Principal-and-CEO

# Epsom Runner's Tribute to Sister Raises Over £22,000 for Epilepsy Charity

13 March 2025



An Epsom man has completed an extraordinary fundraising challenge in memory of his sister, raising more than £22,000 for national charity Epilepsy Action.

Barry Ahearn, from Epsom, ran **27 half-marathons** over the past year to honour his sister, Abbie, who tragically passed away in September 2023 following a severe epileptic seizure. Barry's challenge was deeply symbolic—each half-marathon representing **one minute of the 27 minutes** his sister's brain was without oxygen while paramedics fought to save her life.

His final run took place on **Saturday, 8th March, in Battersea Park**, where he was joined by **40 fellow runners** and **150 supporters**, including family, friends, and representatives from Epilepsy Action.

## A Challenge Driven by Love and Loss

Reflecting on the challenge, Barry said:

*"Losing Abbie has been the hardest thing I've ever experienced. She was kind, compassionate, and full of life. Every day since she passed, I've felt emotional pain—so I decided to match it with physical pain and push myself to do something in her memory."*

Abbie was just **three months away from her 30th birthday** when she suffered a fatal seizure. Having been diagnosed with epilepsy only six weeks earlier, her death came as a devastating shock to her loved ones.

Barry's journey has taken him across the UK, completing half-marathons in **London, Carsington Water, and even at his local park**, where he ran up and down a single path **55 times** to complete the 21km distance. Some runs were part of organised events, while others were solo challenges that tested his mental and physical endurance.

## Community Spirit and Support

Throughout his challenge, Barry was supported by his **wife Naomi**, who not only cheered him on at every race but also ran parts of the final half-marathon with him.

*"Seeing my best friends, family, and their children cheering me on has been so special. The solo runs were tough emotionally, but I knew I had people behind me every step of the way."*

His efforts have not only raised funds but also **heightened awareness of epilepsy**, a condition that affects **over 600,000 people in the UK**, with **three people dying from epilepsy-related causes every day**.

## An Impact Beyond Fundraising

Barry's campaign has been hailed as a remarkable achievement by **Epilepsy Action's Director of Fundraising, Philippa Cartwright**, who praised his determination and resilience:

*"Barry's efforts are truly inspiring. The funds he and his team have raised will help support vital services, from Talk & Support groups to our helpline, ensuring people with epilepsy get the help they need."*

Barry hopes that his sister's story will encourage more people to learn about the risks associated with epilepsy and push for better awareness and research.

*"When I started this challenge, I wanted to raise awareness and funds. I can't measure the full impact it's had, but if this helps save even one life, it will have been worth it."*

## How to Support the Cause

Barry's fundraising page remains open for donations to **Epilepsy Action**, which continues to campaign for better services and support for those affected by epilepsy.

To contribute to Barry's campaign, visit: **JustGiving - Barry Ahearn's Fundraiser**

For more information on epilepsy and support services, visit **www.epilepsy.org.uk** or call the **Epilepsy Action helpline on 0808 800 5050**.



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## Dorking's Green Gap narrowing

13 March 2025



Homes will be built on the former green belt gateway into Dorking - forever changing the character of the picturesque town.

Plans to turn more than eight hectares on the edge of the Surrey Hills into housing were approved on appeal in 2023 but details of what it would look like were only given the go-ahead last week. The decision was made despite many at the Wednesday, March 5, meeting airing concerns over traffic on the "poor" A25 and the impact of school coaches being pushed into the town's one-way system. Councillors were hamstrung in their efforts to mitigate against the impact of the added traffic following the appeal ruling and could only vote on the plan's layout.

Developers Taylor Wimpey, however, said the scheme, which would include 72 affordable homes, was an "exciting scheme for Dorking." Speaking on behalf of the application was James Newton. He said the proposals bring "much-needed homes for the district" with "77 per cent of the mix being one to three-bedroom properties." He added: "The affordable tenures include social and affordable rent, shared ownership and first homes and the mix has been agreed with the housing services team. The design has been amended over time with input from heritage officers... and takes cues from the Dorking vernacular and the wider area." Homes, he said, will be sustainable with air source pumps and solar panels while the project as a whole would bring in more than £3million into Mole Valley District Council through community infrastructure payments. He finished: "This will be an exciting scheme for Dorking."

The L-shaped site will take up two fields west of Dorking. The land was originally in the green belt when the decision to allow the homes was granted on appeal. Since then, it has been put into Mole Valley District Council's local plan as a site designated for development. As well as the 144 homes, there will also be parking for The Priory Secondary School, including staff and coaches. Officers told the meeting they were happy with the project and that it would not harm the character of the area - with red tiling used to help it blend in with existing homes in the town.

Speaking against the plan was Nicholas Tinker, who highlighted the 60 letters of objection. He said: "144 dwellings will create, at least, 144 additional vehicles. More realistically, double that figure, most people leave for work at the same time every morning. The congestion on the Westcott Road and around town will be totally unacceptable." Air quality, he said, would degenerate and reach dangerous levels for schoolchildren, with the coach drop-off point creating a particular problem and forcing them to use the one-way system. He said: "It's going to be absolute chaos."

Cllr Abhiram Magesh (Liberal Democrat; Mickleham, Westcott and Okewood) said: "I'm generally pro-affordable housing. Housing means more people, more people means more council tax for front-line services, more customers for local business, however, I'm quite torn on this particular development because I do feel it's lacking in a number of ways. We've discussed quite adequately in the past that the highways assessment is quite lacking. We all know the trouble on the A25 - especially at peak time. I'm frankly torn about this because its layout is effectively a cul-de-sac which I think is generally quite poor planning strategy. So while I laud the affordable housing commitment, I'm extremely worried for a lot of my constituents in Westcott and Abinger who have to essentially travel every single day to get any form of amenity in Dorking. The A25 is of a poor quality as it is right now, so I'm not sure how at minimum 144 extra cars - how the road is going to be able to handle that."

The designs and layout were approved by eight votes in favour, with two against and three abstentions.

Taylor Wimpey plans for 144 homes outside Dorking (image Taylor Wimpey/ Mole Valley Planning Portal)

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## Local Choral group tackles global disruption

13 March 2025



In a world of disruption and disharmony, Ashtead Choral Society provided something of an antidote in our concert *Harmonies of Humanity* on 8 March at St Martin’s Church in Epsom. More than a concert, this was an explosive and educational exploration of rhythms and harmonies from around the world.

Our audience may have felt nothing much had changed as we kicked off in traditional mode with 16th-century harmonies—but from a composer based in Mexico. Five magnificent and rarely heard pieces by the French composer Lili Boulanger combined French expressionism with exoticism and mysticism from the first female winner of the Prix de Rome composition. This begged the questions: *what might have been?*—from a composer who died at 24—and *what would she have made of International Women’s Day*, which coincided with this concert?

We were delighted to be joined by the Percussion Ensemble of London, who treated our audience to an introduction to the ‘kitchen department’ with demonstrations of tuned and untuned percussion instruments. Who knew that, if hit too many times, the gong-like tam-tam would likely break the church windows?

The second half saw all these forces come together under musical director Dr Andrew Storey with the late David Fanshawe’s *African Sanctus*. Choir, percussion ensemble, lyric soprano soloist Madeleine Holmes, and pianist Steve Ridge wove in with recordings of music captured by the composer in the 1960s along the Nile River (masterminded from the sound desk by our own Chris Turner). The composer’s intent was to celebrate one people under music, and *African Sanctus* was something to behold aurally and optically. I hope we provided some hope for and refuge from the unstable and volatile world that our audience returned to at the end of the evening.

We were delighted to receive a letter from David Fanshawe’s wife, noting that he had studied under Boulanger’s sister and knew the composer of the *Gospel Gloria*, Dillo Dilworth, which we performed twice—once as an encore. We were also delighted that so many of our audience took time to say how much they enjoyed a different approach to the traditional concert format, which included short talks and percussion demonstrations. And we were thrilled that a few audience members liked the evening so much they enquired about joining the choir.

With that in mind, we are recruiting new singers of all voice parts as we grow from a current 100 members to 120. We welcome those keen to join a choir that performs the big choral works with professional orchestras and top soloists.

If you are interested in joining, do come along to our free event on the morning of 22 March in Ashtead to experience singing with us and discover the work we will be tackling at our concert on 24 May: Dvořák’s *Stabat Mater*.

[www.ashteadchoralsociety.org](http://www.ashteadchoralsociety.org)

**Vincent Desmond, Chair  
Ashtead Choral Society**

## Surrey’s fire ruined mansion restoration plan

13 March 2025



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

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

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

week.

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

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

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

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## Box Hill keeps its pie and mash

13 March 2025



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

13 March 2025



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Surrey schools not swamped by private VAT escapees

13 March 2025



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

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

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

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

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

Not a mass exodus of children to the state sector, the policy appears to have not squeezed private schools out of business just yet. Panic over secondary school place shortages has also not materialised in these new figures. Admissions data shows that for Year 7 places there is a mild buffer on the number of families getting their first preference in school places this year.

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

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

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

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

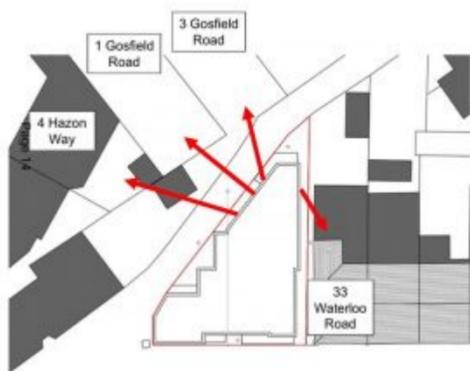
Surrey has around 140 private schools: including primary, secondary and special schools. Fees vary between schools, but the cost of independent education in Surrey is above the national average.

Image: Rosebery School Epsom - Google

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## The Battle of Waterloo Road development

13 March 2025



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



# Sutton & Epsom Win But Gravesend Earn Vital Points

13 March 2025



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Black & Whites started to take control of the game but were being hampered by errors that thwarted their best moments. Gravesend were most unfortunate when they were awarded a penalty in their half. A prodigious clearance was

picked up by the breeze and remarkably rolled the length of the pitch, and play returned to where it started.

This was to prove costly as, soon after, the ball was in the hands of Sam Lennie. The hooker is a genuine force of nature in open play, and he had plenty to do, but bouncing off tackles and brushing defenders aside, he raced in for the try. Normal service resumed for the Bunting boot, and Sutton led 26-7 entering the final quarter.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Sutton & Epsom:**

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

Replacements: Boaden, Gibson & Nelson.

**Gravesend:**

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

Photo credit Robin Kennedy

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

13 March 2025



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Related reports:

[What Epsom could do with Woking's £75 million bail out?](#)

[Ex-Council Officers under investigation for Woking's £2 billion debt](#)

[Will Epsom and Ewell be bailing out Woking?](#)

[No wonder Woking went bankrupt. Scandal of private school loans](#)

[PM confident of success in Woking](#)

[Woking's whopping bail out and tax rise](#)

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

13 March 2025



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

### Devolution to the middle

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

### Dissolution from the Ministry

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

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

### Duopoly

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

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

### Bigger is not always better

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

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

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

Cllr Alex Coley

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council

Ruxley Ward Councillor

### Related reports:

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

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

# Epsom Ranks Among Surrey's Best for Train Punctuality

13 March 2025



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

## Government Push for Greater Transparency

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

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

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

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

Other stations in the lowest 10 for punctuality include:

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

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

- **Earlswood** - 11.7%
- **Salfords** - 11.7%
- **Horley** - 8.4%
- **Kempton Park Racecourse** - 7.4%
- **Sunbury** - 7.3%
- **Upper Halliford** - 7.3%
- **Chilworth** - 6.8%
- **Redhill** - 6.6%
- **Shepperton** - 6.6%
- **Gomshall** - 6.5%

### **Epsom's Strong Performance**

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

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

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

### **A Positive Outlook for Epsom Commuters**

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