

## 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.**

## 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)

## 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?](#)

## 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**.

## 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)

## 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)

## 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

## 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].