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For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

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Poundland saving itself pennies in Elmbridge

26 February 2025



Poundland has been told to “show some local pride” and repair its broken shop front window and remove the graffiti from its East Molesey store.

The low-price chain, which serves up to seven million customers every week natonwide, has been issued with a community protection warning by Elmbridge Borough Council after ignoring multiple requests to address the eyesores.

Elmbridge Borough Council says it works with business groups and community volunteers to keep its high streets, villages and parades thriving and to bring that sense of civic pride.

One group, from Manor Road, takes care of the planters along Walton Road to “lift up the high street”.

Initiatives in the last year have been designed to make a positive impact on the community, such as new bins, flower planters, deep cleans and pavement works.

It’s part of a move to get businesses, volunteers and the council working together in support of the borough’s high streets.

That work has been undermined for “almost a year” as Poundland left temporary wooden panelling and unsightly graffiti, in place.

A spokesman for Elmbridge Borough Council said: “Despite multiple requests to address the graffiti and damage at Poundland in East Molesey, sufficient action has not been taken.

“The store has tried to clean the windows professionally but could not get the graffiti removed.

“In support of local residents, we have issued this Community Protection Warning hoping that Poundland will now undertake the necessary repairs and support our high streets.”

Under Community Protection Warnings, £100 fines can be issued in the first instance. If no action is taken, prosecutions can begin. If convicted the maximum penalty is a fine up to £20,000.

Councillor Steve Bax (Conservative: Molesey East) said: “Almost a year has gone by without action and they are giving the impression they are not bothered as long as the money continues to roll in.

“When we have got Manor Road residents caring for the planters so brilliantly and doing their best to lift up the high street, we need this retailer to show some local pride too.

“The council has issued a community protection warning against Poundland which gives the company 28 days to fix the shop front or face a fine.

“Hopefully this formal action will now mean the company move forward and deal with shopfront issues.”

Poundland was approached for comment.

Epsom’s Horton Cemetery gets attention of two kinds

26 February 2025



Just as **The Epsom and Ewell Times** was about to publish a letter concerning Council efforts to tidy and make safer the

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boundaries of Horton Cemetery (Hook Road / Horton Lane) a motor car struck railings near the roundabout and knocked over the Memorial to the near 9000 patients buried and neglected in the privately owned 5 acre cemetery.

Surrey Police issued a statement: “We were called to Horton Lane, Ewell at around 7:10pm on Wednesday 19 February after reports of a single vehicle collision at the location. Officers responded and found that the collision had resulted in damage to a fence and cemetery stone. The driver was not arrested and did not require medical treatment.”



It is understood that Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is responsible for the Memorial after former Labour Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, **Alan Carlson**, raised the money for its installation through a public appeal in 2004.

The charity The Friends of Horton Cemetery continues its campaign to restore the Cemetery to community ownership following the bizarre NHS transfer of the asset to a property speculator in 1983. **Michael Heighes** of Marque Securities has taken away the tombstones and all the crosses on each grave have gone. The cemetery is barely recognisable as a cemetery and relatives cannot enter without trespassing.

Recently, the Charity has made a submission to the Law Commission, which is considering reforms to cemetery law. It has submitted that the opportunity to update the laws should include a duty to maintain and allow access to cemeteries in private hands.

The charity has also sent a letter to Epsom and Ewell Borough Council in connection with the current Local Plan arguing any development of neighbouring **Horton Farm** for housing should seek developer’s funds for the restoration of the Cemetery as an amenity of peace and remembrance open to the public.

Mr **Lionel Blackman**, Secretary of the Charity, said “The existence of the largest asylum cemetery in Europe is not going to disappear. With relatives coming forward every week and our research team publishing the lives of over 600 patients so far, it is only a matter of time and whichever local government takes over, that action will redress this historic outrage.”

Sam Jones – Reporter

Letter from Matthew Walters, Epsom.

Dear Sir,

I would like to draw attention to recent developments concerning Horton Cemetery in West Ewell, Epsom.

For many years, concerns have been raised about the lack of respect shown to the 9,000 individuals buried there, whose graves are no longer marked. More recently, attention has also turned to the safety risks for road users on the busy Hook Road.

Until yesterday, the grass verge alongside the cemetery was largely inaccessible due to overgrown brambles and tree branches extending from the cemetery, as well as significant fly-tipping, including building waste.

It is therefore welcome news that Surrey County Council and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council have worked together to clear the area, improving both its appearance and safety, as evidenced in the accompanying photographs.

While the decision to classify Horton Cemetery and its 9,000 graves as an “amenity woodland” remains a point of contention, the recent clearance has ensured that the surroundings are now more in keeping with a cemetery. However, the public should be aware that sections of the perimeter railings remain unsafe, with some sharp railings protruding towards Hook Road at dangerous angles, none of which are currently marked with hazard tape.

Falling branches from trees inside the cemetery continue to pose a risk to road users, and it is hoped that Surrey County

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Council will monitor this issue and take necessary action, as indicated in previous communications.

In the meantime, cyclists, motorcyclists, and motorists should exercise caution when travelling along Hook Road near the cemetery. Furthermore, steps should be taken to ensure that the cost of maintaining overgrown vegetation from within the cemetery does not fall upon Council Tax payers.

Horton Cemetery remains in private ownership by a property developer, and the recent clearance now allows for greater visibility into the site. This presents an opportunity for the public to assess whether greater care and respect should be afforded to those buried there.

Out of sight should not mean out of mind.

Yours faithfully,

Matthew Walters

Epsom Stands in Solidarity with Ukraine on War's Third Anniversary

26 February 2025



Epsom's Market Place was a scene of unity and reflection today as residents, dignitaries, and members of the Ukrainian community gathered to mark the third anniversary (24th February) of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Organised by the Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network (EERN) and Epsom based Surrey Stands With Ukraine (SSWU), the event served as a powerful demonstration of the town's enduring support for those affected by the war.

The Worshipful The Mayor of Epsom & Ewell, Councillor **Steve Bridger**, (RA Stamford) and the Mayoress, Carol Bridger, attended the commemoration, reaffirming the borough's commitment to standing in solidarity with Ukraine.

"Kindness Will Prevail"

The event opened with a speech from **Jo Sherring**, co-founder of EERN, who highlighted the strong bonds forged between the local and Ukrainian communities. "We are privileged to have met and worked with such wonderful people, and we will continue to support them as long as they need our help," she said. EERN supports as many as 80 or more families from Ukraine. Mainly women and children.

Roy Deadman, Chair of SSWU, praised the tireless efforts of volunteers who have dedicated time and resources to aid Ukraine. "The support for Ukraine we have seen today from this wonderful community still shows us that kindness will prevail in a world that feels very dark right now," he said. SSWU has sent a van of civilian aid nearly every week since the war began and thousands of pounds of aid for humanitarian projects in Ukraine.

The two charities work together in offices generously provided by the Ashley Centre and for which the Council has waived all business rates.

MP's Message of Support

Epsom & Ewell's MP, **Helen Maguire**, who was unable to attend in person, sent a statement which was read aloud to the assembled crowd. She paid tribute to Ukraine's resilience and urged continued support for its fight against Russian aggression.

"Three years ago, the world watched in horror as Putin launched his brutal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. I am proud that Epsom's community has gathered here today to say what we have said from the very beginning: We stand with Ukraine. We stand with its people. And we will not waver," she said.

Ms Maguire described Ukraine's battle as one for "democracy, sovereignty, and the right of nations to choose their own future." She praised the courage of the Ukrainian people, whether on the battlefield or in communities enduring relentless attacks, displacement, and loss.

"To our Ukrainian friends here today: you are not alone. We have not forgotten you, and we will continue to support you, in both word and action, for as long as it takes," she added.

The MP also called for the UK to take a leadership role in supporting Ukraine's victory, advocating for military assistance

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and the seizure of Russian assets to aid in reconstruction. “The future of Ukraine must be decided by Ukrainians,” she said.

Emotional Tributes

The gathering featured a powerful performance by **Helin Konyar**, a third-year student at Laine Theatre Arts and a Ukrainian national, who sang Ukraine’s spiritual anthem *God Save Ukraine*. Her performance deeply moved those in attendance.

A particularly poignant moment came from **Constantin Ryzhikov**, a blind Ukrainian refugee, who shared his heartfelt gratitude for Britain’s support. He spoke about the difficulties faced by Ukrainians both in their homeland and those who have sought refuge abroad, moving many in the audience to tears.

The event also included a prayer led by Deacon **Gary Carter** of St Joseph’s Church in Epsom, calling for peace and strength for those suffering in Ukraine.

A Show of Unity

The commemoration ended with the Ukrainian national anthem, once again performed by Helin Konyar. The assembled crowd joined in a moment of solemn reflection, standing in solidarity with Ukraine.

As the war enters its fourth year, the event served as a poignant reminder of Epsom’s unwavering support for Ukraine and the power of community in times of crisis.

Ukrainian Culture

Since the war talented Ukrainian musicians and a local Ukraine Choir come together for the 11th Ukraine Music Evening since the war began. Held at 6pm on Saturday 22nd March in the Worship Area of the Epsom Methodist Church in Ashley Road. Entry is free and a leaving collection is dedicated to support the musicians whose livelihoods have been cut in their homeland.

For more information on how to support Ukraine locally, visit:

- **Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network:** www.epsomrefugeenetwork.org
- **Surrey Stands With Ukraine:** www.surreystandswithukraine.org

Image: Roy Deadman of SSWU addresses the crowd alongside Jo Sherring of EERN and Deacon Gary Carter (Credit Nina Kaye)

Related reports:

Sir Ed supporting Epsom based Ukraine charities

Fire Assembly for Ukraine

2 years on Epsom to gather in solidarity with Ukraine

Epsom Man’s 56-Mile Walk to Raise Mental Health Awareness

26 February 2025



A local Epsom resident, Nicholas Mark Dulake, is set to complete an extraordinary challenge this Sunday, 23rd February 2025, as he concludes a 56-mile walk in aid of the mental health charity, Mind. Nicholas embarked on this challenge in January, aiming to raise funds and awareness about mental health issues and the stigma that surrounds them.

His journey is deeply personal. On 20th February 2024, Nicholas attempted to take his own life. His survival led to five

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weeks in a coma, multiple hospital transfers, and several life-saving operations, during which he was resuscitated four times. As a result of his ordeal, he now lives with a tracheostomy, which presents daily challenges with his breathing. However, rather than allowing his experience to define him negatively, he has chosen to channel his energy into raising awareness and supporting others struggling with their mental health.

To date, Nicholas has raised an incredible £3,705 in sponsorship for Mind. To mark the completion of his challenge, he has arranged a final walk around Epsom Downs and is inviting the local community to join him in showing solidarity for mental health awareness.

“I’ve had an overwhelming response from people who have read my story and reached out to tell me how much it has helped them,” Nicholas shared. Through his personal blog, *Start Again Monday* (www.startagainmonday.co.uk), he continues to share his journey and offer support to others facing similar struggles.

His mission is clear: to break down the stigma surrounding mental health and ensure that those who are suffering know they are not alone.

Local residents are encouraged to take part in the walk on Sunday to show their support for this important cause. For those who wish to donate, details can be found on Nicholas’s blog.

Nicholas is also keen to share his experiences in greater detail following the completion of his challenge. If you would like to learn more, follow his blog or reach out to him directly.

For those struggling with mental health issues, charities like Mind provide crucial support and resources. Nicholas’s story serves as a powerful reminder that recovery is possible and that support is always available.

Surrey Uni Zebrafish Study Links Blood Pressure Drug to Potential ADHD Treatment

26 February 2025



A commonly prescribed blood pressure medication could offer a safer alternative for treating ADHD symptoms, according to a new study involving the University of Surrey. The findings suggest that amlodipine, a well-established drug for managing hypertension, may help reduce hyperactivity and impulsivity, key characteristics of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

From Fish to Humans: Genetic Links in ADHD Research

The study, published in *Neuropsychopharmacology*, tested five potential drugs in rats genetically bred to exhibit ADHD-like symptoms. Of these, only amlodipine significantly reduced hyperactivity. To validate the findings, researchers turned to zebrafish (*Danio rerio*), an important model organism in neurological studies, which shares approximately **70% of its genes** with humans. The zebrafish trials confirmed that amlodipine reduces hyperactivity and impulsivity, and for the first time, researchers confirmed that the drug crosses the blood-brain barrier, directly influencing brain function.

Further analysis of human genetic data reinforced the findings, showing that ADHD is linked to calcium channels in the brain—the same targets of amlodipine. A review of UK-wide patient records further strengthened the case, revealing that individuals taking amlodipine reported fewer mood swings and a lower tendency for risk-taking behaviour.

Dr Matthew Parker, co-author of the study from the University of Surrey, noted:
“Repurposing amlodipine, a well-established blood pressure medication, offers a promising and swift pathway to address ADHD symptoms. Our research indicates that, due to its existing approval and safety profile, amlodipine could be rapidly redeployed as a treatment option for ADHD, potentially providing relief to patients sooner than developing new medications.”

Why Zebrafish? The Genetic Overlap with Humans

Zebrafish have become an invaluable model in medical research due to their high genetic similarity with humans. In fact, they share a greater proportion of their genes with humans than many might expect. Some examples include:

- **Chimpanzees** (~98-99%) – our closest genetic relatives.
- **Mice** (~85%) – widely used in biomedical research.
- **Dogs** (~84%) – studied for genetic diseases and neurological conditions.
- **Zebrafish** (~70%) – a crucial model for studying brain function and drug effects.

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- **Fruit flies** (~60%) – key for understanding genetics and neurobiology.

Because of this genetic overlap, zebrafish are often used in drug discovery, particularly for neurological disorders. Their transparent embryos and rapid development allow scientists to study the effects of medications in real-time.

A Safer Alternative to Existing ADHD Medications?

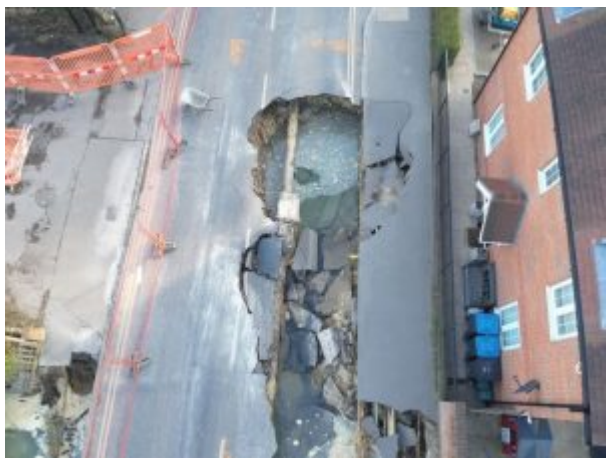
Current ADHD treatments, such as stimulant medications, are effective but often come with significant side effects, including appetite loss, high blood pressure, headaches, and sleep disturbances. Additionally, stimulant medications carry a risk of misuse. Amlodipine, already widely prescribed and well-tolerated, could offer a new alternative with a safer profile.

With approximately **25% of ADHD patients not responding well to existing treatments**, the need for new options is urgent. If further clinical trials confirm these findings, amlodipine could be repurposed as an ADHD treatment much faster than developing a brand-new drug, providing relief for patients sooner.

The study highlights the importance of genetic research in understanding brain disorders and demonstrates how unlikely connections—such as a heart medication treating a neurodevelopmental condition—can lead to breakthroughs in medical science.

Surrey sink-hole major incident

26 February 2025



A significant sinkhole has emerged on Godstone High Street in Surrey, leading to evacuations and widespread disruptions. The incident began on Monday night when a section of the road collapsed, revealing a hole filled with water. By Tuesday morning, the sinkhole had expanded to approximately 20 metres in length and 6 metres in width.

Surrey County Council has declared the situation a major incident, with the Surrey Local Resilience Forum overseeing the response. Assistant Director for Safer Communities, Carl Bussey, stated that efforts are underway in collaboration with emergency services, utility companies, and Tandridge District Council to ensure public safety and restore essential services.

The sinkhole’s rapid expansion has led to the evacuation of around 30 properties within a 100-metre cordon. Residents have been advised to avoid the area while investigations and repairs are conducted. The incident has also resulted in the closure of Godstone High Street between Oxted Road and Bletchingley Road, with diversions in place for the foreseeable future.

The cause of the sinkhole is believed to be a burst water main. SES Water has confirmed that engineers are on-site working to repair the damaged pipe and restore water supplies to affected homes. In the interim, bottled water is being distributed to residents.

Local residents have expressed concerns over the incident. Some evacuees have reported hearing cracking sounds and witnessing the sinkhole’s growth overnight. One resident described the scene as resembling the aftermath of an earthquake, with buckled roads and pavements.

Authorities are urging the public to follow updates from Surrey County Council, Surrey Highways, and Tandridge District Council on social media for the latest information regarding the situation.

Councillor thinks new Ewell homes refusal is batty

26 February 2025

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Plans for four new homes in Ewell have been refused over bats potentially living in the two bungalows. Although one survey was done, councillors could not rule out there were definitely no bats in the buildings.

The scheme involved demolishing two semi-detached bungalows on Kirby Close, and erecting four, 3-bedroom homes in a residential Ewell suburb. The two-storey houses would have two car parking spaces per house with associated landscaping, according to the report.

However, the applicant had not carried out a phase 2 survey establishing if there were any bats in the bungalow. Officers "could not be satisfied" the demolition of the building did not pose a risk to protected species and its habitat. Members rejected the application at an Epsom and Ewell Borough Planning Committee meeting on February 13.

Cllr **Julian Freeman** (LibDem College) said: "This smacks of desperation to find some reason for turning down an application for housing that we desperately need in this borough." An increasingly frustrated Cllr Freeman reminded the committee that the borough has a "housing crisis".

The Liberal Democrat member argued that you would know if bats are on the site as "you would be sweeping up the mess on a fairly regular basis". He said: "If [the council] is going to refuse an application because there *might* be bats then, surely you need some evidence of that."

But Cllr **Steven McCormick**, (RA Woodcote and Langley) chairing the meeting, explained the plans have to be turned down because there is no evidence that bats are *not* in the two bungalows. Councils have a legal requirement for bat surveys to ensure the mammals are not harmed in the demolition or construction of buildings.

The potential harm to protected species is the only reason why the risks would outweigh the benefits of delivering two houses, planning officers told the committee as they recommended the application for refusal.

If the applicant was to appeal the decision, members asked whether the council would be "laughed at" for refusing on the grounds there was no evidence that bats are non-existent on the site. However, officers told the committee that an application on Reigate Road, which was refused for a lack of satisfactory bat survey, was dismissed at appeal by the Planning Inspector.

Councillors questioned whether they could approve the application with the condition of a further bat survey, but officers said National England guidance is it has to be known early on if bats are in the building before approval could go ahead. The bungalows cannot be demolished until the council knows whether or not bats are there.

Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) said he was happy to approve it once the second bat survey is done as he couldn't see "any significant or demonstrable harm that outweighs the benefit of two additional dwellings".

A previous similar application for the 'principle of development' was rejected in July 2024 on the basis the housing proposal was too dense to match the character of the street. This is currently at appeal.

Image: 9-10 Kirby Close in Ewell, where the proposed development would be built. (Credit: Google Street View)

Sutton and Epsom Soar in Nine-Try Extravaganza

26 February 2025



Sutton & Epsom RFC 59 Dartfordians 20. Saturday 15th February.

1988, the first league season, was when Dartfordians last visited Rugby Lane on the final day of the season. On that occasion, the visitors were safe in the knowledge that they had retained their league status, but this time around, the Kent club were looking for vital points in their struggle to avoid the drop. Considering that the Black & Whites had to come from 21-3 down to win the reverse fixture, having been aided by injuries that reduced Dartfordians to 14, the Bexley-

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based club arrived with realistic hopes of success. By the final whistle, the visitors had endured another afternoon blighted by injuries and, despite a spirited performance, were overwhelmed 59-20.

On a chill and overcast afternoon, Sutton welcomed back not only the Stag weekend adventurers but also Matt Whitaker in his 199th league appearance. Dartfordians kicked off attacking the clubhouse end. No doubt responding to the need for a strong start, the visitors dominated the first 15 minutes of this encounter. Gareth O'Brien was soon scurrying to gather a ball rolling into the corner and was rewarded for his efforts by being bundled out of the in-goal area. Soon the Kent team were attacking from a 5-metre lineout. Though thwarted when held up in a maul, the visiting pack earned a reprieve as S&E fumbled at the first scrummage.

Under the baton of Jarlath Hetherington, the 10 orchestrated a telling attack from the subsequent set piece, switching the focus from the open side to the blindside. Resolute tackling was not enough to deny Dartfordians as lock William Tuffley did superbly to score in the corner. Hetherington's touchline conversion missed, but his side had a morale-boosting 5-0 advantage after ten minutes.

Moments later, a superb kick ahead by winger Elliot Soler-Gomez produced a 50/22 and had Dartfordians in prime position to extend their lead. Stoic defence denied Dartfordians as they were held up over the line. Sutton shunned the traditional drop-out option of clearing as far as possible for an attacking short ball they hoped would initiate a telling counter. It did not, and the packs were soon settling down for a Darts scrum in a most advantageous position.

With clinical efficiency, they exploited the blindside with a powerful carry from Number 8 Harry Wright that saw him touch down in the corner. The conversion from the flank failed, but the hosts trailed 10-0 and had yet to have the ball in the opposition half. The second try was not a moment to allude to Wildean wit as stentorian words urged Sutton to raise their game.

The response was instantaneous as Adam Bibby pursued the restart and charged down the clearance kick. He appeared to be second favourite to reach the ball, but the bounce favoured S&E, and the centre scored, putting Sutton 5-10 down.

The Bourne Road boys viewed this as an unfortunate and temporary aberration as their excellent defence neutered the Black & Whites, who attempted to spread the ball wide. Using the same successful formula as before, Dartfordians kicked for territory and were soon in the 22 looking for another score. The S&E defence matched each assault and, for the second time, held up the visitors over their line.

It was the hosts who scored next. A surging break by Freddy Bunting gained a penalty, and he advanced his side into the enemy half. The ball was carried into the 22, and Tom Lennard caught a pass aimed at his laces, straightened the line, and passed to Josh Glanville, and the lock gave Sam Lennie his first try of the afternoon. Lennie intelligently dummied the touchdown in the corner and sauntered round under the posts. An appreciative Freddy Bunting added the extras for the 12-10 lead on the half-hour.

Moments later, the Kiwi hooker scored a sublime solo effort. Collecting the ball in the middle of the field, he set off with not only 40 metres to go but numerous defenders to avoid or dismiss from his presence. Changing pace and direction, he relentlessly advanced until he reached out to score with two tacklers hanging off him. Captain Bunting made it 19-10, and Sutton were in the ascendancy.

Before the break, with echoes of the reverse fixture, Dartfordians suffered the cruellest of blows. Prop Stephen Garrett collided with lock Lewis Potter, and after a lengthy delay and excellent work from the physio teams, they were patched up. However, both had ended their afternoon's rugby and departed for A&E to tend to their wounds. The visitors had lost two of their pack, both players having over 100 appearances, and they were forced into significant changes.

Their cause was not aided when Sutton secured the bonus point before the break with their best rugby of the half. Excellent continuity and sweeping attacks resulted in winger Angus Findlay scoring in the corner, and the Bunting boot took the interval score to 26-10.

Dartfordians needed a reprise of their opening efforts of the match. To their great credit, they immediately put Sutton on the back foot. A wonderful break with beautifully timed passes saw the hosts desperately scrambling to cover in their 22. The initial thrust was parried, but eventually, sheer weight of numbers told, and the superb Jarlath Hetherington was rewarded for his efforts with a try. Though unable to add the conversion to his score, Dartfordians were back in the contest at 15-26.

Perhaps with Medway memories still resonating, the Black & Whites were in no mood to let a sizeable lead slip from their grasp again. Steve Munford took a quick tap penalty, and Rob Hegarty punished a retreating defence with a 30-metre break to the 22. The ball rapidly went to the flank, where Freddy Bunting stood his man up and strolled in for the try. The gluttonous points accumulator added the conversion for 33-15.

Hetherington tried to rally his troops with a wonderful kick and collect, but the visitors were superbly turned over in the Sutton 22. Replacement Matt Whitaker made a powerful break, ably supported by Adam Bibby, and yet again, Freddy Bunting was the man in the right place at the right time to collect his second try of the afternoon. The conversion failed, but the 38-15 lead appeared to be unassailable.

Approaching the final quarter, the Black & Whites cut loose, and Adam Bibby was at the centre of some of their best running rugby of the season so far. The NZ centre has won plaudits for his exceptional defensive qualities all campaign and has become an increasing attacking threat as each week goes by, but in this match, he was exceptional.

With a perfectly timed and angled run, he sliced through the defence, and a delightful dummy saw him cruise through to score his second. Freddy Bunting advanced his personal account, and Sutton led 45-15.

From the restart, Sutton attempted some champagne rugby from near their line. Sadly, the result was not a magnum of Dom Perignon White Gold but rather a flat spritzer. Some extremely speculative long passes culminated in an isolated Angus Findlay being put in a deep slurry pit of trouble. Ryan Chandler gratefully accepted the gift, and a joyous Dartfordians had scored their fourth try, equating to a vital bonus point.

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Though the conversion slipped narrowly wide as referee Stronge blew the final whistle, the visitors had a much-deserved consolation as Sutton & Epsom won a highly entertaining match 59-20.

Once again, there is no league action next week, and the programme returns on 1st March with the Black & Whites heading to Thurrock. Meanwhile, Dartfordians will host Gravesend in a pivotal match in their fight for survival.

Sutton & Epsom:
O'Brien, Scott, Bibby, Bunting (C), Lennard, Munford, Johnson, Lennie, Boaden, Glanville, McTaggart, Jones, Tame & Hegarty.
Replacements: Howes, Whitaker and Rea.

Dartfordians:
Scott, Cappuccio, Taylor J, Nichols, Soler-Gomez, Hetherington, Chappell, Garrett, Sweeney, Chapman, Tuffley, Potter, Williams, Chandler & Wright.
Replacements: Hooban, Taylor M. & Ola.

Photo credit: Robin Kennedy

Epsom and Ewell FC win for correspondent's 2000th match

26 February 2025



Epsom and Ewell 2-1 Abbey Rangers. Combined Counties League – Premier Division South. Saturday 15th February.

Richard Lambert, both a dedicated fan of Epsom and Ewell FC, a club historian and match reporter, was awarded with a team victory on Saturday on the occasion of his 2000th match since 1981. We thank him for sharing his reports that feature on his website www.eefconline.co.uk

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For the fourth time in as many contests, a match against Abbey Rangers finished 2-1 to the home team as we claimed the points at the KGF on Saturday afternoon in front of a crowd needlessly exaggerated from the 56 who were present to an official figure of 70.

At the start of the match, it looked like it might be a long day, as we took the field with just two named substitutes available, one of whom was Ethan Brazier, who had been out for some time, while the other was a new player from Fleet Town, Campbell Scott, who suffered the same initiation of many Epsom players by having his name spelt wrongly on the line-up board. Nothing else quite says "welcome" to a new player, does it!

The match started well for us. Carl Oblitey shrugged off a defender's challenge and got through on goal in the fifth minute, only for former Salt Shay Honey to deflect his shot onto the post and away, but the visitors didn't heed the warning and in the ninth minute Oblitey turned provider with a cute ball over the top of the defence that Ethan Nelson-Roberts latched onto and holding off a defender, he clipped a shot back across Honey and into his bottom left corner from around twelve yards to open the score. This was the earliest goal we had scored this season and the first in the League in the opening ten minutes.

The visitors responded almost immediately as their Captain Luke Roberts almost broke through, but Stefan Aiwone was back to cover and blocked the shot. Chances were few and far between in this match, although Kevin Kardel turned a fierce volley onto the post to preserve the lead and five minutes later with the clock showing the 40th minute we extended it. Oblitey provided another great pass through, this time for Ali Fofahan to compose himself before guiding his shot beyond Honey's right arm and into the net from ten yards.

Although there had not been a great deal between the teams at the half, I felt we deserved our lead for the quality of the two goals. Interestingly a tweet from one of the Abbey accounts stated that they had been "in control". Football is of course a game of opinion! One thing was clear though; in our last League meeting we had recovered a 2-0 half time deficit at Sheerwater, so it was important that we kept our focus to ensure that the visitors couldn't do the same to us.

The second half was a little scrappy to start with; not always a bad thing if you are two goals up, as we appeared happy enough to play on the counter attack and break up the opposition attacks, which we did fairly well. Nelson-Roberts picked up a yellow card for throwing the ball away, while Jack Torbett; making his first start, appeared to be badly fouled, although nothing was given by the referee. Later in the match he would limp off, still clearly feeling the effects, giving Scott a debut at left back.

Jason Bloor sent a header just over the bar, but in the 59th minute Abbey pulled a goal back after a low shot was half

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stopped by Kardel, but no one reacted to the loose ball and it was knocked in from close range by Stuart Mortimer.

The match was still fairly even and extremely competitive; then Craig Dundas linked up well with Nelson-Roberts, leading to a cross from the latter that was then met by a strike from Oblitey and then Luke Miller, both of which were well blocked by defenders. The visitors tried to force an equaliser and sent a dangerous ball just beyond the far post before seeing another shot blocked wide by a defender. At the other end Fofahan nearly got through, but was flagged offside and picked up a yellow card for then sending a shot over the bar, well after the whistle had blown. It was hard to argue with the decision.

There was just time at the end for a ten minute cameo from substitute Brazier, during which he headed a dangerous ball away from the goal line. Kardel then punched another delivery away and Brazier then got forward on the right, although his ball in was just cut out by a defender. It was a promising return and it is hoped that he is now over his long-standing hamstring injuries.

Overall, this was a typically hard-working performance and although at times, the play was congested in midfield, which affected the quality of the match, I think we had the better chances and deserved the win for that alone.

Epsom & Ewell: Kevin Kardel, Anthony Nazareth, Jack Torbett, Adam Green (c), Stefan Aiwone, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Luke Miller, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Jason Bloor, Ali Fofahan

Subs: Campbell Scott for Torbett (64) Ethan Brazier for Bloor (83)

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council: Financial Crisis or Manageable Deficit?

26 February 2025



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is under increasing scrutiny following the resignation of Councillor **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley Ward) from the ruling Residents' Association (RA) group. His resignation letter cites a failure to address the "unhappy truths" about the borough's finances and warns that 2026 could be the year the Council "runs out of money". But is this a political exaggeration, or do the financial documents substantiate these concerns? A recent 78-page financial report prepared for councillors at the end of January 2025 sheds light on the borough's economic standing.

Cllr Coley, who has served in various leadership capacities—including Vice Chair of Audit & Scrutiny and Chair of Community & Wellbeing—states that despite his efforts to get clarity on the financial trajectory of the Council, he has been left without clear answers. His conclusion? The Council is heading for a financial crunch by 2026 with no viable plan in place to prevent it.

The specific concerns he raises include:

- Budget uncertainty for 2025/26 and beyond.
- Financial instability of Council-owned properties, which could have wider implications for the borough's assets and revenue streams.
- A lack of a clear strategy to prevent the Council from exhausting its financial reserves.

The Financial Report: Does It Confirm the Warnings?

The Financial Strategy Advisory Group's report (31 January 2025) is a key document shaping the Council's budget. Several aspects of this report support Cllr Coley's concerns:

1. A Deficit on the Horizon?

The Council's 2025/26 budget is delicately balanced, but its long-term financial plan suggests a deficit by 2026/27, growing further in 2027/28:

Year	Net Expenditure (£m)	Expected Income (£m)	Funding Shortfall (£m)
2025/26	10.27	10.27	0
2026/27	11.48	10.40	1.08

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2027/28	12.24	10.72	1.52
2028/29	12.85	11.06	1.79

The projections indicate a potential funding crisis by 2026/27 unless new revenue streams or savings are identified.

2. Property and Investment Risks

- The Council relies significantly on income from its commercial property portfolio, including investments through Epsom & Ewell Property Investment Company Ltd (EEPIC).
- Rental income from commercial properties contributes £1.35m annually to the Council's budget, but there are concerns over sustainability if market conditions shift.
- In addition, £448,000 of this income is required to fund day-to-day services, raising questions about financial resilience.

3. Shrinking Government Support

- The New Homes Bonus (NHB), which has provided additional income, is set to shrink dramatically from £498,000 in 2024/25 to just £6,000 in 2025/26.
- The Government's Core Spending Power allocation to Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is effectively stagnant at £10.2m, meaning the Council is not receiving inflation-adjusted increases.
- The Fair Funding Review scheduled for 2026/27 could further reduce financial support for district councils like Epsom & Ewell.

4. Business Rates Volatility

- The Council is highly dependent on business rates, yet its share of retained rates is forecast to fluctuate. In 2025/26, it expects to retain £1.8m, but past years have shown this figure is not guaranteed.
- There is a £282,000 deficit in the business rates collection fund, a concern for future budgets.

Council Tax Increases as a Stopgap?

To address some financial pressures, the Council is proposing a 2.98% increase in Council Tax for 2025/26, which would:

- Raise an extra £228,467.
- Increase the average Band D household bill from £226.17 to £232.92 per year.
- Be just below the government's 3% cap before requiring a referendum.

However, even this increase will not be enough to fully close the funding gap beyond 2025/26.

What This Means for Residents

If Cllr Coley's concerns hold true, services could be at risk in 2026 and beyond. Potential consequences include:

- Cuts to local amenities, including cultural venues and community support.
- Higher fees for Council services, as seen in the proposal to increase charges by 6% in 2025/26.
- Reliance on reserves, which could lead to financial instability in the future.

Local Government Reorganisation: A Game-Changer?

Surrey County Council has been advocating for the creation of a unitary authority, which would absorb district and borough councils like EEBC. This move could:

- Reduce Bureaucratic Costs – Eliminating multiple layers of government could generate savings.
- Redistribute Resources – EEBC's financial issues might be alleviated if its budget were merged with Surrey's broader funding pool.
- Dilute Local Control – While cost efficiencies could be achieved, decision-making might shift away from community-focused governance.

If reorganisation proceeds, EEBC's financial crisis may become a moot point as budget planning is absorbed into the county-wide strategy. However, if the process is delayed or abandoned, the borough must act independently to avoid

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financial distress.

Conclusion: A Crisis in the Making?

While the Council insists its 2025/26 budget is balanced, the financial report confirms a growing structural deficit, aligning with Cllr Coley's warnings. The reliance on property income, shrinking government support, and an increasing budget gap suggest that by 2026, tough financial choices will be inevitable.

Cllr Coley's warnings are not entirely unfounded, but the financial data suggests that EEBC is not yet on the brink of insolvency. The real risk lies in the structural deficit and growing debt burden, which must be addressed through a combination of revenue generation, cost-cutting, and strategic planning.

The key question remains: What is the Council's plan beyond short-term fixes? Without a comprehensive long-term strategy, the borough may indeed be heading towards the financial cliff that Cllr Coley has predicted.

Related reports:

Prominent Residents Association Councillor leaves the fold

Epsom & Ewell Full Council Meeting: Budget Approved Amid Debate

The Plot of Gunpowder in Worcester Park

26 February 2025



Unearthing History: Worcester Park's Gunpowder Mills Rediscovered

For centuries, the quiet banks of the Hogsmill River at Old Malden Lane, Worcester Park, concealed a remarkable piece of Surrey's industrial past. The site of the former Worcester Park Gunpowder Mills, which operated in the 18th and 19th centuries, has recently been brought to light thanks to an unexpected archaeological discovery during a housing development project.

This fascinating chapter in local history was uncovered through the work of Surrey County Council's Historic Environment Planning Team, led by Nigel Randall, in partnership with Cotswold Archaeology. Their findings tell a story of industrial ingenuity, featuring cutting-edge engineering by John Smeaton, the 'father of civil engineering', and contributions from the renowned inventor James Watt.

An Unexpected Discovery

The site, long designated as an Area of High Archaeological Potential, had been a haulage yard for the past 40 years before its purchase by developers Taylor Wimpey. On the surface, it appeared unremarkable—concrete hardstanding, rough ground, and piles of demolition rubble. An initial archaeological assessment in 2018 noted the high potential for remains from the gunpowder mills but suggested they would likely be fragmented due to modern disturbances.

When planning permission was granted, it included a condition requiring archaeological investigation before construction began. What followed was a revelation: instead of minor remains, archaeologists uncovered substantial structures, including two gunpowder 'incorporating' mills, a sophisticated water management system, and a network of subterranean brick-built culverts.

A Hub of Industrial Innovation

The Worcester Park Gunpowder Mills played a crucial role in Britain's industrial heritage. Designed in 1771 by John Smeaton, the mills incorporated advanced engineering to power their operations. At the same time, James Watt was commissioned to develop a steam engine to pump increased volumes of water from the Hogsmill River—an indication of the site's significance at the height of its production.

Balancing Preservation with Development

Faced with such an important discovery, a collaborative approach between the developers and archaeologists ensured that as much of the site as possible could be recorded and preserved. The layout of the housing development was adjusted to avoid major disruption to the mill structures. However, due to safety concerns, some elements had to be carefully dismantled, while others were preserved beneath the new development.

To document and share this discovery, Cotswold Archaeology created a detailed 3D model of one of the incorporating mills, alongside a short video that brings the site's history to life. These resources provide a valuable opportunity for the

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public to engage with Surrey's industrial past and appreciate the ingenuity of 18th-century engineering.

A Lesson in Hindsight

Reflecting on the excavation, the project's lead archaeologist acknowledges that had an earlier trial trench evaluation been conducted, more could have been done to adapt the development to preserve these historical remains. However, the funding generated by the project enabled a comprehensive archaeological investigation, ensuring that this significant chapter in local history is documented and remembered.

For those interested in delving deeper into the story of Worcester Park's gunpowder mills, further details and the 3D model can be accessed through Cotswold Archaeology's online resources.

The uncovering of these historic structures serves as a reminder of the rich heritage hidden beneath our feet—and the importance of balancing development with the preservation of our past.

Acknowledgements: This article is based on research conducted by **Nigel Randall** of Surrey County Council's Historic Environment Planning Team and the **Surrey History Centre**. We extend our thanks for their work and permission to share this story. For further information, contact heritageconsultations@surreycc.gov.uk.

Many many more fascinating stories from Surrey's rich and varied heritage can be found on the Surrey History Centre website: https://www.exploringsurreyspast.org.uk/

Image: An aerial view of the main excavation looking south-west. It shows the two mill structures and the brick culverts that supplied the water to power them and returned it to the Hogsmill (photo courtesy of Cotswold Archaeology and Aerial-Cam).

Ex-Council Officers under investigation for Woking's £2 billion debt

26 February 2025

Two former officers at Woking Borough Council are being investigated over their roles in Woking Borough Council's bankruptcy. The Financial Reporting Council (FRC) has confirmed that it is looking into the "professional standards" of two "individual accountants" in respect of Woking Borough Council's operations and investment activities for the financial years ended 31 March 2017 to 31 March 2023.

While the FRC has not identified the two people involved, former CEO Ray Morgan has confirmed to the Local Democracy Reporting Service he is being investigated. The Guardian has named the other as Leigh Clarke, who was the council's chief financial officer until 2023. Shortly after her departure the council's interim section 151 officer declared Woking bankrupt with debts of more than £2 billion.

Since then the council has had to cut huge numbers of jobs, increased its share of tax by 10 per cent and slashed funding to services and facilities. It is the second time the FRC has investigated council officers. In January 2024 it began an investigation into a former member at Thurrock Council after that authority admitted to a £469m budget black hole.

If that is any indication of timescales, it could easily be more than a year before a decision is reached in Woking. FRC sanctioning powers range from issuing unlimited fines down to a slap on the wrist. It can also strip people of their membership of professional bodies.

Both Ray Morgan and Leigh Clarke were named in the Grant Thornton report published on Tuesday, November 5 that examined the scale of Woking's borrowing. The report found a "long and atypical history of borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board" ran between 1999 and 2020.

Borrowing accelerated rapidly between 2016 and 2019 – primarily to fund regeneration projects such as Victoria Place and Sheerwater but also to cover running costs at its companies as well as loans to a private school. The Grant Thornton report read: "There was a strong message, over a period of many years, from the former CEO, Ray Morgan, that if debt could be serviced it was possible to borrow as much as the council wished, for whatever purposes it chose."

Will Forster said: "As Woking's MP, I've called for those who effectively bankrupted our local council to be held to account. Pleased to see that the Financial Reporting Council, the UK's accounting watchdog, is investigating Ray Morgan and Leigh Clarke, two former senior council figures."

Responding to the news, Cllr Ann-Marie Barker, Leader of Woking Borough Council, said: "Since the council fully accepted the recommendations of the independent Grant Thornton public interest report, Government-appointed commissioners overseeing Woking Borough Council's financial recovery have been liaising with relevant professional bodies.

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"As a result, the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) has confirmed investigations into the conduct of two former employees.

"Woking residents deserve complete transparency and for those responsible for the borough's financial issues to be held accountable. We will therefore do whatever we can to assist the FRC in their investigations."

The FRC statement read: "This press notice concerns the opening of an investigation into the relevant individuals. The investigation does not relate to any persons or entities other than the relevant individuals and it would not be fair to treat any part of this announcement as constituting or evidencing an investigation into any other persons or entities.

"The Financial Reporting Council has commenced an investigation under the Accountancy Scheme into the conduct of two individual accountants in relation to their compliance with governance, reporting, regulations and professional standards in respect of Woking Borough Council's operations and investment activities for the financial years ended 31 March 2017 to 31 March 2023.

"The individuals are no longer employed by the council. The decision was made at a meeting of the FRC's conduct committee on 17 December 2024. The investigation will be conducted by the FRC's executive counsel."

Prominent Residents Association Councillor leaves the fold

26 February 2025



Councillor **Alex Coley**, who has represented Ruxley Ward in Ewell for seven years, has announced his resignation from the ruling Residents' Association (RA) group, opting to serve as an Independent councillor. In his resignation letter addressed to RA Group Chair **Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) on 11 February 2025, Cllr Coley expressed deep concerns about the council's financial trajectory and his inability to support the proposed 2025/26 budget.

Throughout his tenure, Cllr Coley has been instrumental in advancing several key initiatives, including the Climate Change Action Plan, the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy, and the Community Safety Strategy. He also played a pivotal role in enhancing governance and transparency as Vice Chair of Audit & Scrutiny and of Standards & Constitution.

He also stood as an independent candidate in the last election for Surrey's Police and Crime Commissioner receiving a highly creditable 16% (42,062) of the vote being just a little less than half the votes cast for the Conservative Party incumbent Lisa Townsend.

He was an independent minded Councillor on 22nd March 2023 when he walked out of a Full Council meeting protesting the ruling group's pause progressing the Local Plan.

His recent efforts to promote Epsom & Ewell as a cultural and creative destination led him to uncover unsettling truths about the council's finances and property management. "In my pursuit of this goal, I have uncovered many unhappy truths about our finances and the properties we own and operate for the benefit of our residents," he stated in his letter.

Cllr Coley voiced apprehension about the council's financial sustainability, indicating that he believes the council may face insolvency by 2026. "I have thought for some time that 2026 is the year this Council runs out of money," he remarked, highlighting a lack of clarity and planning for this potential outcome.

The RA group has maintained majority control of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council since its formation in 1937. In the 2023 local elections, the RA secured 26 out of 35 seats, reaffirming its dominant position. Despite this longstanding control, the council has faced financial challenges. In February 2021, RA leader Eber Kington acknowledged a £5.8 million deficit, underscoring the fiscal difficulties confronting the council.

Cllr Coley's departure from the RA group underscores the ongoing concerns about the council's financial health and the need for transparent and effective fiscal management. As he transitions to an Independent role, he remains committed to collaborating with residents' groups to serve the best interests of the community.

The council approved the 2025/26 budget. The budget includes a 2.98% increase in the borough council portion of council tax, equating to an additional £6.75 per year for the average Band D property. Despite this increase, Epsom & Ewell's council tax remains below the average for Surrey.

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Planning or pantomime? Councillors press pause on Plan.

Epsom complainant changes Surrey police procedure

26 February 2025



Surrey Police Accepts Recommendation to Improve Retention of Body-Worn Video Evidence in Complaints

Surrey Police has agreed to implement a key recommendation from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) following a complaint by an Epsom resident regarding the retention of body-worn video (BWV) footage in police complaints.

The issue arose from an incident on 12 April 2023, when the complainant was filmed by a police officer, PC Scruby, during a meeting at his mother's address. The complainant alleged that he was not informed he was being recorded until ten minutes into their interaction. He later raised concerns that the footage, which he believed could substantiate his account, had been deleted under Surrey Police's 28-day evidence retention policy before it could be considered in his complaint.

After being dissatisfied with the response from Surrey Police's Professional Standards Department (PSD) in October 2024, the complainant appealed to the OPCC. The OPCC conducted a review and found that Surrey Police's service was acceptable in 18 out of 19 points raised in the complaint. However, it upheld one element of the complaint, determining that the complaint handler had failed to properly investigate the complainant's concerns regarding what the officer had said during the meeting.

The review confirmed that the interaction had been recorded on BWV, but the footage was not secured by Surrey Police despite the complaint being made the following day on 13 April 2023. As a result, in line with the force's BWV policy, the footage was automatically deleted from the system without being saved, rendering it unavailable as evidence in the complaint process.

In response to the case, the OPCC issued a recommendation that complaint handlers should secure any BWV footage providing evidence in a complaint against police at the earliest opportunity and, in any case, within 28 days of the alleged incident. This measure is aimed at closing a procedural gap that may hinder transparency and accountability in police investigations.

The complainant expressed frustration over the deletion of potentially valuable evidence, stating: "It is concerning that evidence which could clarify what happened during my interaction with the officer was destroyed. I welcome the OPCC's recognition that procedural changes are needed."

The OPCC's report also addressed broader concerns raised in the complaint, including allegations of inadequate communication and procedural mishandling by PSD. While it found that Surrey Police's actions were generally in line with existing procedures, the recommendation for improved evidence retention was seen as a necessary step to enhance the fairness and thoroughness of future complaint investigations.

Surrey Police confirmed that it accepted the recommendation in full on 20 January 2025, with the PSD now in the process of implementing the change.

This development highlights ongoing efforts to ensure greater accountability and efficiency in police complaint handling, reinforcing public trust in the system.

Image: West Midlands Police – CC BY-SA 2.0

Surrey County Council's Climate Change Progress: Successes, Setbacks, and the Road Ahead

26 February 2025

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Surrey County Council (SCC) has made notable strides in its efforts to combat climate change, cutting its own carbon emissions by 38% since 2019. However, despite significant progress, challenges remain, particularly in securing funding and maintaining the momentum needed to achieve net zero by 2030 as an organisation and 2050 for the wider county.

Achievements: Measurable Gains in Emissions Reductions

SCC's third annual Climate Change Delivery Plan assessment highlights a range of accomplishments across various sectors. Since 2019, the county has:

- Reduced its yearly emissions by 1 million tonnes.
- Retrofitted nine council buildings and increased renewable energy capacity by 0.5 megawatts.
- Converted nearly 100% of its streetlights to LEDs, achieving a 75% reduction in emissions from street lighting.
- Upgraded over 3,000 homes to improve energy efficiency.
- Installed 14MW of additional solar power—enough to power 9,000 households.
- Planted 500,000 trees as part of a broader sustainability drive.
- Offered 500 green skills courses to improve employment opportunities in eco-friendly industries.

These efforts have collectively helped residents, businesses, and the public sector save approximately £18 million per year in energy costs.

Challenges: Where Progress Falls Short

Despite these commendable efforts, SCC faces several hurdles that could derail its long-term sustainability plans. Funding constraints, supply chain issues, and the cost of implementing further green initiatives pose serious challenges. The county remains at risk of falling behind on its ambitious targets without additional investment and governmental support.

According to SCC's Net Zero Progress Report, while the county remains generally on track, six out of its twelve borough and district councils have seen an increase in emissions. Moreover, transport remains a significant contributor to carbon output, with Surrey's transport-related emissions making up 44% of the county's total emissions—well above the national average of 29%. The report suggests that while cycling and walking rates have increased, they have not been sufficient to significantly reduce private vehicle use.

SCC's building decarbonisation efforts also face hurdles, with only eight buildings retrofitted against an anticipated 36 by 2025. Similarly, while 39 low-carbon vehicles have been introduced into the council's fleet, this falls well short of the 196 needed by 2025. The delay in installing EV charging points across council sites has further slowed fleet decarbonisation.

How Does SCC Compare to the Best in the Country?

One of the standout local authorities in climate action in the UK is Nottingham City Council, which has set a 2028 net-zero target—two years ahead of SCC's goal. Nottingham has implemented a city-wide district heating system powered by waste incineration, extensive home insulation programmes, and one of the most ambitious municipal renewable energy strategies in the UK. Nottingham has also successfully expanded its cycle network and introduced a fleet of electric buses.

By comparison, Surrey's efforts in public transport and active travel have been less effective. While SCC has made progress with bus electrification (with 16 ultra-low-emission vehicles introduced so far), it still lags behind other councils in deploying public transport solutions at scale. The lack of effective incentives to transition away from car dependency further limits its impact.

The Road Ahead: Priorities for SCC

SCC has outlined several key priorities for the next phase of its climate strategy:

1. **Expanding Renewable Energy**: Increasing rooftop solar on council buildings and exploring carbon offsetting options where direct emissions reductions are challenging.
2. **Improving Home Energy Efficiency**: Expanding the Warm Welcome initiative and continuing the Solar Together programme to help residents transition to renewable energy.
3. **Decarbonising Public Transport**: Expanding electric vehicle charging infrastructure and investing in cleaner public transport solutions.
4. **Boosting Green Skills and Jobs**: Strengthening partnerships with institutions like the University of Surrey to create more opportunities in the green economy.

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5. **Protecting Nature and Climate Adaptation**: Implementing flood resilience measures, developing biodiversity recovery plans, and ensuring green spaces are protected.
6. **Securing National Government Support**: Lobbying for greater investment in local sustainability projects and improvements to infrastructure.

Surrey County Council has made strong initial progress in reducing emissions and implementing sustainability initiatives, but serious risks remain. Without significant additional funding and structural improvements—especially in transport, building efficiency, and energy production—there is a real possibility that SCC may fall short of its ambitious targets.

Ultimately, SCC's ability to meet its targets will depend on whether it can maintain momentum in its existing initiatives while addressing the gaps that still threaten its long-term vision of a net-zero Surrey.

Related reports:

Epsom and Ewell adopts new Climate Action Plan

Climate motion sparks energetic debate in Council

Epsom & Ewell Full Council Meeting: Budget Approved Amid Debate

26 February 2025



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council held a full council meeting on 11 February 2025, where key issues, including the approval of the council's budget, the mayor's upcoming engagements, and urgent council business, were discussed.

Mayor's Address

The meeting opened with prayers led by Reverend Esther Holly Hunt, followed by an address from the Mayor, Cllr **Steve Bridger** (RA Stamford) who reflected on recent civic events, including the 50th anniversary of the Epsom and Ewell Talking Newspaper, the 100th anniversary of the Epsom Rotary Club, and the forthcoming 80th anniversary of VE Day. The Mayor also highlighted the upcoming Mayor's Ball at Epsom College and the opening of the newly step-free Stoneleigh Station.

Budget Debate and Approval

A crucial part of the meeting was the discussion of the council's budget for 2025-26. Councillor **Neil Dallen** (RA Town), Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee, presented the budget, outlining the financial challenges faced by the borough, including homelessness, climate change policies, and government funding uncertainties.

The opposition groups, including the Liberal Democrats, Labour, and the Conservatives, expressed concerns over housing shortages, procurement processes, and local plan delays. Councillor **Alison Kelly** of the Liberal Democrat group (Stamford) criticised the council's lack of action in addressing social housing and discretionary housing payments. Labour Councillor **Kate Chinn** (Court) challenged the proposed council tax increase, arguing that it would place an undue burden on residents. Meanwhile, the Conservatives called for greater scrutiny of council spending and planning decisions.

Many councillors who voted against the budget voiced concerns over the council's financial priorities. Labour representatives particularly highlighted the continued reliance on temporary accommodation for those facing homelessness, arguing that the budget did not allocate enough funding to long-term housing solutions. The Liberal Democrats criticised the slow progress on infrastructure projects and the perceived lack of transparency in procurement decisions. The Conservative group, on the other hand, raised issues regarding planning enforcement and the handling of the local plan, arguing that the administration was failing to provide long-term economic sustainability for the borough.

Some opposition members also questioned the feasibility of the proposed budget adjustments, warning that future financial strains could lead to service reductions or higher tax burdens in the coming years. They argued that without a more robust financial plan, the council risked further instability, particularly in areas such as waste management, policing support, and community welfare.

Following the debate, the budget was put to a recorded vote and was approved, despite opposition from some eleven councillors including several Residents Association members against 23 who voted to pass the budget.

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Withdrawal of Motion

A motion initially set for discussion was withdrawn at the request of Councillor Dallen. The motion pertained to potential by-election arrangements and was removed following guidance from Surrey County Council, which advised that any by-elections held before May 2026 would need to be conducted under existing boundaries.

Confidential Discussions

Towards the end of the meeting, the council entered a closed session to discuss an urgent item containing exempt information, leading to the exclusion of the press and public.

The meeting highlighted the ongoing challenges faced by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council as it works to balance financial constraints with the needs of local residents. The approval of the budget ensures continued funding for essential services, though the opposition has signalled that they will continue to scrutinise council decisions closely.

Funding for new apprenticeships now available to Surrey businesses

26 February 2025



Businesses can grow their workforce and boost productivity in just a few clicks by getting an apprenticeship funded by Surrey County Council.

As part of the Apprenticeship Levy Transfer Scheme, small and medium enterprises across the county can get fully funded support to train local talent.

Apprenticeships are widely recognised as a cost-effective way to recruit, improving diversity and filling skills gaps. In time, they can also help businesses grow, improve employee retention and support the wider economy.

Funding is available to pay for the training of dozens of new apprenticeships across the county. It is open to all businesses in Surrey and allocated on a first come, first served basis – meaning those interested should apply swiftly via the Surrey County Council website.

For those unsure of the process, a free 45-minute webinar will be hosted by the Council's Business Surrey service on February 26. Reserve your space today to discover more about modern-day apprenticeships and how businesses can access funding.

One Surrey organisation that has benefited already from the scheme is Sight for Surrey, a charity that provides specialist support for people in Surrey with sensory loss. Diane Smith, Head of Adult Services says:

"We have used the levy to support internal succession for those wanting to pursue a career in Social Work from the Deaf Community. More recently we used the levy to support three new apprentices in roles that are recognised to be under resourced across the sector nationally as well as in Surrey.

"The process of completing the Levy Transfer scheme was simple and smooth due to the responsive support from the Council. Our Deaf Services Social Worker has recently graduated from Kingston University and our three new apprentices are settled and progressing well in their new careers! All making an impact for residents of the Surrey community."

The call comes in National Apprenticeship Week (February 10 to 16), which is a national celebration of the opportunities presented by the training schemes.

According to government figures, benefits of apprenticeships include:

96% of employers report benefits to their business
employers make a net gain of between £2,500 and £18,000 per apprentice during their training period
80% of businesses see a significant increase in employee retention
Almost two-thirds of all UK apprenticeships in the last year have been funded by the apprenticeship levy.

This is a pool of funding made available by large employers, such as the Council, to make apprenticeships more accessible to SMEs. The Council wants as many local residents and businesses to benefit from the scheme as possible – which is why the online process can be completed in a matter of minutes.

Matt Furniss, the Council's Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport, and Economic Growth, emphasised the council's commitment to providing opportunities for all. He said: "Apprenticeships are a proven cost-effective way to recruit which benefit businesses and employees, as well as the broader economy. As an organisation we are committed to providing opportunities to all of our residents, which includes creating a skilled workforce for the future. "The levy transfer scheme

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is a fantastic way for SMEs to access funding to develop and grow their workforce – which is why I encourage them to discover more about this fantastic opportunity."

For more information on how to apply for the Apprenticeship Levy and to start the process of recruiting talented apprentices, visit https://www.businesssurrey.co.uk/workforce/apprenticeship_levy/

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