EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
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Local roadworks taken to task

12 July 2024



Surrey County Council has established a critical new **task force** to reduce the impact of utility roadworks and drive better coordination and communication of works across Surrey's road network.

Utility companies' demands in Surrey are amongst the top five highest in the UK with 88 works starting every day in the last twelve months. In total, over 32,000 utility works have been undertaken across the county during this period, at a cost impact to Surrey residents of £35,424,225.

Made up of representatives from water, energy and telecoms companies, the task force held their inaugural meeting last week and agreed five key areas of focus:

- Better coordination of roadworks across Surrey
- Working collaboratively to minimise disruption for residents
- Improved public communication by utility companies and improved on-site signage prior to works commencing and throughout
- Improved methods of sharing information, including online mapping of planned utility works
- Clearly defined escalation routes so that SCC can quickly hold utility companies to account.

Jonathan Hulley, Deputy Cabinet Member, Strategic Highways at Surrey County Council, said, "*Whilst we recognise that works on the highway carried out by utility companies are necessary, these works are all too often impacting negatively on Surrey road users.*

"*This is a huge source of frustration for our residents, and we need to ensure that utility works are completed quicker, with better traffic management, better coordination, and better resident communication, which is why we have formed this vital task force.*

"*Surrey County Council is working hard to improve over 100 roads as part of our £8.5m highways maintenance programme this Summer to help prevent potholes – the biggest ever surface dressing programme undertaken in the county.*

"*I thank all partners who attended the first meeting of the task force and I look forward to working together to drive real improvements and do all we can to reduce utility congestion on our busy road network*."

The task force will meet monthly to take this work forward.

More information on Surrey County Council's responsibilities and utility companies roadworks is available on the **Surrey County Council website**.

Image: Credit Geof Sheppard Licence

Epsom County Councillor win for childminders

12 July 2024



Surrey County Council (SCC) has announced a significant change in the payment system for childminders, following a successful campaign led by Residents' Association County Councillor **Eber Kington** (Ewell Court, Auriol & Cuddington). The new system, which will see childminders receiving monthly payments, comes as a response to overwhelming feedback from the childminding community.

Currently, childminders in Surrey receive 60% of their term's funding upfront at the start of each term, with the

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remaining 40% plus any necessary adjustments paid by mid-term. This staggered payment system has been identified as a barrier by nearly half of the respondents in the 2024 Early Years Provider Survey. Additionally, SCC's in-person consultation revealed that 95% of childminders favored a shift to monthly payments.

Councillor Kington highlighted the discrepancy in SCC's public messaging, which he argued favored larger group providers over individual childminders. He was approached by a childminder from his division, expressing the need for a spokesperson to advocate for a payment system that supports their financial stability and professional efficacy.

The childminder stated, "It would be good to finally have a spokesperson who can support us in calling for a change and enabling us to make a choice in how we are paid, so we are able to continue doing our jobs to the best of our ability, without worrying how or when we will be able to pay our mortgages."

Councillor Kington emphasized the importance of this change, especially in light of the upcoming expansion of early years entitlement, which will require more childcare places. He argued that ensuring a reliable payment system is crucial for recruiting and retaining childminders.

After lobbying the Council, Councillor Kington raised the issue at the July Council Meeting. In response, Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children, Families, and Lifelong Learning, confirmed that SCC is transitioning to a new software system for early education payments. This system, set to be implemented in September 2024, will include the option for monthly payments.

Following the meeting, Councillor Kington expressed his satisfaction with the outcome. "This is excellent news, but it is a shame that childminders have had to work hard to get the change despite the clear evidence of need shown in SCC's own consultation results," he said.

The move to monthly payments aligns SCC with other local authorities, such as the London Borough of Sutton, which already offer this option to their childminders. This change is expected to provide greater financial stability and support for childminders, enabling them to focus on delivering high-quality care without the added stress of managing inconsistent payment schedules.

Image from www.childcare.co.uk

Surrey Borough fails social housing tenants

12 July 2024



Guildford Borough Council (GBC) has failed to meet new rules on social housing a judgement has rules.

The report published by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) said the social landlord for around 5,200 homes is "failing"on a number of legal health and safety requirements.

Around 1,700 homes have been left without an up-to-date electrical condition report and another 1,000 with unsatisfactory certificates, according to the RSH's report. GBC told the RSH it does not have evidence of a current electrical condition report for more than 100 communal blocks, and it could not provide evidence it had completed around 1,300 fire safety actions.

Introduced on April 1 this year, the new consumer standards intended to drive landlords to deliver long term improvements for tenants. In the first bunch of regulatory judgements RSH gave Guildford a 'C3' grading, which means there are serious failings and it needs to make significant improvements.

Reports by the RSH, published July 9, said: "The information provided by Guildford BC to us during our engagement with it demonstrates that Guildford BC is failing to ensure that it meets a number of legal requirements in relation to health and safety".

Findings from the report also showed GBC had not collected Tenant Satisfaction Measures from tenants, which all social landlords are required to do. RSH judgement report said: "Guildford BC has been unable to explain the reasons for its failure to collect this data, and as a result, tenants are not supported to effectively scrutinise Guildford BC's performance in delivering landlord services."

In December 2023, GBC said it identified some areas of concern within its landlord housing function included potentially unnecessary repairs being carried out to tenants' homes. Referring itself to the government's Regulator of Social Housing (RSH), GBC has since identified other concerns relating to its legal landlord health and safety compliance.

Commenting on the Regulator's report, Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Housing, Cllr Julia McShane responded: "Everyone living in a council property deserves to have a safe and secure home. Since December 2023, we've

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taken urgent action to improve our service. We can evidence progress across all areas of compliance and building safety which includes a real time compliance dashboard, recruitment of expert officers and procurement of building safety contracts.

The leader of the Liberal Democrat-run council said it has reviewed all electrical information data to confirm an accurate position of where it is. GBC has also procured two short term contractors to complete the certification work by July 2025.

McShane said a fire risk validation exercise has confirmed there are no outstanding high-risk actions. She added that a new contractor is now revisiting the low to medium risk properties to validate them, arrange any works required and update the council's position.

"Our engagement with the Regulator will be ongoing and plays an integral and intensive part of our improvement plan as we work to resolve all of the issues identified and achieve full compliance for our residents," McShane added.

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No more German supermarkets in Epsom

12 July 2024



Plans for an Aldi store have been rejected again over fears the increased traffic would have a severe impact on road safety.

[The site is a few hundred yards away from another German owned supermarket Lidl in Upper High Street.]

A proposal to create the budget supermarket on the vacant former Dairy Crest site in Alexandra Road was refused a second time at an Epsom and Ewell council meeting on July 10.

The application was first thrown out in 2015 following concerns about the site's location, level of car parking and traffic, and the effect on the character of the neighbourhood.

The new application for the £5m development in Epsom includes car parking, some landscaping but plans for residential units have been scrapped.

Councillor Jan Mason (Residents' Association/Ruxley Ward) said the supermarket giant should "do far better" on the design of the building if it "wants to come to a lovely area such as Epsom".

Although Aldi said it had "refined" its proposals, carefully designing an "attractive, bespoke Aldi food store" which would "respect the surrounding area", councillors were still concerned about its location.

Despite Surrey Highways advising the development "would be unlikely to result in a severe impact" on local traffic, councillors remained sceptical. Speaking before the debate, Ward Cllr Julie Morris (Lib Dem/College Ward) said there would be a "huge" impact on local residents who already feel the surrounding residential roads are a "rat run".

"The one thing you can't put in a spreadsheet is common sense," Cllr Chris Watson (Residents Association/ Ewell Court Road) said. He argued that regardless of "clever" data from the county council, "common sense" says it is a busy junction which could result in queuing traffic.

Agreeing with him, other councillors said the "already challenging junction" is "fraught with danger". It was agreed it was in the interests of residents, motorists, pedestrians and children crossing to go to school that councillors had to reject the application.

However, Cllr Clive Woodridge (Residents' Association/ Ewell Village Ward) argued it was not viable to refuse the application on traffic and road concerns. He said Surrey Highway experts have judged the development acceptable and this could not be easily defended at appeal.

But Cllr Mason called the development a ticking "time bomb", which could lead to a fatal collision if plans goes ahead.

Speaking to the committee, local resident Leah said: "The council has had feedback multiple times that local residents don't want a food store here." She cited Aldi's own research from its application that 58-61% of local residents objected to the proposal.

Around 91 letters were sent opposing the scheme, arguing it was an 'unacceptable location' for a food store at a busy junction. Concerns were raised that traffic would be exacerbated, a pedestrian crossing would be dangerous and the brownfield site should be saved for affordable housing.

Aldi superstore. (Credit: Marques Thomas/Unsplash)

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Surrey author tells story of Luftwaffe uncle

12 July 2024



Surrey-based author **Matt Graydon** brings a powerful new perspective on World War II with his latest novel, ***Leaving Fatherland***. Drawing from real-life family events, Graydon takes readers on a journey with protagonist Oskar, from his troubled childhood in Nazi Germany to his search for identity in New York City.



Matt Graydon

The novel is inspired by the wartime experiences of his German uncle, whose crash in the North African desert during the war had become family legend. This personal connection infuses *Leaving Fatherland* with authenticity and emotional depth, making it a significant addition to historical fiction.

Published by Cranthorpe Millner on August 20th, 2024, *Leaving Fatherland* stands out for its detailed portrayal of life in the Luftwaffe and the harrowing aftermath of war. Graydon's protagonist, Oskar, endures an abusive childhood, a turbulent war, a failed marriage, and forty years of research, all in search of understanding his father's violence. This narrative, steeped in meticulous research and family history, offers readers a poignant exploration of how the past shapes our identity.

Graydon, who resides in Surrey with his family and a lively cockapoo, has a rich background in journalism and public relations, skills that have significantly contributed to his historical research and storytelling. He is an active member of the Phoenix Writing Group in **Dorking** and the UK's Society of Authors, continuously enriching Surrey's literary community.

Early reviews praise *Leaving Fatherland* for its thorough research and compelling storytelling. Kirkus highlights the novel's exploration of family loyalty and ethics, while renowned historian Iain MacGregor lauds it as a deeply honest family drama spanning continents and decades.

Fellow authors and historians, including Anna Stuart and Louise Fein, commend Graydon's compassionate and thought-provoking narrative. The book has been described as immersive and cinematic by award-winning filmmaker Andi Reiss, and as a moving family story by Jenny Towey of the Anglo-German Family History Society.

Leaving Fatherland (ISBN: 978-1-80378-209-6) is available in paperback (£12.99) and eBook formats from August 20th, 2024.

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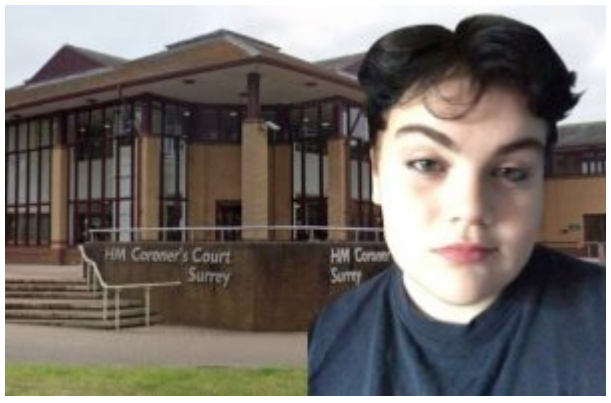
Teen suicide risk underestimated by CAMHs

12 July 2024



An “underestimation” of suicide risk and significant mental health ‘failings’ contributed to the death of a vulnerable teenager, a Senior Coroner has found.

Locket Williams, described by their family as “a lovely person with a huge character”, was just 15 years old when they tragically killed themselves in September 2021.

Senior Coroner Richard Travers concluded that there were a number of key failures by Surrey and Borders Partnership (SABP) NHS Foundation Trust’s Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) which contributed to the death of the vulnerable teenager, who goes by they/them pronouns. The three-week inquest concluded Friday 31 May.

Locket’s older sister, Emily, said: “Hearing the coroner recognize what we have believed for three long years—that failures by CAMHS contributed to Locket’s death and ultimately meant Locket lost all hope—is heartbreaking.

“We’re thankful for the Coroner’s respect for Locket’s identity, which was so important to them, and we sincerely hope this process will help prevent more tragic deaths like Locket’s in the future.”

Described by their family as “vibrant” with a “massive heart”, Locket “brought colour to everything they participated in” their family said.

They had a long history of mental health difficulties, resulting in self-harming behaviours and three previous suicide attempts throughout within seven months of 2021.

Evidence heard at the inquest highlighted “illogical conclusions” that Locket was deemed “low risk” by clinicians, despite their ongoing suicidal ideation and three suicide attempts in close succession, the family’s lawyers said.

Coroner Travers found that Locket’s high risk of suicide was “underestimated” by clinicians, as there was an “insufficient account” of Locket’s long-running risk, which meant Locket did not receive the treatment they needed.

Commenting on the Coroner’s findings, the family’s solicitor, Elle Gauld from Simpson Millar’s public law team, said: “Given Locket’s three suicide attempts and deteriorating mental health, CAMHS’ approach repeatedly defied logic and palpable evidence of suicidality, bypassing the patient’s express wishes and placing an unrealistic burden on a family already in crisis. Treatment was not commenced in a timely manner”

Long waiting lists for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and a shortage of therapists meant that, although clinicians all agreed CBT was necessary, Locket remained at home. Without access to the required support and treatment, their mental health continued to deteriorate, the lawyers for the family said.

Coroner Travers said there was a ‘failure’ to assess the likelihood Locket could be kept safe while waiting eight months for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (‘CBT’), a treatment she was ready and willing to engage in.

Failures in communication between social services and CAMHS were also identified, leading to crucial information being missed in Locket’s assessment and care. CAMHS failed to attend Core Groups meetings held by social services to protect Locket, as a vulnerable child.

Locket was passed from service to service, with no continuous care from the same clinicians or who was responsible for Locket’s care, lawyers said.

Speaking of the family’s loss, Locket’s mother, Hazel Williams, said: “We hope the lessons learned from their death highlight the urgent need for change and prevent future tragedies. We are grateful for the thoroughness of this inquest and the potential for positive changes in managing mental health services for young people.”

SABP has 56 days to respond to the senior coroner’s findings. Coroner Tavers has asked the NHS Trust to report whether there is now a system in place to ensure that young people referred to CAMHS are seen and treated promptly, and that clinicians are acting in accordance with the Trust’s guidelines.

A Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust spokesperson said: “We are extremely saddened by the tragic death of Locket Williams and our deepest sympathies go to their family and friends.

“We are carefully reflecting on the Coroner’s findings and the questions we have been asked and will respond within the given timeframe.”

Image: Locket. (Credit: Simpson Millar law firm) Coroners Court in background – Google

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Poor road conditions a real test for learners

12 July 2024



A driving instructor said he's on a "one man crusade" to fix the roads around Redhill Aerodrome Driving Test Centre. Martin Pitchley, 57, said he was "shocked" at the road conditions in Redhill, Surrey.

Unreadable road markings, overgrown hedges blocking speed signs and poor road conditions were some of the issues raised by the driving instructor.

"It's not very fair for students taking their test with all these problems with the road which is caused by poor road management by the [county] council," Martin said.

Emailing Surrey County Council (SCC) on June 3, Martin said nothing has been done to fix the issue.

A SCC highways maintenance officer said the vegetation covering road signs will be removed as part of the rural cut back of Earlswood and Reigate South on July 19 . Fixing chevrons and replacing speed signs have also been requested on a list of works to be done.

Students who are just about to take their driving test come out of the centre not knowing what the speed limit is on that road, according to Martin. He claims a speed sign had been knocked over and lying down in a hedge for over six months.

Outside the driving test centre is the 40mph Kings Mill Lane, but Martin says there is no signage until a good few hundred yards up the road.

He said: "It's not fair to be giving students tuition and telling them there should be a speed limit here but there's not one, or it's knocked down.

"It's an unsafe speed for that road" he added, "It's got so many sharp bends, and big lorries yet students are expected to drive 40 mph up there.

"It's like a one-man crusade really. It's not really fair for the students going up to the test centre and taking their test with all these problems with the road."

Not only worried for his driving students, Martin said he was concerned for the general public including pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles.

"They are very severe and dangerous [roads] for any motorists, either for a learner or a full-time experienced driver," he said. "They have to drive up these roads and find there's a big steep dip in the roads or uneven roads that will make them steer awkwardly or crash their car."

According to Crash Map data, seven 'slight' accidents and two 'serious' incidents with vehicles have occurred on Kings Mill Lane between 2018-2022.

Martin said the county council has had enough time to fix the issues with the road and wants to see change. He said: "I just want this issue to be resolved so students can go up to their driving test, get a fair test, and members of the public are not going to get hit by a speeding car."

A SCC spokesperson said: "We appreciate the concerns raised and our Highways officers have been in communication with the individual to talk through the issues.

"The grass verges in question will be cut as part of our twice per annum rural cuts – information on where and when these take place are available on our website.

"Requests to replace speed signs in the area have been raised, however these need to be prioritised against other requests across the county and officers will review this as soon as they can."

Image: Driving instructor Martin Pitchley, Credit: Road Rules Driving.

Tree falls on van in Ewell Village

12 July 2024

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On Saturday a tree close to the bus stop, opposite the entrance to Bourne Hall in Ewell Village fell across the road onto a passing red Mercedes van shattering its windscreen.

Surrey Police were quickly in attendance and a female police officer used a broom to sweep debris from the road to make the road as safe as possible for passing traffic.

After approximately 30 minutes, contractors arrived on site to remove the fallen tree. No one is believed to have been injured by the tree falling across the pavement.

A few months ago, a similar incident occurred when a large tree inside the entrance gates to Bourne Hall fell causing major damage to walling which has had to undergo major restoration.

Whilst Saturday's incident required Surrey Police's involvement, it is not believed that any of the other emergency services were called upon. Two trees falling within only a few metres of each other within such a short space of time in a busy village suggests that people were lucky to escape serious injury. Does more need to be done in the Borough to ensure trees overhanging public spaces do not pose a danger to anyone?

Ivy can choke a tree if allowed to climb it and dead branches will then fall to the ground below. Ivy can, however be easily dealt with by removing a section of it from the base of a tree so that the ivy above dies and loosens its grip on the tree.

The tree that fell across the pavement and road onto the top of a red Mercedes van on Saturday was visibly covered in ivy.

Feast your eyes and ears on this

12 July 2024



Epsom Choral Society and The Barnes Choir, two amateur choral groups renowned for their passion and dedication to musical excellence, are set to entertain audiences with a grand performance of Sir William Walton's epic masterpiece, **Belshazzar's Feast**, on Saturday 13th July 2024, at **Cadogan Hall** in London. Under the baton of their Musical Director, Julian Collings, and featuring acclaimed baritone soloist, Philip Tebb, this event promises to be an unforgettable evening.

The work will be performed by an 80-piece professional orchestra, including two additional brass bands as called for in Walton's score, complemented by a combined choir of over 160 singers. Such a collaborative effort shows the commitment of both choirs to showcasing the exceptional standard of amateur choral singing prevalent in this country.

The programme will also feature a selection of other notable works, including Vaughan Williams' evocative Five Mystical Songs, Parry's majestic I Was Glad and stirring Blest Pair of Sirens, as well as Elgar's enchanting Serenade for Strings.

"We are thrilled to bring together the talents of Epsom Choral Society and Barnes Choir for this ambitious performance," said Julian Collings, Musical Director of both choirs. "Through our dedication and passion for choral music, we aim to inspire and uplift audiences, showcasing the extraordinary level of artistry that exists within the realm of amateur choral singing."

Tickets for this event are now available from Cadogan Hall box office, offering audiences the opportunity to experience the power and beauty of choral music at its finest. Don't miss this exciting collaboration.

Event Details:

• Date: 13th July 2024
• Time: 7:30 PM
• Venue: Cadogan Hall, 5 Sloane Terrace, London SW1X 9DQ

For ticketing information and enquiries:

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Please visit www.cadoganhall.com or contact the box office on 020 7730 4500 or online https://cadoganhall.com/whats-on/belshazzars-feast/book/912634/

Democracy at work? Or strange mathematics?

12 July 2024

For the first time in its history as a Parliamentary constituency Epsom and Ewell has a Member of Parliament who is not a Conservative. Undoubtedly the events, personalities and circumstances at the national level impacted local results. Controversies that swirled around recent Conservative Prime Ministers Boris Johnson and Liz Truss, the squeeze on living standards, the failure of Brexit to deliver on its promise to stem immigration, Conservative aides and Parliamentary candidates placing bets on the date of the General Election.

Nevertheless, there were some local factors that contributed to the change that happened in Epsom and Ewell. The neighbouring constituency of Esher and Walton witnessed former Conservative Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab's share of the vote slump from a peak of 63% in 2015 to 49.5% in 2019 with Monica Harding for the Liberal Democrats just 4.5% behind. She proceeded to win on 4th July. Esher's rise of her party must have given Epsom and Ewell Liberal Democrat's choice of Esher based candidate **Helen Maguire** belief that change was possible.

The Epsom and Ewell Liberal Democrats ran their campaign with an unrelenting belief that even in the Conservative stronghold of this constituency voters could change their allegiance.

The intervention of the Reform UK party impacted the local result on 4th July with its 5795 votes, which if cast for Chris Grayling's replacement **Mhairi Fraser**, might have seen the new Conservative candidate, being elected. Reform's previous incarnation as UKIP not standing in the General Elections of 2017 or 2019 after the 2016 EU referendum.

Local tactical voting appears to have been influential with the Liberal Democrats seemingly taking the anti-Conservative or protest votes where in earlier elections Labour has come second in Epsom and Ewell to the Conservatives in both 2015 and 2017. The Liberal Democrats moved to second place in the 2019 poll.

The headlines of a Labour landslide nationally mask the true expression of public opinion with Labour's 4th July 2024 share of the vote being only 2% higher than Jeremy Corbyn's 2019 "worst election result for Labour in history". In fact in 2017 Labour polled 40% of the national vote under Mr Corbyn's leadership. Labour's 2024 share of the national vote at 34% is the lowest of any British Government ruling with a majority in the House of Commons seemingly ever in history.

Where the translation of votes into seats in the Commons appears to be so wildly out of sync. it requires new MPs to work their socks off in their constituencies if they wish to maintain the loyalty of voters in 2024 to the end of the new Parliament and the beginning of the next one.

Epsom and Ewell's new MP and new Party

12 July 2024



The 2024 general election count for Epsom & Ewell was held last night at the Epsom Downs racecourse from 10pm to the early hours today.

This year's election introduced new boundaries for the constituency of Epsom and Ewell, with the addition of wards from Ashtead and Leatherhead.

With the vote closing at 10pm, the official ballot count revealed a voter turnout of 70%. (2019: 81,138. 73.3%)

Mrs **Jackie King**, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's CEO and Returning Officer, revealed the official result at about 06:15 with the results as follows:

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LIBERAL DEMOCRAT: Helen Maguire:

- Votes 20,674
- Share 37.9%
- Share change +13.7
- *2019: 13,946 (23.5%)*

CONSERVATIVE: Mhairi Fraser:

- Votes 16,988
- Share 31.2%
- Share change -22.4
- *2019: 31,819 (53.5%)*

LABOUR: Mark Todd:

- Votes 8,325
- Share 15.3%
- Share change -1.5
- *2019: 10,226 (17.2%)*

REFORM UK: Mayuran Senthilnathan:

- Votes 5,795
- Share 10.6%
- Share change +10.6

GREEN: Stephen McKenna:

- Votes 1,745
- Share 3.2%
- Share change -0.1
- *2019: 2,047 (3.5%)*

TRUE and FAIR: Gina Miller:

- Votes 845
- Share 1.6%
- Share change +1.6

Social Democratic Party: Damon Young:

- Votes 153
- Share 0.3%
- Share change +0.3

Each candidate was accompanied by a fairly large cohort, all working endlessly to keep up with a general sense of how well their party was doing nationally. While the rest of the UK's election results unfolded on TV screens, mixed reactions were circulating. However, it was the Labour corner with the most cheers throughout, with a landslide exit poll for the Labour party unfolding into a reality. The announcement of a Labour government was issued around 4:55 am.

Helen Maguire (Liberal Democrat) said a priority for Epsom and Ewell was getting the new hospital built that had been promised for 10 years. On the election campaign she said "There are so many pollsters saying different things it has been difficult for voters to know what has been going on. It brings up the question whether we should have polls during election campaigns. If we had proportional representation we wouldn't need polls anyway."

Responding to the result **Stephen McKenna** of the Green Party said "With a super-majority is it less likely that the new Government will work with other parties to get proportional representation and introduce the Green policies the country needs. We hope the new MP preserves the Green Belt and makes sure we have a housing policy that works for everyone and sorts out the NHS locally."

Mayuran Senthilnathan of Reform UK said "The first past the post system does not serve the interests of this country so I hope the constituents of Epsom and Ewell get behind a campaign for proportional representation."

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Gina Miller of True and Fair said of the future of Epsom and Ewell “I hope the Green Belt is preserved and Epsom and Ewell becomes a place where health and well-being come first”. On the national picture she said “I think the share of the vote for Reform UK is quite terrifying. The centre parties need to start listening to people and deliverying for them.” On her local campaign experience Gina Miller said she was shocked by the negative campaigning that had gone on. She called for regulation of campaign literature and tactical voting websites. “The bullying is something I never thought I would experience”.

Editorial:

Democracy at work? Or strange mathematics?

Wet weather kicks into the long grass

12 July 2024

People fed up with long unsightly overgrown grass and verges can use an interactive map to see when their favourite spots are next due to be cut.

The seemingly endless rainfall this year has heavily affected work across the county as the wet weather shuts down the process – Surrey County Council says this is because its machinery will not cut wet grass properly and can, in some cases, even damage the turf.

Urban areas are due to have six cuts a year by the county – unless they have been designated as a blue heart zone. Rural cuts and high speed roads are chopped twice a year.

Blue hearts are part of Surrey’s 3,000 miles of grass verges but have been deliberately left to grow as a way of increasing plant and insect biodiversity.

Reducing the amount of times these areas are cut is intended to allow native plant species to thrive – or even to sow native wildflower seeds.

As well as using the map, the county council has published a table covering each area in Surrey and when it estimates to get on with the job.

The council’s website reads: “We are experiencing some delays with our planned grass cutting programme dates in parts of the county as a result of the weather and operational issues.

“We are working with our contractors to improve the situation and are sorry for any inconvenience. Thank you for your patience.”

The Blue Campaign, founded in 2014 by wildlife filmmaker Fergus Beeley in response to dramatic declining biodiversity in the UK, lets nature take a bit more control, the county council said.

It encourages the rewilding of green spaces in suitable areas and are marked in blue on the map.

Often they can be identified with a blue heart planted in th ground to show residents grass and flowers are deliberately being left to grow – and the council is encouraging residents to identify new sites and gather local support.

Any areas put forward for blue hearts will be reviewed by the county council and, if approved, contractors told to skip the verge unless some safety work is needed.

All verges, including blue hearts are supposed to have a full cut each autumn.

Surrey County Council spokesperson said: “Our new interactive grass cutting map available here shows residents when their area is due to be cut.

“Our grass cutting programme can however be heavily affected by weather. We cannot cut when it is raining heavily or shortly after as the machinery will not cut the wet grass properly and risks damaging the grass itself.

“Weather and ground conditions permitting, urban spaces are cut six times a year and for rural areas, this takes place twice a year.”

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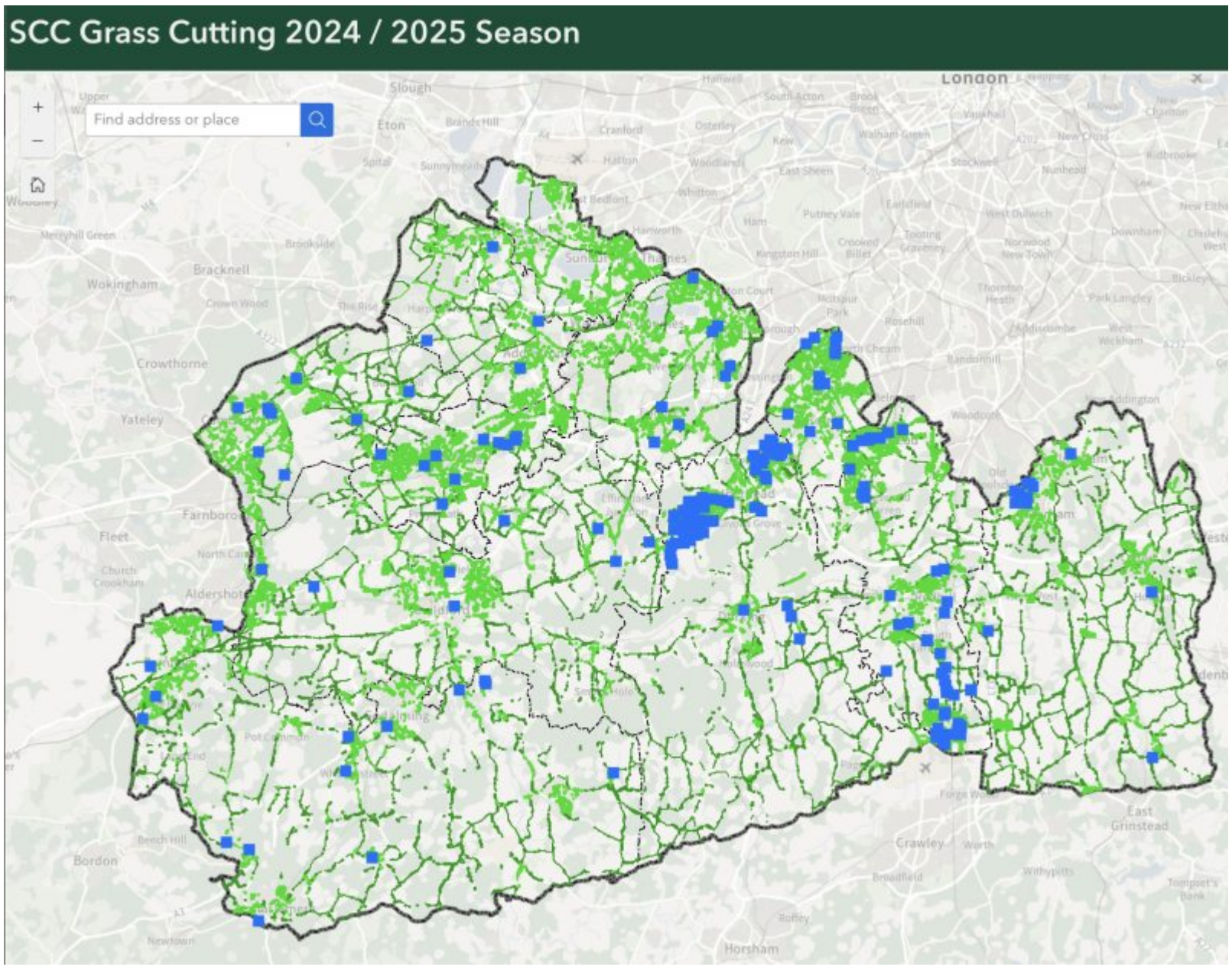

Image: Surrey grass cutting, when your verge is due to be cut. Areas in blue are being left to grow over the summer to encourage biodiversity (image SCC)

INTERACTIVE MAP

Blue Heart

Related reports:

A Greener Future in Partial Sight As Verges To Be Left Unmown

Verging on the ridiculous

Feature photo: *credit Jon Hawkins – Surrey Hills Photography*

May our hustings make up your mind?

12 July 2024



Epsom and Ewell Times staged a six election candidate Parliamentary hustings at the Adrian Mann Theatre, **NESCOT** in Ewell on Wednesday 26th June. With every seat in the 230 seat theatre occupied, **Gina Miller** (True and Fair), **Mark Todd** (Labour), **Mhairi Fraser** (Conservative), **Stephen McKenna** (Green), **Helen Maguire** (Liberal Democrat) and **Mayuran Senthilnathan** (Reform) took the stage, with **Lionel Blackman** in the Chair.

Questions on Brexit, local government financing, arming Israel, where to build houses, crime, tactical voting and proportional representation and others were asked by a lively audience. Many voters from the new southerly Ashtead and Leatherhead areas of the Epsom and Ewell constituency came along.

Below is a recording of the hustings. After introductions the hustings get going after 06:50.

The Epsom and Ewell Times is indebted to NESCOT CEO **Julie Kapsalis** and **Louise Gaskin** of the Creative and Media Department of NESCOT, who worked so hard to make a success of this once in a Parliament event. Special thanks to **Charlie McCarthy** of NESCOT who edited the video recording.

Top image credit Steven McCormick photography.

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[Please note that in error the introducer muddled the Labour candidate Mark Todd with a former Labour MP of the same name.]

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Reform candidate for Epsom and Ewell

A True and Fair view of the world

The cost of sending pupils to school

12 July 2024



Surrey County Council (SCC) has been ordered to pay out £1,500 by the social care ombudsman for a ‘service failure’ in defaulting its legal duty to provide SEND transport to and from school. The local authority is already predicted an overspend of £7.3m on SEND school transport for its 2024-25 annual budget.

A family has received £1,500 after Surrey County Council (SCC) failed to provide a child with complex medical needs school transport adding pressure to the family. The boy missed 27 days of education as well as special needs provision, causing his mother and the wider family “avoidable” distress.

The provider suspended the child’s transport after no longer feeling able to meet the boy’s change in medical needs, on June 15, 2023. The boy waited for his school transport to pick him up the next morning but it did not arrive to collect him. It was not until lunchtime until the travel provider informed the Council that it had suspended its service.

SCC speedily offered the mum a travel allowance while it explored longer term solutions but she felt ‘pressured’ into taking this as she did not have the time to recruit carers. The travel allowance is a more cost-effective option than managed transport services.

Report documents detail the “avoidable distress, frustration and inconvenience” that the child’s transport withdrawal caused his family. The social ombudsman said “the council did exactly what we would expect in the circumstances it found itself in” and it now has contracts with two ambulance-style providers able to transport children with complex medical needs.

A SCC spokesperson said it would not comment on individual cases and “although the report does recognise that we put appropriate mitigations in place, we accept the findings from the Ombudsman report and sincerely apologise for any distress caused”.

They added: “We know how important it is for children and young people to have access to their education setting, however a lack of suitable providers has meant that some children who require specialist provision for high and/or complex medical needs have had to wait longer for appropriate arrangements than we would like. In these circumstances we always work actively with families to find a solution and offer measures such as personal travel allowances in the interim.”

The ombudsman demanded the council pay his mother £1,000 in recognition of his missed education and SEN provision during the period he had no transport to school, plus £500 for the ‘avoidable distress’ it caused her and her family.

An overspend of £7.3m, all based on home to school transport, is already predicted one month into SCC’s new budget for 2024-25. In 2023, SCC saw an overspend of £12m on SEND transport, with nearly a third of the transport costs being to independent schools outside of Surrey.

Rising demand, more travel days and anticipated increase in the number of children who need transport have contributed to a pressurised budget. SCC said it is reviewing all discretionary travel arrangements, tightening applications and is actively promoting personal travel allowance to manage costs.

A SCC spokesperson added: “We have seen a 64% increase in education, health and care needs assessment requests across Surrey since 2020, which has naturally had a knock on effect with a year on year increase in demand for Home to School Travel Assistance (HTSTA) as many children and young people with an education, health and care plan require HTSTA. This has resulted in a predicted overspend for this service.”

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Image: Credit: Arriva436 **CC BY-SA 2.0**

Scoutabout success for Surrey

12 July 2024



More than 6,000 Scouts and Guides and adults from **Surrey** enjoyed an action-packed weekend of activities over the weekend of 28th to 30th June 2024.

Scouts, Guides, and adults from **Epsom & Ewell** joined other Scouts and Guides from Surrey.

The first Scoutabout was at Ardingly back in 1984 and and thus event 40 years was celebrated. The boys and girls aged 10 to 14 had the opportunity to take part in more than 100 activities at the three-day Scoutabout event at the South of England Showground in Ardingly, West Sussex, the only site big enough and close enough to house the Scouts and Guides of Surrey for the weekend.

There were over 150 activities including Bus Driving, car driving, bungee running, kayaking, archery, air rifle shooting and caving, to name just a few. The young people were able to try something new, in a safe environment, gain skills-for-life and make new friends at the same time.

The weekend will not have been possible without the hard work of a determined team of 1,500 adult volunteers from across Surrey who have carried out a range of roles to make Scoutabout a reality.

From camp cooks to a doctor and from fire teams to IT engineers, adult volunteers would have shared their skills to benefit these young people.

One of the biggest tasks has been to source the huge number of activities that make Scoutabout such a success.

On the Friday night Sour Kix played for the camp at the opening ceremony and on the Saturday night Doubting Thomas and The Ariston played on stage.

Over the weekend Scoutabout FM was broadcasting and along with competitions (Thanks to Guildford Flames, Bentley Copse Activity Centre, Airfix and Surrey Sports Park for the donation of prizes) Explorer Scouts were able to present shows.

Bear Grylls, Chief Scout said “A special message for all of you at Scoutabout 2024 at Ardingly showground. I really hope all of you have a brilliant weekend together, look after each other and most of all have fun. So proud of what you all do, helping other people always, showing the true Scouting spirit, you are all amazing”.

Marcus Martin-Burns, County Youth Commissioner for Surrey Scouts said “Seeing 5,000 Scouts & Guides all together for one weekend at Scoutabout has been truly awesome, giving them the opportunities to learn skills for life, make new friends and discover new activities. From Archery to Zorbing, Scoutabout had it all and a big thank you goes to all the leaders and service crew who made this weekend possible.”

Eashan, aged 10 from Epsom & Ewell district (**1st Ewell Court**) said “The best bit of Scoutabout was the fun activities, I enjoyed the bungee slip slide because its fast and fun and gets you active.”

Lucy, aged 11 from Leatherhead district (3rd Bookham) said “I liked the quad biking as I have not done it before, and it was really fun.”

- The first Scoutabout was at Ardingly in 1984.
- Scoutabout happens every three years (apart from this one, due to the pandemic the 2024 one puts it back into a tri-annual event.
- Scouts are for Boys and Girls aged 10.5 to 14.
- Guides are for girls aged 10-14
- Individuals are 15% less likely to suffer from mood swings and anxiety if you’ve been a Scout or Guide. Source: Cohort study by the University of Edinburgh and Glasgow, 2016

Neil Wibberley

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Epsom library to lend an ear on changes

12 July 2024

Epsom Library is being transformed as part of Surrey Libraries modernisation programme and residents are invited to drop in to give their views at the library on Tuesday 9th July from 10am to 4pm.

This is an opportunity to meet library staff, hear more about the improvements and give feedback on the designs for the library.

A separate session especially for children, parents and carers will be held during Story-time from 10:15am to 10.45am. The designs will remain on display in the library for at least 2 weeks following the 9th July, to provide an opportunity for further feedback.

The library changes will include a fully flexible layout with space for events and performances; improved furniture and increased study space; new **Super Access technology** enabling out of hours use and multi-use meeting rooms.

To enable initial set up works to be completed, the library will be closed from 5th August for one week only. It will then re-open from the 12th August within Epsom library's learning centre, still within the Ebbisham Centre, which will be accessed via the cafe.

Customers will be able to access a range of library items, along with computer workstations, printing and the popular Rhymetime and Story-time events, which will still run at a reduced capacity to suit the space.

Work at the library will continue throughout 2024, until the expected final completion date of February 2025. Any further short closures required will be well publicised before they take place.

More information on Epsom Library changes will be found at the **Epsom Library page.**

Northern Lights up Epsom

12 July 2024



At their "**Mass in Blue**" concert Saturday 29th June, St Martins Church, Epsom, the **Epsom Chamber Choir** succeeded once again in enhancing their reputation for exciting performances of adventurous programmes.

The evening kicked off with "**Northern Light**s" by the contemporary Latvian composer, **Ēriks Ešenvalds**, and saw the choir placed unusually in the chancel, rather than in their customary position nearer the audience in the transept. This meant that their entrance was not greeted by the usual applause, as the audience hadn't realised that they had arrived! After a vigorous opening, the reason for this placing became apparent as the piece employs tuned wine glasses and chimes which need to be supported – the choir stalls being ideal.

Ešenvalds uses this unusual instrumentation to produce a sustained shimmering sound which underscores the choir particularly effectively in the quieter passages. A timely work for us in the UK, having recently been treated to magical displays of the Northern Lights!

The choir returned to their normal positions for "Stargazer" by the contemporary British composer, **Alec Roth**. His style recalls Holst's and Britten's – especially the Flower Songs – and the choir showed some wonderful legato singing in the shifting harmonic colours.

Vocalist **Maddie Martin** and the **LJ Jazz Trio** then provided us with a jazzy interlude, and the first half of the concert concluded with another contemporary British composer, **Jonathan Dove** and his "The Passing of the Year". These seven, contrasting part-songs – stunningly accompanied by choir member, virtuoso pianist **Stephen Ridge** – gave the choir the chance to display their convincing mastery of complex and quirky rhythms, and cool and hot tone clusters.

The second half of the concert was given over to "Mass in Blue" by a third contemporary British composer, Will Todd. While not a personal favourite, this exciting setting of the mass has gained huge popularity across the choral world. The blues scale permeates the whole work but the choir immediately seemed fully "in the groove", secure and quite at ease with the challenging blues harmonies and rhythms.

At times, some were unable to resist the urge for spontaneous swaying! Singing almost as a complex backing group to the jazz trio and vocalist, the choir was able to show off its skill with sensitive phrasing and highly effective dynamic contrasts. A convincing performance of a welcome addition to the repertoire.

Nick Landauer

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