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

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Getting to the bottom of Epsom’s Ashley Centre seating

4 April 2026



Shoppers in Epsom have voiced concern after seating in the Ashley Centre was removed and replaced as part of what management describes as an ongoing improvement programme.

One resident contacted the Epsom and Ewell Times to highlight the impact of the changes, particularly on older visitors and those with mobility difficulties who rely on regular rest points while shopping.

The resident said the removal of existing seating was “totally unexpected” and had caused “great concern”, adding that the centre is not only a retail space but also a social hub for many: “It is especially important for the older generation who visit the centre both to shop and to meet friends.”

Concerns were also raised about the suitability of the replacement seating. The resident described the new arrangements as inadequate in number and design, claiming that current provision allows seating for “only twelve people”, which they said was “totally unacceptable for such a busy shopping mall”, particularly following the arrival of a major new store increasing footfall.

The complaint further suggested that the materials used in the new seating may present practical issues: “The upholstery is unhygienic and it will easily get dirty in very little time,” the resident said.

In response, a spokesperson for the Ashley Centre said the changes were part of a planned upgrade and sought to reassure visitors that further improvements are imminent.

The spokesperson said: “We remain committed to providing a welcoming and accessible environment for all visitors and appreciate feedback from the local community. Recent seating changes form part of a planned improvement programme, with additional new seating due to be installed later this month to enhance comfort and accessibility for shoppers.”

The issue is likely to resonate with many regular users of the town centre, particularly those who depend on accessible facilities. Whether the promised additional seating will address residents’ concerns remains to be seen.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Lung disease death widens investigation of Epsom and St Helier Trust service

4 April 2026



Widow still seeking accountability two years on.

A widow whose husband died aged just 48 after treatment at Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust has

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spoken of her continuing search for answers, as investigations continue into the care of more than 200 lung disease patients.

Laura Noakes, from Sutton, says she still does not know why her husband Daniel died from interstitial lung disease (ILD) in February 2024, despite concerns raised about his treatment before his death. Speaking on the second anniversary of his passing, she said the lack of clear information has left her feeling isolated and unable to move forward.

Her case forms part of a wider investigation involving patients treated under respiratory consultant Dr Veronica Varney, whose practice is under scrutiny. The investigation includes a review by the General Medical Council, though no outcome has yet been made public.

According to reporting by the Daily Telegraph (29th March), a letter from the Trust acknowledged that Mr Noakes had been prescribed Roflumilast for several years — a drug licensed for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease but not for ILD — and that he could have lived longer had he received treatment in line with guidelines.

Mrs Noakes said: “While nothing will bring Daniel back, finding answers is really important. It feels like I’ve been treated in a silo. I haven’t been able to understand the wider picture, and answers have only come after I complained.”

Concerns over treatment and oversight

Mr Noakes, who had never smoked, was first referred to respiratory services in 2018 after developing a persistent cough. The Trust later accepted that earlier scans suggesting ILD were not properly followed up, and that there was insufficient senior medical oversight during his care.

His condition deteriorated significantly from late 2023. While still alive, he was contacted by the Trust raising concerns about his treatment — something his wife describes as a “double trauma”, learning both that he was dying and that aspects of his care may have been avoidable.

She said: “We trusted we were getting top-level care. Instead, we later found there had been serious failings. We could have had many more years together.”

The Trust has apologised to the family and acknowledged that Mr Noakes’ care “fell far below” expected standards. It has also commissioned an external review by the Royal College of Physicians into more than 200 cases.

Wider investigation and cultural concerns

Findings reported by the Telegraph indicate that internal reviews identified a culture at St Helier Hospital that discouraged junior staff from challenging senior clinicians. The Trust has since said it has strengthened safeguards and systems to prevent similar failures.

Dr Varney left the Trust in 2023. The GMC has confirmed she remains registered with conditions while its investigation continues.

An inquest into Mr Noakes’ death has yet to reach a final conclusion.

Legal action and calls for others to come forward

Mrs Noakes is now being supported by clinical negligence specialists at Slater and Gordon.

Senior associate Nadia Saber said: “Daniel’s death was avoidable and premature, and Laura understandably has many questions. The number of cases under investigation gives cause for serious concern, and we would urge anyone worried about their care to come forward.”

Mrs Noakes added that accountability is essential not only for her family, but to ensure lessons are learned: “We need to know what happened and why — so this doesn’t happen to anyone else.”

Sam Jones – Reporter



Plans for 130 Kingswood homes ‘absolute disgrace’ as nearly 700 objectors speak

4 April 2026

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Plans to build up to 130 homes on protected green belt land between Kingswood and Burgh Heath have sparked a fierce backlash, with nearly 700 objections lodged by residents.

Developers want outline planning permission for the scheme on 13 hectares of farmland off Canons Lane, with details like layout and design to be decided later. The proposal includes a mix of homes, nearly half classed as “affordable”, alongside green space, play areas, allotments and a community orchard.

Lightwood, the developers, state the land presents a “opportunity to create a high-quality, thoughtfully designed place to live, work and connect with nature”.

But the scale and location of the development have become the biggest flashpoints. The site sits in the Metropolitan Green Belt and an Area of Great Landscape Value, currently made up of open fields used for farming. It also borders existing homes and is criss-crossed by public footpaths used by walkers and cyclists.

Residents say building here would mean sacrificing one of the last stretches of countryside before Greater London.

One objector called the plans “an absolute disgrace”, warning they would “start the loss of the last remaining parcels of farming land” and harm wildlife. Others pointed to records of protected and declining bird species on the land, arguing the development would fragment habitats and disrupt migration routes.

Traffic is another major concern. Access would come from Canons Lane, with opponents saying the rural road is not fit for the extra cars likely to come with 130 households. Nearby routes, including the busy A217, are already under pressure at peak times.

There are also doubts about whether the scheme would genuinely tackle the housing crisis. Some residents argue that so-called affordable homes (typically priced below market rates rather than at social rent) would still be out of reach for many.

Despite this, developers say the site is in a sustainable location, within walking or cycling distance of schools, shops and transport links, including Kingswood railway station. They argue it would form a logical extension to the existing built-up area and deliver much-needed housing.

The plans also promise environmental measures, including new tree planting, upgraded footpaths, and sustainable drainage systems designed to reduce flood risk.

In planning terms, the application is only seeking approval ‘in principle’, with all detailed design matters reserved for a later stage except for the main access point.

Supporters say the benefits, particularly new homes and affordable housing, should carry significant weight. But with objections outnumbering supporters almost 175 to one, the council faces a contentious decision over whether those benefits outweigh the loss of protected countryside.

Emily Dalton LDRS

View of the outline of the proposed development site between Canons Lane and Doric Drive, Kingswood. (Credit: Lightwood planning documents)

Epsom March crime and safety round-up

4 April 2026



Policing activity across Epsom and Ewell in March 2026 saw a mix of enforcement successes, court outcomes and continued concern around acquisitive crime, drugs and community safety.

30th March an unexploded ordnance was handed in to the police counter in the Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom. The area

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was cordoned off until experts gave the all-clear.

Drug crime crackdown sees cash seizures in Epsom

A significant policing outcome during March was the seizure of more than £12,000 linked to criminal activity following a proactive stop by officers in Epsom. The funds, recovered under the Proceeds of Crime Act, are set to be reinvested into policing.
Local police social media updates suggest this forms part of wider activity targeting drug-related offending and organised crime in the borough, with officers using stop-and-search powers and intelligence-led patrols to disrupt offenders.

Targeted operations lead to arrests across offence types

Neighbourhood policing teams reported intensive enforcement weeks during which more than 20 arrests were made across a range of offences including burglary, theft, drugs and weapons possession. (Facebook)
These operations reflect a continued emphasis on “visible policing” and proactive interventions in hotspot areas.

Burglary and vehicle crime remain priorities

Across Surrey, two burglars were jailed in March after targeting homes to steal car keys and vehicles in early-morning break-ins.
While not limited to Epsom and Ewell, such offences remain a key policing priority locally, with residents repeatedly advised to secure vehicles and keys.

Domestic abuse and sexual offences prosecutions

March also saw several significant court outcomes across the county, including custodial sentences for domestic abuse, coercive behaviour and serious sexual offences.
Police continue to highlight safeguarding and victim support as central to their work, alongside encouraging reporting and use of protective measures such as Clare’s Law disclosures.

Community engagement and policing visibility

Residents are being invited to participate in upcoming “Policing Your Community” roadshows, aimed at gathering local concerns and shaping neighbourhood priorities.
This follows ongoing efforts in Epsom and Ewell to strengthen engagement between officers and the public.

Ongoing concerns around public safety incidents

Although outside the March reporting window, earlier incidents such as the January report of a teenage girl being approached by two men in Court Recreation Ground continue to frame community concerns about safety in public spaces. (The Sun)
Police have maintained increased visibility patrols in such areas in response.

Overall picture

Data and operational updates suggest that policing in Epsom and Ewell during March has been characterised by: targeted enforcement against drugs and organised crime; continued focus on burglary and vehicle theft; strong emphasis on safeguarding in domestic abuse and sexual offence cases; ongoing community engagement initiatives.
While Surrey remains a relatively low-crime area overall, the persistence of acquisitive crime and anti-social behaviour continues to shape local policing priorities.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Surrey tech pioneers get £25k boost in start-up drive

4 April 2026

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Surrey’s emerging tech entrepreneurs have been given a significant boost after more than 30 early-stage innovators completed the first cohort of a new county-wide startup programme.

Surrey Venture Studios (SVS), a business growth initiative backed by the University of Surrey and partners, has supported participants through workshops, mentoring and pitching opportunities aimed at turning early ideas into viable technology businesses. The programme offers selected founders £25,000 in funding alongside six months of expert support to help launch and scale their ventures.

First cohort builds momentum

Organisers say the inaugural cohort brought together a diverse range of innovators working across multiple sectors, all benefiting from access to experienced mentors and investors. Participants attended intensive workshops designed to refine ideas and prepare them for pitching to expert panels.

Ody Bassioukas, manager of Surrey Venture Studios, said the programme had already demonstrated how quickly ideas could develop with the right support: “It’s been incredibly energising to see just how much progress can happen in a matter of days… ideas gaining clarity, confidence building, and new pathways starting to take shape.”

Among those taking part was Elizabeth Baldwin, founder of Puzzle Proof, a digital system aimed at supporting survivors of domestic abuse. She said the programme had helped validate her idea and encouraged her to take it forward.

Industry figures have also backed the initiative. Iain Jamieson, chairman of the S100 Angel Investment Club, described the programme as “exactly the kind of support that is needed” to help new entrepreneurs succeed.

Applications open for next round

Following the success of the first cohort, applications are now open for a second intake, with a deadline of 8 May and workshops scheduled for June.

The programme is open to people living, working or studying in Surrey and includes an initial two-day workshop and pitching process, with successful applicants progressing to the funded accelerator stage.

Caroline Fleming, director of the Surrey Innovation District ecosystem at the University of Surrey, encouraged prospective applicants to come forward: “This is your opportunity to realise your tech entrepreneur ambition, supported by our world-class innovation ecosystem.”

Addressing a gap in startup support

Surrey Venture Studios has been developed in collaboration with Royal Holloway and the University for the Creative Arts, alongside Surrey County Council, to address what organisers describe as a longstanding gap in support for very early-stage innovators.

By combining funding, mentoring and structured development, the programme aims to help bridge the gap between concept and commercial readiness for new technology businesses.

A webinar for prospective applicants is scheduled for 21 April, offering further information on how the scheme works and how to apply.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Local girl made good. The rise of NESCOT’s Julie Kapsalis

4 April 2026



Julie Kapsalis, CEO and Principal at Nescot college in Epsom, has achieved a remarkable trio of prestigious awards – including an MBE – in recognition of her leadership, dedication, and outstanding contribution across the region.

Julie’s year of accolades began with national recognition in the King’s 2026 New Year’s Honours List, celebrating her transformative work as Chair of the Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) from 2020–2025. During her tenure, Julie championed and delivered major investments in skills, infrastructure and business support, playing a pivotal role in strengthening the region’s economic landscape. This week, Julie was presented with her MBE for Services to Economic Development by His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales at Windsor Castle.

The success didn’t stop there. At the Gatwick Diamond Business Awards on 19 March, Dee Mathieson, Chair of the Gatwick Diamond Business Council, presented Julie with the Outstanding Contribution to the Gatwick Diamond Award — a special accolade widely celebrated by colleagues, partners, and all who have worked with her. The citation shared: *“Over the span of two decades Julie’s career in economic development, skills enterprise and inclusive growth has made her one of the region’s most influential and transformative leaders. For her exceptional leadership, her sustained dedication to the region, and the tangible, lasting positive impact of her work, Julie is a profoundly deserving winner.”*

Rounding off an extraordinary week, Julie was also named ‘Gamechanger of the Year’ at the Dynamic Business Awards in Brighton on 26 March. The award celebrates businesswomen who deliver significant, positive change within their industries — something Julie has consistently demonstrated through her bold leadership, commitment to innovation, and passion for skills development.

Julie Kapsalis, CEO & Principal at Nescot said: *“I love working in this incredible region, building networks and (hopefully) making a difference. This recognition and the awards are shared with the wonderful colleagues I’ve worked with over the last 25 years including at Nescot, Chichester College Group and Coast to Capital LEP. Meeting the Prince of Wales was such a proud moment – and made all the more special by having my family with me.”*

NESCOT

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Caterham will try to force a rental of long empty Post Office

4 April 2026



A long-empty post office building in the heart of Caterham could finally be brought back into use under new council powers despite concerns over cost, risk and whether it will work.

Tandridge District councillors approved plans on March 26 to use a Government-backed High Street Rental Auction to force the former Station Avenue site to be let after years of vacancy in a prominent town centre location.

Members said the building has become a “significant eyesore” and a source of frustration for residents and businesses. Cllr Rob Spencer said: “You come to Caterham and you’re looking at a dead, old building,” adding the council had reached “the end of our tether” waiting for it to be occupied.

How the scheme works

Under the scheme, the council can designate the town centre for a High Street Rental Auction and formally notify the landlord. If the owner fails to secure a tenant, the council can step in to market and auction the lease, with a tenant potentially in place within around six months.

If successful, the move could bring the building back into use, boosting footfall and improving the high street.

However, officers warned the situation is complex. The property has multiple owners, and high asking rents and sale prices have deterred interest so far. They added it is still possible no suitable offers will come forward, even through an auction process.

Concerns over cost

The project is expected to cost around £15,000, with some money potentially recovered through grants and fees. Officers also noted the council cannot guarantee it will recover costs, with much of the expense tied up in staff time.

However, councillors raised concerns about where the funding would come from. Cllr Jeremy Pursehouse said: “It does sound like we’re rummaging down the side of the sofa.”

Mixed views from councillors

Opinion among members was divided. Cllr Mike Crane backed the proposal, calling it “a no-brainer” and suggesting the committee was “over-thinking” the issue.

But Cllr Perry Chotai warned the move could “set a precedent” and criticised the lack of detailed analysis. “This sounds a bit like a Trumpian style of analysis,” he said, calling for clearer evidence on risks and outcomes.

Despite reservations, councillors agreed to press ahead, viewing the auction as a potential way to revive the town centre even if success is not guaranteed and public money may be at risk.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Former Caterham post office. (Credit: Google street view)

Climate emergency comes to Epsom

4 April 2026

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A community screening of a national climate film is set to take place in Epsom next month, bringing together residents, councillors and community groups to explore what the climate and nature crisis means locally.

The event, hosted by St Martin's Church and Sustainable Epsom and Ewell, will feature *The People's Emergency Briefing*, a 45-minute film based on a high-level national briefing delivered in Westminster last year.

Organisers say the screening forms part of a UK-wide programme designed to make complex information about climate and environmental risks more accessible at a local level, with community discussions encouraged after each showing.

Local screening details

The Epsom event will take place on Saturday 11 April at St Martin's Church, Church Street, starting at 3pm (doors open 2.30pm). Entry is free, although attendees are asked to register in advance so organisers can plan capacity.

Invitations have been extended to local councillors, community leaders and Epsom and Ewell's MP, alongside residents interested in environmental issues.

From Westminster briefing to community film

The film is based on a landmark briefing held in November 2025 at Westminster Central Hall, attended by more than 1,200 MPs, peers and leaders from across business, culture, faith and media.

Experts at the event examined the implications of climate and nature breakdown across areas such as food security, health, infrastructure and the economy, alongside practical evidence on how risks might be reduced.

That material has now been adapted into a public-facing film, launching nationally in April 2026, with screenings planned in venues ranging from churches and village halls to libraries and schools.

A "civic event" as well as a film

Organisers emphasise that the screenings are intended not just as film showings but as civic events, encouraging discussion about local impacts and responses.

Each event is expected to include a facilitated discussion, allowing residents to reflect on how national risks relate to their own communities.

The wider programme has backing from organisations including WWF, the National Trust, CPRE and the Royal Meteorological Society, with hundreds of screenings anticipated across the country.

Broadcaster Chris Packham, who opened the original Westminster briefing, said: "I'd encourage people everywhere to attend a screening… It creates exactly the kind of honest local conversation we now urgently need."

Local focus

For Epsom and Ewell, the event offers a chance to connect global environmental challenges with local concerns, from green space and biodiversity to resilience and community preparedness.

Organisers say they hope the screening will help spark informed, constructive discussion about how the borough can respond to the issues raised.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Event Listing Details Here

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Penalty Drama Caps Epsom Salts' Triumph

4 April 2026



Epsom & Ewell FC 2 v Guildford City 1 – Combined Counties Premier Division South- 28th March -Spectrum Football Ground

Epsom & Ewell went into the match knowing that victory would secure a finish above Guildford City and complete a league double over their opponents — adding further importance to an already significant fixture. Kit Fletcher returned in goal, while Jason Vincent came into the starting line-up in place of Craig Dundas, who moved to the bench, in what was otherwise a settled side.

The Salts began brightly, moving the ball well and creating several promising attacking moments in the opening stages. However, the rhythm of the game was disrupted by extreme weather conditions, with snow, hail and heavy rain all making an appearance and turning it into a typically challenging afternoon.

A major moment came on 30 minutes when Antonios Nazareth suffered a serious fall that forced him to leave the field and be taken to hospital. The incident understandably affected the tempo of the match, and neither side was able to establish control before the interval, with the teams going in level at 0–0.

Epsom & Ewell emerged for the second half with renewed intent and made the breakthrough just two minutes after the restart. Courtney Swaby finished well to give the Salts the lead, celebrating with his trademark flips and lifting the home support.

The Salts continued to press and looked the more likely to add a second. Substitute Craig Dundas had a golden opportunity late on to seal the game but was unable to convert, leaving the contest finely balanced heading into the closing stages. Football, as ever, had a twist. Former Salts player Kallum Peart struck in the 88th minute to bring Guildford City level and set up a tense finale.

Deep into stoppage time, in the seventh minute of added time, the referee pointed to the spot. Up stepped substitute Ali Fofahan, who confidently converted the penalty to secure all three points for Epsom & Ewell. It was a match that had everything — difficult conditions, a serious injury, late drama and a display of real character from the Salts. A deserved and memorable victory.

Epsom and Ewell FC Media

Box Hill's Zig Zag Road Leads to Straight Ban on Antisocial Riding

4 April 2026



Motorcyclists near Box Hill are being targeted despite the "vast majority" who visit the Surrey beauty spot being "considerate people who behave respectfully". A Public Spaces Protection Order is being introduced around the National Trust site following efforts from residents in Mickleham and Westhumble over what they said was excessive noise and acts of anti-social behaviour. Mole Valley District Council then carried out consultation on whether to make certain behaviour an offence within the defined area.

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This includes, revving engines, keeping engines idling, speeding, stunts, driving in a convoy, exhaust popping or backfiring, racing, for sudden or rapid acceleration. The area covered includes the world famous Zig Zag road and the roundabout near Denbies wine estate.

The decision was taken by the council's March executive committee after 603 people, 62 per cent of those who took part in the consultation, backed the measures – compared with 29 per cent who were against and nine per cent who were undecided. It will remain in place for three years unless renewed with the council estimating it will come into effect this summer once necessary signage is installed.

Councillor Caroline Joseph (Liberal Democrat: Fetcham) said: "The consultation revealed a polarised view about whether a PSPO should be introduced ranging from citing behaviour that it disrupts residents' lives and threatening safety to viewing it as unenforceable and being harmful to local businesses and long-standing biker traditions. "Motorcycle riding at Boxhill and the surrounding area dates back to at least the 1920s from early racing and trials, and the Surrey Hills area remains a popular destination. "It is important to recognise that the vast majority of motorcyclists in this area are considerate people who behave respectfully."

Bike groups are concerned it will impact their long-standing enjoyment of the area and groups. She added: "It's not aimed at spoiling those traditions but it's meant to encourage less antisocial behaviour by those who don't respect the traditional activity of bikers in the area. "The purpose of the order is only to prohibit the behaviours that cause a public nuisance." "The introduction of the PSPO will benefit visitors to the local area and those residents and businesses whose quality of life has been affected by vehicle noise all while not affecting responsible and considerate drivers and riders who use Mole Valley's roads." The council said it was open to extending the order's coverage but would require further consultation – which would need to be done outside the upcoming election period.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Zig Zag Road (image Google)

Local Councillors react to hospital merger idea

4 April 2026



From Councillors Eber Kington (RA) and Steven McCormick (RA)

Dear Editor,

Your article of 26th March exposing the plans by Epsom and St Helier University Hospital Trust to merge with St George's Hospital Trust is most welcome. However, the fact that the decision was taken behind closed doors three weeks ago, without public comment, with no reference on the ESHUHT website, and clearly no intention to engage with residents, is quite alarming.

The stated position, that the Trusts "have not agreed to merge" but will "submit a strategic case for merger to NHS England, asking them to approve developing a full business case" is hard to believe. Of course there is nothing fully worked up, but even a strategic case will have been developed by reviewing and testing options for cost savings such as merging services in single sites or in just two rather than three.

And the fact that patients and residents generally were the last to know of these plans, and only through the press, does not augur well if NHS England does agree that the Trusts can develop a full business case. But if that is what is to happen, the ESHUHT Board must be open from the start about what is within scope of any plan and what is not.

We also note that our own MP was aware of the developing proposal yet also decided not let residents know. She suggests that her priority is to ensure that residents in the Trust area "continue to receive the high-quality healthcare they deserve." However, we believe that most residents in Epsom and Ewell will also want reassurance that those key services are not stripped out of Epsom Hospital and located at St Helier and far away St George's Hospital.

Clearly, the state of the Hospitals' finances is behind this decision, as Epsom, St Helier and St George's Hospitals have all been set targets to clear debts, and Government support is due to be withdrawn over the next three years. However, the need to find ways to deliver current and new services in a more efficient way does not have to be done in secret. It can, and must, be an open process that encourages patients, members of staff, and residents to be part of the work that shapes their hospital services for years to come. And our residents need to know right now, that greater openness will be the case.

Yours

County Councillor Eber Kington and County Councillor Steven McCormick

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Related report:

Epsom Hospital to “merge” with St Georges in Tooting?

Epsom’s Rainbow Centre former operators drive up Leatherhead Leisure Centre visitor numbers

4 April 2026



BBC reports: Visitor numbers are booming at Leatherhead Leisure Centre on the back of major investment to rebuild the site’s reputation, staffing, and facilities. GLL Leisure (former Rainbow Centre contractors) took over management of the centre last year – which at the time had just three full-time staff. Knowing this would be a major issue, the company began recruitment months before the contract took over – leading to it having full management staffing from day one. That, and investing “well over” what they bid on refurbishing the site, together with timetabling tweaks, has seen memberships soar with almost double the amount of visits on last year.

The encouraging figures were presented by GLL Leisure staff to Mole Valley District Council’s March 24 external scrutiny committee. The first phase had been to turn the ship and rebuild reputations. They said: “Leatherhead Leisure Centre had a poor reputation under the previous leisure contractor in respect that the building had deteriorated – and the preservation of the building was the first priority. We also wanted to make sure that we had enough staff to run the building as previously there was a lack of staff. There were literally two lifeguards that we took on and one manager.”

So far the numbers have shown the effort has been worthwhile with memberships at Leatherhead at 4,600 – up 1,800 in just a single year. Visitor numbers soared as well from 260,000 per year in 2024 to 508,000 last year. They believe a similar approach at Dorking Leisure Centre – which GLL Leisure also run, should see similar results.

They added: “We knew Leatherhead was a destination many many years ago and we wanted to get that back. We invested well over what we put in the bid but we had real confidence that it was going to work, and it really has. A lot of people have come from private health clubs to come and use the leisure centre, as part of the new gym development so that’s a real good indicator that people are coming back to public centres rather than spending over the top on private health club provisions.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Image: Leatherhead Leisure Centre (Image Google)

Related reports:

Epsom’s Rainbow Leisure Centre Places new operators

Gold star at the end of the Rainbow

Pot of gold for Rainbow?

“It’s my meeting”: Cllr Dallen stops questions about his role in alleged Rainbow “cover-up”.

Epsom and Ewell Council transparency row erupts as council backs publication of urgent decisions

Cllr Dallen accused of £1/2 m Epsom & Ewell Council cover-up

GLL used to operate the Rainbow Centre but were replaced in October 2025 when Epsom and Ewell Borough Council awarded the contract to Places Leisure. In the coming weeks Epsom and Ewell Times hopes to complete an investigative report on circumstances surrounding the management contracts between Epsom and Ewell Borough Council and the Rainbow Centre operators.

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Surrey University designs new long-life battery

4 April 2026



A new battery design that could significantly extend the range of electric vehicles and the lifespan of portable electronics has been developed by researchers at the University of Surrey's Advanced Technology Institute (ATI).

In a study published in ACS Applied Energy Materials, researchers introduce a novel lithium-ion battery anode that delivers some of the highest energy storage capacities reported for silicon–carbon nanotube systems, while maintaining stability over hundreds of charge cycles.

Lithium-ion batteries power much of modern technology – from smartphones and wearables to electric vehicles. Graphite, the most commonly used anode material, is stable but limited in the amount of energy it can store. Silicon, on the other hand, offers far greater capacity, but it expands during charging, causing it to crack and degrade over time.

To overcome this, the research team developed a new "Vertically Integrated Silicon–Carbon Nanotube" (VISiCNT) structure. The design grows dense forests of carbon nanotubes directly onto copper foil and coats them with a thin layer of silicon, creating a flexible, conductive scaffold that can absorb expansion while maintaining performance.

The resulting anode can store a very large amount of energy for its weight. In laboratory tests, it stored more than 3500 milliampere-hours per gram – close to the maximum possible for silicon and far higher than the graphite (370 mAh/g) used in today's batteries. It also demonstrated improved stability and performance over repeated charge cycles.

Dr Muhammad Ahmad, Research Fellow at the University of Surrey's ATI and lead author of the study, said:

"There's been a growing push for battery innovation, as many of today's technologies are limited by how much energy batteries can store. Our VISiCNT design offers a practical route to harness silicon's huge storage capability without sacrificing cycle life.

"This is a much-needed breakthrough, delivering very high capacity, fast charging and long-term durability, while bringing us closer to batteries that can power electric vehicles and everyday devices for much longer on a single charge."

A key advantage of the new approach is that the carbon nanotubes are grown directly onto copper – the material already used in commercial batteries – using a scalable manufacturing process. This could make it easier to integrate the technology into existing industrial production lines.

Professor Ravi Silva, Principal Investigator and Director of the ATI, said:

"This work is an important step towards bringing CNT-silicon anodes out of the lab and into real-world manufacturing. We can grow carbon nanotube structures directly onto copper foil at speed and tailor the silicon layer for stability, meaning this approach could be integrated into existing battery production lines with minimal disruption. The technology has clear potential not just for electric vehicles, but also for grid storage and smaller batteries used in microelectronics.

"We are very proud to present yet another CNT technology following our initial research in delivering the world's darkest material, VANTA-Black via the university spin-out Surrey NanoSystems Ltd., which is showing real-world impact of fundamental research funded by UKRI."

As demand for energy storage grows, batteries will need to store more energy, charge faster and last longer to support the UK's transition to Net Zero. The VISiCNT design offers a promising route to meeting these challenges and could be key to powering next-generation electric vehicles and phones.

Surrey University

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Epsom Chamber Choir spring bridge across the centuries

4 April 2026



What a glorious evening of music there was to be enjoyed last Saturday night (21st March) in St Martin's Church, Epsom, with the Epsom Chamber Choir accompanied by Affinity Chamber Orchestra. There were two apparently diverse works for the concert, one in each half, having no obvious connection to each other and yet surprisingly intertwined. The conductor was the fine musician Jack Apperley.

A Time to Dance by Alec Roth, performed after the interval, was composed with the idea of being heard alongside the work which opened the concert, Bach's Magnificat. Alec Roth had thought to use very similar instrumental sections as Bach intended when composing the Magnificat, Mary's song of praise to God on learning that she will bear the Messiah. Affinity Chamber Orchestra were therefore the perfect accompaniment to the Chamber Choir for both works, although A Time to Dance added some unusual percussion instead of the timpani for Bach's Magnificat.

The programme notes were very thorough and helpful, reminding the listener of the rich history of Bach's Magnificat and providing background to the composition of the modern work, A Time to Dance. The Choir and Orchestra gave an incredibly uplifting rendering of Bach's Magnificat, a joy to hear with its choral drama and fine arias.

Throughout the concert, the sound was consistently glorious, with impressively clear enunciation from the Choir and very sensitive accompaniment by the Orchestra. The acoustics of St Martin's Church were ideally suited to the extensive dynamic range of both singers and instrumentalists, as well as to the style of both the Magnificat and the modern Roth composition.

The whole concert showcased the exceptional talents of the Chamber Choir singers, as members took all the solos throughout. This followed Bach's original intention when composing the Magnificat and was mirrored beautifully in the storytelling of A Time to Dance. This modern composition proved a tuneful delight, taking the listener through movements depicting Time, the Seasons, times of day, Love and Dance. These themes were inspired by biblical text from Ecclesiastes, chapter 3, alongside both modern and historic poetry used as settings for the various movements.

The audience was treated to an ever-changing variety of words and music for Sunrise, a Spring Morning, Summer Noon, Autumn Evening and Winter Night. After the delights of Spring, with soloists and Choir beginning a journey of joyful reawakening and the encouragement to dance, Summer Noon conveyed a sense of drowsy heat and gently swaying countryside, including text from William Blake's *The Fly*. The Choir and soloists vividly captured the atmosphere of high summer.

In "Humdrum" during Part III, Autumn Evening, the Choir revelled in the fun of song and dance, escaping the daily routine of life. This movement was brought to life by percussive elements including washboard, dinner gong and desk bell. Moving into Winter Night, more delicate musical textures emerged before "A Glee for Winter" burst forth, bringing merriment and evoking love and laughter, with dance once again at its heart.

The final movement, Afterdance: Proper Exercise, saw the Choir put down their scores to sing and clap with visible joy and enthusiasm. The whole work was magnificently performed by both Orchestra and Choir, expressing a vivid sense of dance throughout.

This was an exceptional concert of the highest quality and clearly much appreciated by the audience.

Future concert dates for Epsom Chamber Choir are 27 June, 7 November and 12 December at St Martin's Church, Epsom.

Elizabeth Hargrave

Photo credit: Paul McCan

£200 sports bursary launched for Epsom & Ewell teenagers

4 April 2026

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Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has launched a new bursary scheme aimed at helping young people overcome financial barriers to taking part in sport.

The “Access to Activity” bursary offers up to £200 to help cover the cost of sports club memberships, subscriptions and match fees for 12–15-year-olds living in the borough. It is open to families where children receive free school meals, or where parents or guardians receive Universal Credit, as well as those with care experience.

Applications will open on Monday 30 March 2026 and run until 31 December 2026, or until the available funding has been allocated.

The council says the scheme forms part of its Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which aims to increase physical activity and reduce health inequalities locally. A range of local sports clubs are expected to take part, with more invited to join throughout the year.

Councillor Clive Woodbridge, Chair of the Community & Wellbeing Committee, said: “We know that for many families, the cost of taking part in sport can be a real obstacle. By helping to ease financial pressures, the Access to Activity bursary can help ensure 12–15-year-olds can take part in a sport they enjoy, feel included and thrive.”

He added that the scheme builds on the council’s earlier “Young Legends” programme, extending support to older children while continuing efforts to boost confidence, skills and social connections through sport.

How the scheme works

Eligible applicants must first arrange a taster session with a participating sports club. If they wish to continue, they then complete a council application form, after which the council will confirm next steps.

The grant is a one-off payment, with priority given to residents who have not received similar council funding for physical activity in the past five years. Successful applicants will then enrol directly with their chosen club.

The council notes that awards are discretionary, with no right of appeal for unsuccessful applications, and may be closed early if demand exceeds available funding.

Local sports clubs and community organisations are also encouraged to signpost eligible families to the scheme as part of a wider effort to increase participation in sport among young people in Epsom & Ewell.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Carers “left with nowhere to turn” after Surrey cuts support services?

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Charity warns of risks to 1,500 carers as safety net withdrawn

A Surrey charity has warned that unpaid carers across the county are being pushed “beyond breaking point” following the withdrawal of key support services by Surrey County Council (SCC), a move it says could leave vulnerable residents at risk and increase pressure on hospitals and emergency care.

Crossroads Care Surrey says two critical services — Emergency Care Provision and End of Life support — are being removed, alongside the ending of the Carer Emergency Planning service at the end of March, affecting around 1,500 carers who rely on it as a safety net in times of crisis.

The charity says the decision was made with little notice and without consultation, leaving carers uncertain about what will happen if they are suddenly unable to provide care.

Under the existing system, carers can create emergency plans with named contacts and a guaranteed back-up response if those contacts are unavailable. Crossroads says it is this final layer — the guaranteed emergency response — that is now being removed.

Terry Hawkins, CEO of Crossroads Care Surrey, said: “In an emergency, carers don’t need signposting, they need someone to step in.”

“A false economy” and fears of increased hospital admissions

The charity argues the cuts risk shifting pressure onto already overstretched NHS and social care services, warning that without preventative support, more vulnerable people could end up in hospital or crisis care situations.

It says the current emergency planning service costs around £200 per carer per year, compared with more than £1,200 for a single day in a hospital bed, describing the move as a “false economy”.

Concerns have also been raised about the reliability of alternative arrangements. Crossroads says that in some cases the council’s Emergency Duty Care Team has failed to respond to emergency requests, even with advance notice, citing lack of available resources.

The charity is now launching its own paid-for emergency support scheme, but warns this risks creating a two-tier system where only those who can afford to pay will have access to reliable back-up care.

Human impact: “Without support, families reach breaking point”

The potential consequences are illustrated by the case of Eleanor, 53, who cares for her 13-year-old son Tom, who has severe autism and OCD.

Under intense pressure, Eleanor attempted suicide, triggering an emergency response from Crossroads Care Surrey, which stepped in within hours to care for Tom for over two weeks while she recovered. Without that intervention, Tom would likely have entered emergency social care.

The charity says this is not an isolated case but an example of how quickly carers can reach crisis point without adequate support.

Council response: “Services did not achieve expected impact”

Surrey County Council has defended its decision, saying the contracts with Crossroads Care Surrey are not being renewed because they “failed to achieve the impact we expected” and had lower-than-anticipated take-up.

Sinead Mooney, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, said: “After careful review, we’ve decided to end – or not renew – contracts with Crossroads Care Surrey for carer support services because the contracts have failed to achieve the impact we expected. Take-up has been lower than we intended and we can’t justify continuing to fund the arrangements.”

She added: “We’re absolutely committed to making sure that the transition from these contracts for carers is smooth, responsive and supportive, and we encourage any carer with questions to contact the council directly. In Surrey we go above and beyond our statutory duty to support carers and are committed to using our resources as effectively as we can.”

The council says it will introduce a revised approach, including a one-off £300 wellbeing payment for carers and closer working with NHS partners, and maintains that emergency support will continue through existing social care processes.

Questions over consultation and transparency

Crossroads Care Surrey has questioned how decisions affecting thousands of carers could be made without public consultation or Cabinet scrutiny, and is calling on the council to explain how the changes align with its duties under the Care Act.

The charity warns that unpaid carers — who collectively provide care valued at an estimated £162 billion annually across the UK — are an essential but often overlooked part of the health and care system, and that reducing support risks undermining that foundation.

With the changes due to take effect imminently, carers across Surrey now face uncertainty over what support will be available when they need it most.

Sam Jones – Reporter

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Energy debt fears rise as Epsom’s Good Company’s support steps up

4 April 2026



Rising energy costs could push more households into debt this year, with local support services warning of growing pressure on low-income families.

Good Company (Surrey), which runs the Epsom & Ewell Foodbank, says many of the people it supports are already struggling to keep up with bills. With further increases in gas and electricity prices expected when the energy price cap is reviewed in July, concerns are mounting about the impact on vulnerable households.

Energy debt among clients is already significant, averaging around £900 per household. The charity says this is placing “enormous pressure” on families trying to manage day-to-day living costs.

To help address the issue, Good Company has expanded its programme of energy support workshops. These sessions offer practical advice on reducing energy use and costs, alongside providing items such as energy-efficient appliances and heated blankets to help people stay warm at home.

One participant described the sessions as eye-opening, saying: “So many things! Learning about radiator reflectors, energy surveys, how much a shower costs per hour. Being provided with further info to go away and look into. The £50 voucher and the appliance were a fabulous surprise. Thank you!”

For households already in arrears, the organisation is also offering access to an intensive debt relief programme, working with specialist energy advisers to help people find a sustainable path out of debt. Tom, Participation and Prevention Director at Good Company, said: “At Good Company, we can’t control global events — but we can help local families reduce their energy use, ease the burden of debt, and feel more secure at home.”

Employment support under review

Alongside energy concerns, the charity has been reviewing how well employment and skills support is working locally.

A recent event brought together advisers and senior leaders from local services to discuss findings from research into clients’ experiences. The study found that access to good quality work can make a major difference to financial resilience and wellbeing, but that support is not always reaching those who need it most.

While some people reported positive experiences and success in finding new roles, others highlighted gaps in awareness of available services. There were also concerns about continuity, with some clients losing support when advisers move on, and difficulties accessing training in specific sectors. Some felt held back by a lack of qualifications.

The findings have prompted discussions about improving promotion of employment support through community touchpoints such as GP surgeries, strengthening adviser handovers, and increasing awareness of local training opportunities. Ellie, Community Researcher, said: “This has been a great exercise for us, inspiring us to think about where we can improve our service and maybe even add in some new initiatives.”

New platform aims to join up services

In a further step to improve support, Good Company has launched ReferSurrey, a secure referral platform designed to connect people with a wider network of local services.

The system links users to advice, health and community organisations, with the aim of addressing the underlying causes

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of financial hardship through more coordinated support. Fifteen agencies have already joined, with a further 22 due to come on board shortly.

Call for community support

The charity is also appealing for donations, warning that demand for foodbank and advice services remains high across East Surrey despite the area's perceived affluence.

Rising living costs, accessibility barriers and ongoing inequalities are continuing to drive need, while food donations have fallen. Good Company says regular contributions, even small ones, can help ensure local people are able to access essential support.

"Every contribution, however modest, helps ensure that local people can access the help and support they need, whatever their circumstances. Together, we can build a fairer, more compassionate community where no one is left to struggle alone."

Sam Jones – Reporter



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