EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

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Epsom & Ewell voters urged to prepare for historic Surrey elections

26 March 2026



Residents in Epsom & Ewell are being urged to “get ready to vote” ahead of major local government elections on Thursday 7 May 2026, which will shape how the borough is governed for years to come.

The vote will determine who represents the area on the new East Surrey Council, one of two unitary authorities set to replace Surrey’s current two-tier system in April 2027. Epsom & Ewell will join Elmbridge, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge within the new East Surrey authority.

The change marks the end of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council as a standalone authority, with all local services — from bin collections and housing to roads, education and social care — brought under a single council structure.

A decisive moment for local representation

The councillors elected in May will serve for five years and will initially operate as part of a “shadow authority”, taking key decisions on budgets, council tax, governance structures and staffing ahead of the new council formally taking over in April 2027.

For Epsom & Ewell residents, the elections carry particular weight. The borough has long been dominated by Residents’ Association councillors, but the move to a much larger East Surrey authority — covering a wider political landscape — is expected to dilute that local dominance.

With 72 councillors representing 36 wards across East Surrey, voters will elect two representatives per ward under a first-past-the-post system. The outcome will influence not only local priorities but how strongly Epsom & Ewell’s voice is heard within the new regional structure.

What changes — and what doesn’t

Despite the scale of reform, day-to-day services will continue as normal until April 2027. Existing borough and county councillors will remain in post until then, meaning residents should not see immediate changes to service delivery.

However, decisions made by the newly elected councillors over the next year — including financial planning and organisational structure — will shape how services are delivered in the future.

The elections are also part of a broader shift towards devolution, with proposals for a Surrey-wide strategic authority expected to follow, potentially bringing additional powers over transport, adult education and economic planning.

Key deadlines for voters

To take part in the election, residents must be registered to vote by midnight on 20 April 2026. Voting can take place in person, by post or by proxy.

Those voting in person will need to bring valid photo identification, such as a passport, driving licence or older person’s bus pass. Voters without suitable ID can apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate by 5pm on 28 April.

Applications for postal votes must be submitted by 5pm on 21 April, while proxy vote applications close at 5pm on 28 April.

“Don’t miss your chance”

Election officials are encouraging residents not to miss the opportunity to shape the future of local government.

Mari Roberts-Wood, Returning Officer for the East Surrey elections, said: “Don’t miss your chance to have your say in these important elections. This is your opportunity to choose who represents you on issues that directly affect your day-to-day life in your local area.”

With Epsom & Ewell set to lose its borough council and be absorbed into a much larger authority, the May vote represents one of the most significant changes to local democracy in the area for decades.

Sam Jones – Reporter

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Photo: Dog at a polling station. Chris Caulfield

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

26 March 2026



A major NHS reorganisation affecting Epsom residents appears to have been approved behind closed doors, with no public announcement or consultation to date.

Information shared with the *Epsom and Ewell Times* indicates that St George’s Hospital is set to formally merge with Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust under plans approved by their boards on 5 March.

The proposal, described in NHS terms as a “strategic outline case”, is understood to be the first formal step towards a full merger. If progressed, it would ultimately result in Epsom and St Helier ceasing to exist as a separate organisation, with all services brought under a single management structure.

The development was first reported by Putney News, which described the move as having been agreed “behind closed doors” and without any public announcement or consultation. According to that report, no press release has yet been issued and residents have not been formally informed.

Financial pressures driving change

Documents referenced in the material seen by EET suggest the move is being driven by mounting financial pressures across the hospital group.

The combined shortfall is reported to be around £176 million for the current financial year. While government support has historically offset much of this gap, those payments are now being phased out. St George’s has reportedly been given two years to break even, while Epsom and St Helier has been given three.

Epsom and St Helier is also said to be under formal NHS England supervision in relation to its finances, waiting lists and emergency care performance.

No public consultation announced

Despite the scale of the proposed change, there appears to have been no public consultation process announced.

Material circulated internally suggests that staff have been informed and Integrated Care Boards briefed, but that wider public engagement has not yet taken place.

The apparent lack of transparency may raise concern locally, particularly given previous assurances when the two trusts began closer working in 2021 that they would remain separate statutory organisations.

MP response focuses on patient care

Epsom and Ewell’s MP Helen Maguire said she was aware of the developing proposal but emphasised that patient care must remain the priority.

She said: “I am aware the Trust has put a business case forward to the NHS on the possibility of a merger. From my perspective, my primary concern lies with ensuring that regardless of administrative decisions, residents across my constituency and the wider Trust area continue to receive the high-quality healthcare they deserve. I look forward to meeting with Michael Pantlin to discuss these priorities, and will continue to engage with key stakeholders throughout the process to ensure consistency of service provision.”

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Her comments suggest the proposal remains under consideration at NHS England level, with further discussions expected.

Hospital Management Response

A spokesperson for St George's, Epsom and St Helier Hospitals and Health Group (gesh) said: "We have not agreed to merge – at this stage, we have agreed an intention to submit a strategic case for merger to NHS England, asking them to approve developing a full business case.

"This builds on the work we have already done to strengthen the ties between both Trusts – sharing expertise and resources, whilst leveraging the strengths of our services to further improve patient care.

"We want to reassure people that there are no related planned changes to our services."

Long-term implications for services

If it proceeded the merger could have significant implications for how services are delivered across south-west London and Surrey, including for Epsom residents relying on local provision.

It also comes against the backdrop of delays to the long-promised Specialist Emergency Care Hospital in Sutton, now expected to open in the 2030s rather than mid-2020s.

While NHS leaders are reported to view the merger as a route to achieving Foundation Trust status and improving financial stability, questions remain about how local services may be affected and when residents will be formally consulted.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Mayor opens Primark in Epsom

26 March 2026



Primark has opened a major new store in Epsom's Ashley Centre, drawing large crowds on its first day and appearing to confirm earlier predictions by the Epsom and Ewell Times 13th May 2022, about the likely direction of the town's retail future.

More than 1,000 people queued within the first half hour of opening on 25 March, as the fashion retailer launched its 199th UK store. The 31,400 sq ft outlet spans two floors and offers clothing, accessories, beauty products and homeware, alongside a Click & Collect service.

The arrival of Primark follows ongoing speculation about how large retail spaces in the Ashley Centre would be repurposed in the wake of high street changes. In the Epsom and Ewell Times feature examining potential replacements for the former House of Fraser site, Primark was identified as one of the most plausible candidates to anchor the centre's future retail mix.

That prediction now appears well-founded, with the brand's scale and footfall potential matching the need for a strong "destination" retailer in the town centre. Independent research cited by the company suggests Primark attracts millions of weekly visits nationwide and can generate additional spending in surrounding shops and restaurants.

Any story about Primark is the most avidly followed story in our publication.

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The new store has also brought local employment, with more than 90 staff recruited, including a number returning to work after career breaks and some entering employment for the first time.

Store manager Ewa Klepczuk said the team was “excited to finally open our doors” in Epsom and thanked the community for its early support, while the owners of the Ashley Centre described the opening as a “significant moment” that would boost footfall and strengthen the centre’s position.

For Epsom’s retail landscape, the development may mark more than just a new shop opening. It signals a shift towards high-volume, value-led brands as the backbone of town centre recovery—an outcome the Epsom and Ewell Times had already flagged as the most likely path forward.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

5 Shops that could replace House of Fraser in the Ashley Centre

Primark to open in Epsom

Primark finally indicates a season to open in Epsom

On the Primarks Epsom, ready, steady, go 25th March

Fennies Epsom Continues To Support Local Families As Demand For Quality Childcare Grows

26 March 2026



Established Fennies nursery on 1a Hook Road, Epsom, KT19 8TH, strengthens its role in the community while a new Fennies setting opens nearby in Cheam.

For families across Epsom, access to reliable, high-quality Early Years education remains one of the most important decisions in the early stages of parenthood. At Fennies Epsom, Hook Road, that responsibility is one the team takes seriously. Over recent years, the nursery has become a familiar and trusted presence within the local community, supporting working parents while providing a nurturing environment where children can build confidence and a strong foundation for learning.

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Situated on Hook Road, the nursery is designed to nurture every stage of a child's development. Children aged three months to five years can explore carefully curated rooms, including:

· Two Explorers rooms, with dedicated milk kitchen and nappy change areas
· One Discoverers Room designed to encourage independence
· One Creators room with dedicated reading areas
· One Inventors room with free-flow garden access
· A dedicated studio space for young chefs and budding artists to explore
· A vibrant outdoor space that encourages curiosity and creativity

Fennies Epsom follows a child-led approach, giving children the freedom to explore their interests while building independence and essential life skills. Families are invited to make the most of communal spaces such as the Parent Room, while practical touches like on-site buggy parking make everyday routines easier.

At the heart of the nursery's approach is a carefully considered curriculum designed to reflect both the needs of modern families and the curiosity of young children. Practitioners at Fennies Epsom, Hook Road focus on creating meaningful learning experiences that feel engaging and relevant, balancing structured opportunities with space for children to explore their own interests. The emphasis is on nurturing adaptable, confident individuals who feel secure in their environment and excited about learning.

"Blending child-led exploration with purposeful guidance, the curriculum celebrates imagination, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and STEM-inspired discovery," said Eleanor Richfield, Head of Education at Fennies. "It empowers children to communicate confidently and adapt to change, supporting children to enjoy the now whilst developing the lifelong skills they need to thrive."

Fennies Nurseries is also proud to announce the opening of its newest setting just 15 minutes down the road in Cheam. Fennies Cheam marks the group's 25th nursery, continuing more than three decades of delivering outstanding early learning experiences across London, Surrey, Kent, Middlesex and Berkshire.

With its passionate team, inspiring spaces and a focus on each child's individual journey, Fennies Cheam is ready to help families in the area feel supported and inspired every day. Located at 91 Worcester Road, Sutton, SM2 6QL, the nursery is accessible for busy, commuting parents.

"The garden at Fennies Cheam is amazing, and so much natural light fills the building," said Emma Carrington, Nursery Manager at Fennies Cheam. "We have lots of new resources, and the dedicated studio space will be a fantastic learning environment for the children."

To learn more about Fennies Cheam, book a tour, or register your interest by contacting enquiries@fennies.com.

Sponsored article Fennies Nurseries

Photo: Fennies Nursery in Hook Road Epsom

Oxshott Uproar as 800 Object to Green Belt Housing Plan

26 March 2026

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More than 800 objections later, a controversial plan for 250 new homes on green belt land in Oxshott is set to be decided by a planning committee, and the recommendation is for approval.

Amidst traffic concerns, infrastructure worries and wanting to protect the green belt, councillors must decide if this huge village expansion in Oxshott is to go ahead.

Elmbridge Borough Council's planning committee will consider the outline application for Clouds Hill Farm on Wednesday, March 25.

The proposal would see existing buildings on the 23-hectare site demolished to make way for a new housing estate, along with roads, parking, public open space and a "suitable alternative natural greenspace" (SANG).

At this stage, only the access points from Leatherhead Road and Woodlands Lane are being decided, with details like layout, design and landscaping to come later if permission is granted. The homes are expected to be two to three storeys high.

Planning officers have recommended approval, arguing that, on balance, the benefits outweigh the harm.

They say the scheme would help deliver new housing, including affordable homes, and could meet national planning rules for building on so-called "grey belt" land. Surrey County Council highways officers have also raised no objection, subject to improvements.

But the application has sparked a major backlash locally. More than 800 letters of objection from over 600 households have been submitted, citing worries about traffic, safety and pressure on local services.

Residents say the area's roads are already congested and fear an extra 250 homes would make things worse, particularly along the busy Leatherhead Road.

Others argue that the village lacks the infrastructure of schools, GP surgeries and public transport to support a development of this size.

Environmental concerns have also been raised heavily. Objectors warn the plans would mean the loss of Green Belt land, wildlife habitats and trees, and question whether the development can genuinely deliver the required biodiversity net gain. Some have also flagged flood risk and drainage issues.

Campaign groups and residents' associations have gone further, claiming the site is not in a sustainable location and that the project could permanently change the character of the area.

People claim there is not much public transport in the area so there will be a heavy reliance on on cars, making the quiet Surrey village busier.

Support for the scheme has been far more limited, with a small number of submissions pointing to the need for more housing and potential improvements to walking and cycling routes.

If councillors agree with officers, outline permission will be granted, but only if the developer signs a legal agreement to secure key contributions, including affordable housing, environmental mitigation and transport measures.

If that deal is not finalised within six months, the application could still be refused.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Photo: Stables and outbuildings at Clouds Hill Farm, Oxshott. (Credit: Fairmile Group Ltd./Elmbridge Borough Council planning documents).

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Epsom Stung by Late Blow as Salts Denied by Handball Drama

26 March 2026

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Epsom & Ewell FC 2 – Fleet Town FC 3. Combined Counties Premier League. Saturday 21st March. Easy as HGV Stadium.

The Salts were back in action for the fourth time in eight days, with another game looming on Tuesday, as they travelled to Calthorpe Park. Kit Lawrence-Fletcher returned in goal after being rested for the midweek cup tie. Callum Wilson and Antonios Nazareth came into central defence, replacing the ill Toby Young and Prince Aderogba, who dropped to the bench. Callum O'Keeffe returned to central midfield with Ore Allen unavailable, while Tom Collins and Craig Dundas completed a raft of changes to the starting line-up. Obasanjo Akinniranye was named among the substitutes, with Luke Miller not in the squad.

Epsom & Ewell made an energetic start, creating early chances and forcing Fleet's goalkeeper into action. Tom Collins should have opened the scoring in the opening minutes when clean through, but delayed his shot and was closed down by the keeper, who made a good save. The bright start was rewarded on 12 minutes when Courtney Swaby scored from a cross-come-shot that travelled across the box to give the Salts a deserved lead.

Fleet responded quickly. Charlie Postance equalised on 19 minutes, and just three minutes later Savio Shan completed the turnaround, leaving the Salts trailing despite their positive opening.

The second half began in disappointing fashion, with Fleet adding a third goal within a minute of the restart. However, Epsom & Ewell showed strong character and responded almost immediately. From a corner on 48 minutes, a goalmouth scramble saw substitute Zak Shabir head the ball back into the six-yard box, where Stefan Aiwone forced it home to reduce the deficit.

The Salts continued to press for an equaliser and maintained good attacking pressure throughout the half. Their efforts were nearly rewarded at the death, but a clear handball appeal in the Fleet penalty area from the final action of the game went unpunished by the referee, denying them a potential route back into the match.

Despite a committed performance, the Salts were left to rue a couple of soft goals and a key decision that went against them. With teams around them picking up points, Tuesday's trip to Chipstead and Saturday's visit to Guildford City now take on added importance in the push for the points needed to secure safety.

Epsom and Ewell FC Media

Epsom's UCA hosts delegation from Nigeria

26 March 2026



A new Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between University for the Creative Arts (UCA), Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Economy and the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC) from Nigeria, marking a strengthening collaboration between the UK and Nigeria's vibrant creative and cultural industries.

The signing of the agreement was the key event in a visit of UCA's Surrey campuses in Farnham and Epsom by a Nigerian delegation, which was part of the Nigerian President's week-long state visit to the Royal family in the UK.

Signing the agreement was the Honourable Minister of Arts, Culture, Tourism and Creative Economy of Nigeria, Hannatu Musa Musawa; the Director General of the National Council for Arts and Culture, Obi Asika; and UCA's Joint Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mark Ellul.

Prof. Ellul remarked: "We're delighted to sign this agreement and strengthen our deepening relationship with Nigeria's

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creative and cultural industries.

“We’re pleased to be able to join the rallying call for an institutional commitment that aligns our expertise in creative higher education with Nigeria’s ambition to build lasting relationships that positions its creative economy as a central pillar to their economic diversification and youth empowerment.”

The Honourable Minister, Hannatu Musa Musawa commented: “Nigeria is proud to formalise its partnership with the University for the Creative Arts (UCA), marking a significant milestone in advancing the nation’s creative industry and creative economy.

“This collaboration reflects a shared commitment to innovation, talent development, and institutional exchange, building on sustained engagement with key stakeholders including the National Council for Arts and Culture and the Nigeria Governors Forum.

“The agreement underscores a forward-looking vision to strengthen bilateral ties between Nigeria and the United Kingdom, driving long-term growth and global competitiveness across the creative sector.”

Joining the Minister and Director General were multiple creative leaders from Nigeria and the UK including the British Council, the UK Department for Business and Trade, Bank of Industry Nigeria, Nigerian Film Corporation, DG of National Institute for Hospitality and Tourism, Nigeria, Senior Special Advisers to the Minister, VC and Pro Vice from University of Abuja.

The delegation received a tour of UCA’s industry-grade facilities in traditional and emerging arts at its School of Creative & Cultural Industries in Farnham and School of Creative Business, Fashion & Enterprise in Epsom. They also engaged in a panel discussion about UK–Nigerian Creative and Cultural Collaboration.

Director General, Obi Asika, added: “National Council of Arts and Culture (NCAC) is delighted to have convened the Honourable Minister Hannatu Musa Musawa, the Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Economy of Nigeria (FMACTCE), and UCA in the UK, to advance a bold global knowledge and curriculum partnership designed to unlock the full potential of Nigeria’s creative industry and creative economy.

“Strengthened by our ongoing collaboration with the Nigerian Governors Forum (NGF) established in 2025 and aligned with the UK–Nigeria co-working group under Enhanced Trade and Investment Partnership (ETIP), where I serve as Co-Chair for Nigeria with Hon Florence Eshalomi, Mp, as Co-Chair for the UK, this milestone moment brings together influential leaders across the public and private sectors to drive innovation, talent development, and sustainable growth across the creative ecosystem.”

Many talented creatives from Nigeria are already studying at UCA, across disciplines such as film, fashion, design, animation, and digital media, and making a lasting impact across UCA’s three campuses – bringing fresh perspectives, cultural richness, and creative excellence that continue to enrich the university’s global community.

By recognising Nigeria’s ambition to promote its nation’s cultural and creative industries, UCA will utilise its expertise to further help it grow and sustain the next generation of creative talent and cultural leaders globally.

University for the Creative Arts

Photo: Nigerian delegation at The Wells, UCA in Epsom

Epsom & Ewell Silver Band Delivers Strong Performance at 2026 Regional Championships

26 March 2026



STEVENAGE, March 21, 2026 — The Epsom & Ewell Silver Band took to the stage today at the Gordon Craig Theatre for the London & Southern Counties Regional Brass Band Championships, competing in the highly competitive First Section.

Under the expert baton of Musical Director Tariq Ahmed, the band delivered a polished performance of this year’s set work, Variations on Was Lebet by Andrew Wainwright.

2026 First Section Results

The adjudicators, David Hirst and Steven Mead, faced a difficult task in a field of 14 high-quality bands. While Fulham

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Brass and the East of England Co-op Band secured the top two spots to qualify for the National Finals, Epsom & Ewell earned a respectable placing, further cementing their status in the section.

Looking Ahead

The result marks another year of solid progress for the band. Speaking after the results, members expressed pride in the performance, noting the significant step up in technical demands this year.

Fans won't have to wait long to hear the band again; they are already preparing for their popular Summer Concert in the Walled Garden, scheduled for July 12th at the Old Moat Garden Centre.

Epsom & Ewell Silver Band website – www.eesb.org.uk

Steven McCormick

Photo credit – the author

Epsom and Ewell countryside volunteers face uncertain times

26 March 2026



Epsom and Ewell's army of countryside volunteers faces uncertain times as responsibility for protecting the borough's wildlife habitats shifts next year to a new East Surrey council. The fear is that nature conservation will slide down the priority list during the upheaval of local government reform.

Dozens of local people turn out in all weathers to help nature thrive in places such as Epsom Common, Horton Country Park and on the Hogsmill, an internationally rare chalk stream where water voles were reintroduced last year. More than 40 percent of the borough is open space for the public and visitors to enjoy, or other green belt land. Their work varies widely from opening up woodland glades and removing invasive plants to tending orchards and laying woodchip footpaths. Caring for juniper bushes, which are critically declining in Britain, is an important task on the Epsom Downs.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council leads much of this conservation work, supervising the volunteers and organising contractors to carry out bigger jobs. However, it is due for abolition under a major shakeup of local government when East Surrey takes over in April 2027. Little is known about how the countryside, which provided residents with uncrowded space to exercise and enjoy nature during the Covid pandemic, will be managed in future. Work on the transfer of powers has only just begun, and where the new council will be based has yet to be decided.

Local people caring for local nature

Amid the uncertainty, volunteers are anxious to ensure that local people keep caring for local nature, and that residents retain ready access to their woods, wildflower meadows and riverbanks. "To preserve what we've got takes a lot of work, and in Epsom and Ewell it's largely done by volunteers. My concern is it continues to get done," said David Dixon, a volunteer for the past 10 years. "Volunteers are not going to travel 20 miles to do it, they want to do it locally. The worry is that it'll be subsumed into some sort of central authority who won't know the local areas, who won't really know the tasks that are needed," said Dixon, one of a roughly 10-strong group led by the Council's Countryside Team that meets every Thursday.

Volunteers in various countryside groups collectively work about 8,800 hours a year in the borough. Their task is to maintain and improve the biodiversity of local sites which are home to the likes of kingfishers, endangered great crested newts and a rare population of all five UK species of hairstreak butterfly. Native roe deer also roam, peregrine falcons visit from a nearby nest and cuckoos are once again heard, all within a stone's throw of the town centre.

Risks and opportunities

The aggregate hours figure has been collated by Dave King, who chairs the Epsom Common Association (ECA), and Geoff Delamere, a countryside volunteer since 2018. In a briefing paper they detail the risks and opportunities raised by the reform which will replace Surrey's two levels of local government with a single tier. https://bit.ly/4bvgZnR

At a time when council budgets are under heavy strain those 8,800 hours equate notionally to almost £112,000 worth of voluntary labour a year, based on the National Living Wage rate. Volunteer work keeps down the cost of managing the borough's two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), five Local Nature Reserves and six ancient woodlands. "We're

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pretty good value for money," said King. The ECA's EcoVols group works on the Common two days a month for much of the year, with 10–15 volunteers typically turning out.

Epsom and Ewell's professional countryside officers are paid from the Council budget but they amount to just three full time equivalent staff. Most of the work they lead is funded externally, largely from UK government countryside stewardship schemes. When they aren't working outdoors, Council officers may be at a computer applying for such funding or environmental grants from other sources.

A vision for nature

The modest cost of countryside management means it risks being overshadowed by much bigger budget items that East Surrey will take over. "I fear that wildlife and nature reserves may be well down the priority list," said King. "We need people who understand the site, have a vision for the site." ECA volunteers also make charcoal for sale and check the welfare of cattle that graze the Common in the summer.

A new body, East Surrey Joint Committee, is overseeing the transition and aims to ensure all services move smoothly into the new arrangement. It met for the first time only in January and will work until voters elect East Surrey councillors on May 7. East Surrey will then act as a shadow authority until April 1 next year when it takes over, with the borough continuing to run services in the meantime. Ultimately, decisions about how countryside management, including volunteering, are funded and run will be made by the East Surrey Council.

Countryside management is not the only thing surrounded by uncertainty. Arrangements have to be made for the wide range of services currently provided by Surrey's 11 borough and district councils, all of which will be subsumed into either West or East Surrey.

Knowledge and expertise

Epsom and Ewell has a large body of other volunteers working in everything from litterpicking to helping run Bourne Hall Museum. Council leader Hannah Dalton, who sits on the East Surrey Joint Committee, did not respond to a request for comment. However, Residents' Association councillor Liz Frost, chair of the borough's Environment Committee, expressed gratitude for countryside volunteers. "Their essential work, local knowledge and expertise help ensure that our residents and visitors can enjoy easy access to nature and open spaces across the borough," she said in a statement.

Such work relies on council leadership and support. The Thursday group attended by Dixon and Delamere is run directly by the Epsom and Ewell Countryside Team, which draws up a work programme, provides equipment and supervises the volunteers. The group typically cuts back undergrowth to allow veteran trees – some more than 300 years old – space to flourish. In the spring they erect electric fencing so that cattle, including the gentle "Belties" – Belted Galloways marked by broad white stripes around their bellies – can graze and help maintain habitats.

Feargal Sharkey support

At other times volunteers uproot Himalayan balsam, a colourful but highly invasive Victorian import which chokes native vegetation along many of Britain's rivers, including the Hogsmill. Volunteers also control ragwort in Nonsuch Park, allowing grassland to be mown for hay, which must be free of the plant as it is harmful to horses. The park has its own volunteer team, the Nonsuch Voles.

Such work is hard but rewarding. "It's the most enjoyable 'job' I've had," said Delamere. "It's outdoors and good exercise, as well as being useful for the environment and biodiversity." He added that companionship and learning new skills are key benefits, along with positive comments from passers-by. "Long may this mix of professionals and volunteers continue."

On Epsom Common, the Council Countryside Team agrees a conservation programme for the independently-run EcoVols to carry out. "They do a lot for us," said King, noting work such as scrub clearance and chainsaw operations. "We cost about a pound per volunteer hour," he added.

Skylarks and kestrels

Other groups operate across wider areas including Epsom and Ewell. The Lower Mole Partnership works throughout northeast Surrey and neighbouring Kingston, while the Surrey Wildlife Trust manages Priest Hill where skylarks and kestrels are commonly seen. The Woodland Trust owns Langley Vale Wood, and the South East Rivers Trust is active on the Hogsmill. Local volunteer groups also include the Epsom and Ewell Tree Advisory Board and the Friends of Horton Country Park.

Much of this work is not discretionary. Environmental legislation requires biodiversity to be enhanced, so these efforts must continue into the future. "Volunteers are going to have to work locally," said Dixon. "And the people who decide what has to be done are going to have to have a good local knowledge."

David Stamp is a member of the Epsom and Ewell Borough Council countryside volunteers group.

Photo: A volunteer clears undergrowth in Horton Country Park

Related reports:

Epsom Common 19th Green Flag Award

Epsom Common Association: A History of Conservation and Biodiversity

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Epsom on road to twin with world-famous Ukraine town of Bucha

26 March 2026



BBC reports: Epsom and Ewell has taken the first step towards twinning with a Ukrainian town.

Epsom & Ewell councillors have backed plans to explore a twinning link with the Ukrainian town of Bucha. At a strategy and resources committee meeting on March 17, councillors voted to set up a small working group to look into the proposal before any final decision is made.

The idea, introduced earlier by the council, would see Epsom & Ewell formally linked with Bucha. The town became known around the world after atrocities against civilians in 2022, but which is now seen as a symbol of resilience and rebuilding.

Opening the discussion, public speaker **Lionel Blackman** (Director of Surrey Stands With Ukraine) told the committee the borough had already shown “extraordinary generosity and compassion” towards Ukraine. He pointed to millions of pounds in aid raised locally, support for refugee families, and community events celebrating Ukrainian culture.

“Bucha is a community that mirrors Epsom in many ways,” Blackman said. “It is similar in size and character and like Epsom it sits close to its nation’s capital around 25km from Kyiv. Much as Epsom lies within easy reach of London.”

He said twinning would be a natural next step, stressing it would not be about sending aid, but about building long-term links. “This is about friendship: cultural, educational and civic connections,” he said, adding that much of the work would be handled by a volunteer-led Bucha-Epsom Association rather than the council itself.

What was actually agreed?

A three-member working group will now be formed to look at the practicalities, including costs, risks and how the partnership would work in reality. They are expected to report back in the summer before any final decision is taken.

Despite the differing views on the process, there was broad agreement on one thing: support for Ukraine and the idea behind the twinning itself.

Some concerns raised

But not everyone was convinced the process needed to slow down. Some councillors questioned why a working group was needed at all, arguing it could delay a relatively simple decision. Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative Horton) warned the extra layer of process risked the opportunity “drifting”, while Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) said previous working groups had a habit of dragging on “forever”.

Cllr **Lucie McIntyre** (RA West Ewell) , however, said taking time to get the details right was essential and a working group would be the best means of doing so. Cllr **James Lawrence** (LibDem now Independent – College) agreed, and said the councils should know what it is endorsing.

Councillors raised concerns about how much officer time the project might take up, especially with major local government changes on the horizon. and said the council needed a clearer picture of the organisation it was being asked to back.

In the end, the committee agreed to press ahead cautiously. If it eventually goes ahead, the link would make Bucha Epsom & Ewell’s first new twin town in decades.

Emily Dalton BBC LDRS

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Woking bankruptcy sell off

26 March 2026



Woking Borough Council is selling off its flagship regeneration projects – including the town's new Hilton Hotel and shopping centres to private investors to claw back public money – branded a "sad" and "sobering" reality of the bankruptcy. The small council gained infamy when it went bust in 2023 as the most heavily indebted borough in the country. It has dragged itself through huge job cuts and service reductions to address its £2.6 billion black hole and now come some of its costliest investments.

It's leadership has agreed to market Victoria Square, Wolsey Place, Alexander House and energy company Thameswey Milton Keynes Ltd, in an effort to claw back some of the public money torpedoed into its doomed ventures between 2016 and 2019. Speaking at the Wednesday, March 18 executive committee was the portfolio holder for finance, Councillor Dale Roberts. He said: "The work of understanding and unravelling the council's commercial structures has weighed heavily at times and that is in large part because of the scale of what we inherited. Hundreds of millions of pounds of public money invested through complex commercial structures. At times it has felt like we've been asked to work on the world's most expensive jigsaw puzzle. Being able to bring these matters forward openly, with proper governance and transparency is therefore both a relief and a sign of the progress the council has made. It quickly became clear the first task was not to make immediate decisions about assets and companies but to ensure we had the right governance, reporting, controls in place to understand what we owned and how those companies and those assets were performing."

Victoria Square Woking, including the Hilton Hotel where the council paid for its cutlery, will be sold off – although the car parks will be split off and retained by the council. Wolsey Place Shopping Centre, together with Wolsey Walk residential units, Alexander House and Export House, and units owned by Victoria Square will be combined into another single entity to maximise value. The council's energy company – which supplies exclusive power to Victoria Square – will also be sold, with officers confident a specialist company could successfully fold the firm into an existing operation. A key element in the Thameswey sale is a debt for equity swap that will convert the council's existing loans into shares but banks a historic loss of about £42m associated with the investment.

Cllr Steve Greentree (Liberal Democrats: Knaphill) said: "It's sad to see the £42m loss in a venture that should never have been put at risk by a local borough council in a geography that is no way related to Woking." Cllr Ian Johnson, portfolio holder for housing said: "My overwhelming feeling is that of disappointment. Finally we will rid ourselves of something that has been a drain on our resources." He added: "It's fairly sobering isn't it but it's the right thing to do."

The sales had long been expected as part of the Government's effective bailout programme where it has already pledged about £500m to the borough. Further help has been held back until the Government knows what the council banks in asset sales. Borough leader, Cllr Ann-Marie Barker said: "It's been a very long-term ambition of this administration to sell Thameswey. It's costing us money, it's not contributing to our role as a council to deliver services for local people." Final approval of any deals will need the approval of full council.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Image: Hilton in Woking (Google)

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Guildford goes a different way to Epsom with Parish Council on a narrow margin

26 March 2026

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Guildford Borough Council has approved plans for a new town council despite warnings from its own leader that the move could hit the borough's most financially disadvantaged residents hardest.

Council leader Cllr Julia McShane said the consultation results showed a pattern, with people in poorer areas more likely to oppose the plan with fears of extra costs.

She told councillors: "I have a deeply held conviction that we must work with our communities and not do to our communities." She added the decision "disregards the outcome of the consultation" and the financial pressures facing residents.

Despite this, councillors voted to press ahead with proposals to ask the new West Surrey authority to create a parish-style council for Guildford from April 2027, with £300,000 set aside for set-up costs.

The new council would be funded through a precept, an extra charge on council tax, starting at around £69 a year for a Band D property, with the potential to rise.

The decision follows a public consultation involving more than 3,000 residents, which revealed a near even split: 46.5 per cent in favour and 47.1 per cent against. Turnout was just over 6 per cent, although this was higher than similar consultations elsewhere in Surrey.

"We stand at a critical juncture," Cllr Vanessa King said. "This […] is about protecting the residents' voices and deciding how the unique character of this ancient town will be preserved for the future […] How does Guildford keep its own voice in a much larger authority?" She stressed the result "is not a referendum", meaning councillors were not obliged to follow it but debate the reasons.

But critics said pushing ahead lacked a clear mandate. Cllr Bob Hughes said: "Six per cent turnout is not a ringing endorsement… we can't just keep going until we get the answer we want," warning residents would "pay through the nose" due to the uncapped nature of the precept.

Cllr Joss Bigmore echoed concerns about fairness, calling it "effectively lumping a regressive tax on those who can afford it the least". However, he acknowledged the future West Surrey council is likely to face major financial pressures of its own, which could limit its ability to maintain local services.

Supporters argued the town council could help fill that gap. Cllr George Potter said opposition was largely driven by confusion and concern over cost, rather than outright rejection, and warned that not creating a parish could disadvantage vulnerable residents in the long term.

Cllr Richard Lucas added that the financial modelling was based on "very conservative assumptions" and said more could be done to explore other funding sources.

The plans come amid wider local government reorganisation, meaning Guildford Borough Council can no longer create the parish itself. The final decision will now rest with the incoming West Surrey authority, which will decide whether the town council goes ahead.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Guildford high street buildings, town centre. (Credit: Emily Dalton/LDRS)

Sun sets on Residents' Associations' cherished Parishes for Epsom and Ewell

Epsom and Ewell to ditch Parish Councils plan

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Rare moth rediscovery secures conservation status for Epsom's Manor Open Space

26 March 2026

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Manor Open Space in Epsom has been designated a Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI), recognising its ecological value and role in supporting wildlife across the borough.

The designation, made by the Surrey Local Sites Partnership, highlights several important features of the site, including veteran oak trees and the presence of the extremely rare moth *Coleophora conspicuella* (Knapweed Case-bearer). The species had not been recorded in Surrey for around 100 years before its rediscovery at the site in 2024.

The open space also plays a key role as a wildlife corridor, linking Epsom Common and Horton Country Park local nature reserves. This connection enables the movement of species between habitats and strengthens the borough's wider ecological network.

SNCIs, also known as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation or Local Wildlife Sites, are non-statutory designations that identify areas of high biodiversity value. While not legally protected in themselves, they are recognised in planning and conservation decisions and help safeguard important habitats and species at a local level.

Cllr **Liz Frost** (RA Woodcote and Langley), Chair of the Environment Committee, said the designation reflected both the ecological importance of the site and the work of those maintaining it.

"We are proud that Manor Open Space has been recognised for the important role it plays in supporting resilient ecosystems across the borough," she said. "Through our Biodiversity Action Plan, we can protect our natural heritage, and the presence of veteran oak trees along with the discovery of extremely rare moth species reflects the dedication of everyone involved in caring for our habitats.

"This SNCI designation is a testament to the hard work, diligence and passion of our Countryside team, partners and much valued volunteers who continually strive to improve our green spaces for the benefit of our community. Their commitment ensures that these habitats will be enjoyed for many years to come."

The Surrey Local Sites Partnership, which oversees the selection of SNCIs, brings together Surrey County Council, Surrey Wildlife Trust, district and borough councils and independent ecological experts under the Surrey Nature Partnership. The group identifies and manages both nature conservation sites and Regionally Important Geological Sites across the county.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Biodiversity Action Plan aims to protect, maintain and enhance biodiversity locally, taking into account priorities at regional, national and international levels. This work sits alongside the council's Climate Change Action Plan 2025–2029, which sets out measures to reduce emissions and promote environmental sustainability across the borough.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Photo: Manor-Open-Space-springtime-Cuckoo-Flower-in-the-foreground

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An evening song preludes a Mass and a Requiem by Epsom Choral Society

26 March 2026

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This concert at St Martin's Church, Epsom, was another milestone in the life of one of the town's cultural jewels, its Choral Society. The German Requiem by Johannes Brahms was coupled with two pieces by his contemporary and friend Josef Rheinberger – *Abendlied* and the *Mass in E Flat* – providing an effective and well-matched prelude to the main work.

Rheinberger's *Abendlied*, composed when he was just fifteen (and later revised), brought a warm six-part choral texture well suited to the spacious acoustic of St Martin's. The performance was well controlled, with clear communication between choir and conductor. His *Mass for Double Choir* (1878), rooted in Renaissance tradition but shaped by Romantic language, offered greater contrasts of dynamics and texture. These were generally well realised, though from some positions the antiphonal effect of the two choirs was less distinct. The *Gloria* made a strong impact with tight ensemble in the louder passages, while the restrained drama of the *et sepultus est* in the *Credo* was sensitively handled. The confident entries of the *Sanctus* contrasted effectively with the quieter close of the *Benedictus*, and the atmospheric *Agnus Dei* provided a fitting conclusion to a thoughtful performance of this substantial work.

Brahms's *German Requiem* is not a liturgical setting but a deeply personal reflection on remembrance. Taking years to complete, it stands as a work of remarkable craftsmanship and cohesion. Here it was performed using Iain Farrington's seven-part accompaniment for three strings, three wind and piano. This arrangement proved effective, avoiding the balance challenges of a full orchestra, though at times the upper strings felt slightly underpowered.

The choir was central to the performance and rose impressively to the challenge. From the opening movement, there was a strong sense of confidence, contrast and atmosphere. The ensemble supported the second movement effectively, with particularly dramatic forte and fortissimo passages, although the fugal writing was not always fully clear.

Baritone soloist Dominic Sedgewick delivered a confident and commanding account in the third movement, matched by accurate and responsive choral singing in demanding passages. While some contrapuntal textures lacked clarity, the movement concluded strongly. The well-known fourth movement was rendered with tenderness, its fugal sections particularly successful, alongside Brahms's shifting rhythmic patterns.

Soprano Elizabeth Findon was equally impressive in the fifth movement, her clarity and projection standing out. Balance across the ensemble was generally good, though harder to assess from nearer seating positions. The sixth movement maintained a strong tempo and opened effectively, building to a final section of conviction and a powerful conclusion.

The final movement began with excellent balance, including a particularly effective passage pairing soprano/alto with tenor/bass lines. The closing pages sustained the expressive intensity that characterised the performance throughout. This was a demanding work, requiring stamina and commitment, both of which were clearly evident. Epsom Choral Society can be proud of a performance that amounted to a genuine triumph, with the enthusiasm of its members and an influx of new singers pointing to a strong future.

Peter Lutton

*Evening song

Junior golf booming at Epsom's Horton Golf Park as membership tops 300

26 March 2026



Junior golf is thriving in Epsom, with Horton Golf Park announcing that its junior membership has now surpassed 300 young players.

The milestone reflects a steady rise in participation among local families, with the venue becoming an increasingly popular destination for children and teenagers looking to take up the sport in a relaxed and accessible setting.

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Set within the Horton Country Park estate, the facility offers a mix of golf opportunities suited to beginners and developing players alike. Its two courses — a full-length 18-hole course and a shorter 9-hole layout — alongside a floodlit driving range and practice areas, provide a flexible environment for juniors to learn and progress at their own pace.

The club's efforts have been formally recognised, with Horton Golf Park designated as a Junior Hub by England Golf and the UK Golf Federation. The status highlights its role in nurturing young talent and widening access to the game within the community.

Golf Operations lead Phill Wilmer, who works closely with many of the club's younger members, said the growth has been striking.

"It's fantastic to see so many young people enjoying golf and spending time at the club. Golf is a brilliant sport for developing confidence, patience and social skills, and we're proud to see so many local juniors embracing the game."

General Manager Gareth Bullock echoed that sentiment, pointing to the strong family appeal of the venue.

"We're incredibly proud to now have more than 300 junior members. It's great to see so many local children and families choosing Horton Golf Park as a place to play golf and spend time together."

Horton Golf Park has built its reputation on accessibility, offering affordable pay-and-play options alongside structured coaching programmes and junior pathways. Its informal, family-friendly ethos contrasts with more traditional private members' clubs, helping to break down barriers often associated with the sport.

With numbers continuing to rise, the club says it is keen to expand opportunities for young players even further, reinforcing its position as one of the borough's key grassroots sporting hubs.

Further details about junior membership and coaching opportunities can be found on the club's website.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Ewell school goes safe streets ahead

26 March 2026



Danetree Primary School in Ewell is set to benefit from a School Street from May 2026, aimed at reducing air pollution and improving road safety during the busiest times of the day.

Danetree Road, Danetree Close, Oakhurst Road and a portion of Chessington Road will be open to pedestrians, cyclists and wheelers only between 8:00am and 9:00am and 2.30pm to 3.45pm, Monday to Friday during school term time. Exemptions will apply for residents, carers, school transport and blue badge holders accessing the school.

The move follows the successful rollout of the county's first School Street at Farnham Heath End School in April 2025, where there has already been a 62 per cent reduction in cars entering and exiting the road. In the week before the scheme was introduced, 1,227 vehicles were recorded turning in or out of Bullers Road at school drop-off and pick-up times, compared to 470 once the scheme was in place.

Potters Gate Church of England Primary School in Farnham was the second school to benefit from the School Streets programme.

Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth, said: "By restricting motor vehicle access during peak times of the day, we can create safer, healthier and more pleasant environments for everyone walking, cycling and scooting to school. I'm delighted with the positive results we have already seen in Farnham and am pleased we are able to roll the scheme out further. School Streets are a key part of our overall programme to improve road safety, promote more sustainable school travel and reduce air pollution around schools. We're investing £3m to improve road safety and encourage more walking, cycling and wheeling. We're also continuing to deliver Feet First walking training and Bikeability cycling training to provide lifelong road safety skills for Surrey's school children."

For more information about School Streets in Surrey, visit the county council's website.

Surrey County Council

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Photo: Danetree Road. Danetree Road, West Ewell, just outside of Danetree Junior School Tony Grant. Licence details

Epsom’s Cllr McCormick gives Middlesex revival the irregular iambic treatment

26 March 2026



Historic nostalgia could be upheld in naming a new Surrey council next year. Surrey County Council has backed a symbolic call to recognise Middlesex in the name of a future unitary authority. But councillors were all too aware the proposal had no legal power in officially changing the name.

This move comes amid plans to abolish all 12 of Surrey’s existing borough, district and county councils and create two mega authorities to replace them, East Surrey and West Surrey. Middlesex was effectively abolished in 1965 and outside the living memory for many residents.

A majority of councillors supported a motion asking the government to name one of the new authorities “West Surrey and South Middlesex” as part of local government reorganisation due in 2027. Members voted 32 in favour, eight against with 24 abstentions at a full Surrey County council meeting on March 17.

The proposal, put forward by Robert Evans OBE (Stanwell and Stanwell Moor), centred on Spelthorne’s long-standing ties to historic Middlesex. The borough is the only part of the old county that ended up in Surrey after boundary changes in the 1960s, and remains the only Surrey district north of the River Thames.

Cllr Evans told the chamber the Middlesex name still carries weight for many residents and “cannot be erased”, arguing the change would recognise more than 1,000 years of shared history.

Cllr Harry Boparai, who put forward the same motion to Spelthorne Borough Council in January but was blocked, said he was “pleased” the issue was finally being heard. He explained how the name ‘Middlesex’, which may seem like a simple thing to some, “created a sense of connection to the place where I lived” and recognises the “heritage and identity” of the community.

But councillors explained that under current legislation, the final decision on any new council name will rest with the authority created after reorganisation not existing councils.

Even so, several members said the debate was about sending a message rather than making a binding decision. Cllr Sinead Mooney said “names really do matter”, adding that the motion reflects a genuine sense of identity among Spelthorne residents. Another described it as a chance to show the new authority that heritage should not be overlooked.

Others were more cautious. Cllr Joanne Sexton, leader of Spelthorne Borough Council argued that now is not the right time to focus on naming, with major structural changes ahead. She said the priority should be “working together and maintaining unity” during the transition, suggesting the issue be decided later with public consultation.

Cllr **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley EEBC and Surrey County Councillor) delivered a tongue-in-cheek poem suggesting the name had effectively already been decided. He said: “So toast to the history of Spelthorne’s old soul, while West Surrey wagons begin their first to roll.” Cllr Edward Hawkins joked confusion over boundaries left them unsure “which way to go” on the vote.

Despite mixed views, several councillors said they would support the motion simply to acknowledge the strength of feeling locally. Given it was the council’s last full meeting before the local election campaign gets underway, it is not surprising members did not want to rock the Middlesex boat, or vote.

Others opted to abstain, saying the decision ultimately lies elsewhere. In the end, the motion passed with cross-party backing.

While the result will not change the formal process, supporters hope it sends a clear signal: that for many in Spelthorne, Middlesex is more than just a historic footnote and it is still part of who they are.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Photo: David Howard Licence details

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