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

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Epsom and Ewell's four year commitment to Ukraine

24 February 2026



4 Years of War in Ukraine, 4 Years of Heart Ache, Support and Immense Pride in this Community

By Roy Deadman, Chairman and Co-Founder, Surrey Stands With Ukraine

Four years ago, we woke to news that changed Europe overnight. Ukraine had been invaded. I remember sitting in shock, watching the images unfold, feeling an overwhelming mix of disbelief and anger. I was incredibly angry that Russia had invaded Ukraine. What mattered to me in that moment was not politics, but people. A proud European nation was under attack, and I wanted to do all I could to defend it.

On day one of the war, I called my Ukrainian friend Natalia Irvine, who lives here in Epsom. I asked her a simple question: "What do you need?" I made her a promise that I would support her and her country in any way I could, for as long as it took. At that point, I thought in terms of weeks, perhaps months. I could never have imagined we would still be here four years later.

Together, Natalia and I reached out to our local community. We asked for help and the response was overwhelming. Donations flooded in almost immediately. People wanted to stand with Ukraine. They wanted to do something tangible in the face of such horror.

Within hours, it became clear that we needed space. The generosity of the Ashley Centre was extraordinary. On day one, they offered us 6,000 square feet of retail space. Even though it was rent-free, I had to take a personal risk and sign a lease that made me liable for the business rates, as we were not yet a registered charity. It was a leap of faith, but it was the start of what we proudly called "The Hub."

By the end of that first week, 180 volunteers had registered with us. We had raised close to £20,000 and sent two truckloads of humanitarian aid, donated by this incredible community. It was breathtaking how quickly everything moved.

Those early days were intense. Some people spent up to 20 hours at a time sorting and packing boxes. We worked through exhaustion fuelled by tea, determination and a shared sense of purpose. The emotional rollercoaster was constant, heartbreak at what we were seeing unfold in Ukraine, and immense pride at how Epsom and Ewell pulled together.

We quickly realised this could not be chaotic goodwill alone. We had to run it like a small business operation. Every item had to be sorted, categorised, packed and properly manifested before being loaded onto whichever truck was available. Transport offers poured in, with drivers volunteering to take aid directly into Ukraine. It was inspiring, and it required careful coordination.

In that first week, we formed a core team. Some volunteers stepped forward to create a committee to help make difficult decisions about what we could send and where it should go. These were not easy choices. Demand was enormous, and resources, though generous, were not infinite.

Natalia, based here in Epsom, worked tirelessly alongside us. Her sister Anya, coordinating from inside Ukraine, helped guide where our aid would have the greatest impact. Between Epsom and Ukraine, somehow, we made it work. It was teamwork across borders, built on trust and shared determination.

Very quickly, we understood that we needed to become part of a registered charity. One reason was practical, the burden of business rates. The other was credibility, and the invaluable ability to claim Gift Aid on donations. I was introduced to Lionel Blackman, who ran a charity called Harrop HR Missions. After a coffee and a conversation about our mission, Lionel generously agreed to let us operate under his charity's structure.

From there, Surrey Stands With Ukraine became the fully formed charity we know today: Surrey Stands With Ukraine. As we reach the four-year mark, we have shipped £5 million worth of aid. We have sent 153 trucks, a fire engine, over 50,000 mobility aids and 650 winter family survival packs, and so much more besides.

Today, our charity is based at Global House, where we share space with the totally amazing Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network. EERN provides local support for Ukrainian families who have made Epsom and Ewell their temporary home. It has been a privilege to work alongside such a dedicated team and to witness their daily commitment.

One unexpected gift from these four years has been friendship. What began as an emergency response has grown into a powerful community bond. I have made lifelong friends through this work. We meet for quiz nights, coffee mornings, beers, lunches and parties. That human connection is not a side note, it is central to our resilience.

This work is emotionally hard. While we do not face the same unimaginable horror that Ukrainians endure, we are closer to it than most. We receive constant requests for help. We watch videos from the ground. We hear heartbreaking stories of families torn apart. We cry. We carry it with us.

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That friendship network sustains us. There is always someone ready with a hug, someone to make you smile, someone to pick you up when you are exhausted. This is what being part of this charity and this community truly means.

Every single one of us is a volunteer. No one is paid a wage. We are there because we care deeply and because we want to do something meaningful on behalf of the Ukrainian people. That purity of purpose has shaped everything we do.

Over these four years, I have learned so much about Ukraine and its people. The obvious lesson is their extraordinary courage. But that courage is not confined to the front lines. It runs through all Ukrainians, young and old, men and women. Their commitment to preserving their culture, history and identity in the face of attempts to erase it is profoundly inspiring.

When I made that promise on day one, I thought this would be short term. I do believe Western governments have not done enough, or not quickly enough. This is a war in Europe, on our doorstep. History teaches us hard lessons, yet we so often seem slow to act.

If we are not careful, we may look back five or ten years from now at a Europe that has changed for the worse. It feels at times as though we have moved from a post-war world into a pre-war one. The longer this conflict continues without decisive resolution, the more lives are lost.

And yet, despite the geopolitical uncertainty, I find hope here at home. I find it in every donated sleeping bag, every cheque written, every volunteer shift completed. I find it in schoolchildren raising funds and pensioners knitting winter hats.

When people come together with kindness in their hearts, extraordinary things can happen. A community can unite behind people from another country simply because it is the right thing to do. That gives me hope.

I am immensely proud of what Epsom and Ewell has done over these four years. Proud to live here. Proud to raise my family here. Proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with all of you.

Four years of war. Four years of heartbreak. Four years of unwavering support. And four years of immense pride in this remarkable community.

Roy Deadman – Chair Surrey Stands With Ukraine

There will be a commemoration today at 5pm in The Ashley Centre, marking the 4th anniversary of the war and the Mayor of Epsom and Ewell Cllr Robert Leach will be in attendance. All are welcome.

Image: Roy Deadman with SSWU’s latest appeal for negative pressure wound dressings

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“Imagine this house is in Epsom” says our man in Ukraine.

The Ripley effect of rural development in Surrey

24 February 2026



Surrey villagers say they fear their semi-rural community will be “overwhelmed” by development.

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Ripley is frequently named one of the prettiest and best places to live in Surrey. But locals are worried it could soon lose the charming character that drew them there as plans for up to 540 homes on farmland edge closer to submission.

The proposed development of Grove Heath North, between Ripley and Send, would see hundreds of two- and three-storey houses built on farmland off Portsmouth Road. While the scheme is still at the environmental scoping stage, locals say the scale alone is enough to change the face of the historic village for good.

‘Completely out of character’

Brian Crosby, chairman of the Grove Heath North Residents’ Association, moved to Ripley 33 years ago from Twickenham for what he calls its “semi-rural character”.

Brian said: “We want to maintain the identity of villages at the edge of the countryside. This [development] just doesn’t sit comfortably behind the existing houses. It would virtually join Ripley to Send Marsh creating more urban sprawl.”

He described the proposal as a major speculative development that is not currently identified as a potential development site in the Local Plan and is a complete shock to our residents who are in disbelief, adding: “The developers do not care what happens to the village afterwards.”

To add insult to injury, the scheme also borrows the very name of Brian’s road, Grove Heath North, which is almost opposite the site. He said he has raised the issue with the developer, arguing it will be confusing for emergency vehicles or delivery drivers in future.

Residents are particularly concerned about three-storey homes, which they say would be “completely out of character” in a village proud of its heritage and historic High Street, once known as the first stop on the coaching route to Portsmouth from the 16th century. The Allium Park Development a mile up the road has 3 storey building being built and these are completely out of character.

While Brian accepts more homes are needed, he argues they should not be built on greenbelt farmland. “This is the easy option,” he said. “The land is used for agriculture. Don’t we need more farmers and people producing food for our country?”

Plans include a new village green, a nature trail and suggests a new local shop. However, the application does not clarify if the developers would build it and the new store would be located next to an existing farm shop.

But Brian said it felt like it was part of a tick-box exercise. “Ripley has one of the largest village greens in the country,” he said. “Giving us effectively what we have already got isn’t adding anything. Sally added the proposed site already had public right of way footpaths running across it.

The developer response

A Green Kite Homes spokesperson said: “This site presents an opportunity to deliver a landscape-led development of new homes and community uses in a highly sustainable location. Our proposals would address identified local housing needs, delivering homes in a range of sizes and tenures.

“We have also listened carefully to feedback received during the public consultation and, as a result, have decided to change the name previously used for the site. We will be engaging further with the local parish councils on this.”

Fears over traffic, schools and sewage

Brian and fellow resident Sally pointed to other large schemes in the wider area, including Wisley Airfield (around 2,000 homes), Gosden Hill (1800 homes), Send Marsh (140 homes) and Allium Park (around 620). They argued there is no “joined-up thinking” about the cumulative impact on roads, schools, doctors and drainage.

Sewage capacity has sparked particular anger. Brian claimed the local works are already struggling and have discharged into the River Wey during heavy rainfall in the last few weeks. They pointed to comments from Thames Water indicating major upgrades are not due to be completed until 2030 and Ripley Sewage plant would not be able to meet Government targets for storm overflows until 2045-2050, and questions whether new homes should be occupied before then.

They questioned the pressure on already stretched services. Brian and Sally warned there is only one GP surgery in neighbouring Send which serves both Ripley and Send and one private dentist in Ripley. “The surgery has already had to increase patient numbers and cannot physically increase further,” they said. “Where are all these people going to go?”

There are also claims the local primary school is oversubscribed and there are no local secondary schools nearby, and fears that hundreds of additional commuters would pile a “burden of traffic”. They said roads are already busy, with effectively one main route running through the village, which is often used as a cut-through despite the A3 bypass since there aren’t on and off connections to the A3 at each end of the village.”

A Green Kite Homes spokesperson said: “As part of the planning process, we will continue to work closely with the council and statutory consultees to ensure that local infrastructure can appropriately support development of this scale. This will also include financial contributions towards infrastructure upgrades as part of any future planning consent for the site.”

The current submission is only about setting the scope of environmental studies, not approving the homes themselves. Guildford Borough Council’s decision on the EIA will determine what issues must be examined in detail before any full planning application is considered.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Ripley village sign. (Credit: Emily Dalton/LDRS)

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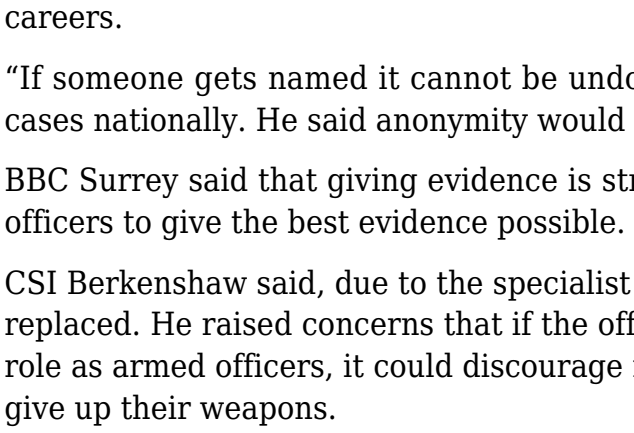
Surrey armed officers in fatal shooting to remain anonymous?

24 February 2026



A coroner will soon decide whether armed police officers involved in a fatal shooting in Surrey will have their names kept out of the public eye.

At a pre-inquest review today (February 23), Surrey's senior coroner Richard Travers said he would take "a couple of weeks" to rule on a Surrey Police application for anonymity for the firearms officers who shot 29-year-old Joel Stenning.

Mr Stenning died after being shot in the early hours of August 11, 2024, in Nursery Road, Knaphill, near Woking.

He had reportedly pointed an air rifle at officers who were called to his home following reports of a man with a gun. Mr Stenning died shortly after 7.30am on August 15 in a London hospital from "complications of a gunshot wound to the abdomen".

Mr Stenning was born in Chertsey, lived in Woking and worked as a roofer. He was remembered by the coroner, who opened proceedings by offering condolences to his parents, who were present in court.

Surrey Police, backed by the Chief Constable, applied for nine firearms officers to remain unnamed. Chief Superintendent (CSI) Justin Berkenshaw told the court that firearms officers are highly trained, voluntary specialists who deal with the "most dangerous and lethal criminals".

Naming them, he argued, could put them and their families at risk from organised crime groups and damage future careers.

"If someone gets named it cannot be undone," he said, adding that officers have faced threats and harassment in other cases nationally. He said anonymity would help officers give their "best evidence" without fear of becoming headlines.

BBC Surrey said that giving evidence is stressful for everyone in court and, given the circumstances, would expect police officers to give the best evidence possible.

CSI Berkenshaw said, due to the specialist and technical nature of highly-trained armed police officers, they are not easily replaced. He raised concerns that if the officers' names were put into the public domain, not only could it undermine their role as armed officers, it could discourage new recruits from going into armed operations and persuade current officers to give up their weapons.

CSI Berkenshaw said: "My team works extremely hard with my firearms officers to prevent knowledge of their role…this is because of the risk to the officers and their families..and to maintain an effective firearms unit."

He said he was worried naming the officers could risk Surrey Police's capability for an armed officer unit.

But lawyers for the Stenning family and BBC Surrey (on behalf of the media) opposed the move. The family's representative said there was no evidence of any threat linked to Mr Stenning's relatives or associates and warned against a "blanket" approach simply because officers were armed.

They argued open justice should not be side-lined by general policy concerns.

The family's legal representative said: "It sets an entirely new precedent setting approach in which the mere fact of the status of a firearms officer should give rise to anonymity across the board without assessment of conditions of the case."

Mr Travers noted the force's arguments were not specific to this case but could apply to any firearms incident. He will now weigh privacy and safety concerns against the principle of open justice before deciding whether the officers will be named when the full inquest begins.

The inquest, expected to be heard over four weeks in early 2027, will examine the circumstances surrounding Mr Stenning's death.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Image – purely illustration and not related in any way to this incident.

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Surrey wasting education in primary schools

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Surrey County Council (SCC) has launched the Surrey Schools Waste Engagement Grant Scheme for primary schools in the county. Through the scheme, SCC will support schools to educate their children and the wider community about waste reduction and recycling.

The funding, which will be spread across the county, can be used to develop and deliver projects that may contribute to educating children and families on:

The impact and importance of recycling.
The impact of putting items that can’t be recycled into recycling bins.
How to dispose of different types of waste correctly, including which items should be recycled, either via home recycling bins, council recycling collections, community recycling centres or non-council recycling schemes, and which items should go in rubbish bins.
Food waste.
Clothing, textile and electrical waste.
The Waste Hierarchy.
Waste reduction, reuse and repair.

Schools that complete waste projects will also be given funding to contribute to or deliver projects that improve the environment of their school for the benefit of pupils.

Natalie Bramhall, SCC’s Cabinet Member for Property, Waste and Infrastructure, said: “I’m pleased to announce the launch of the Surrey Schools Waste Engagement Grant Scheme and look forward to seeing as many primary schools as possible apply for funding. By helping schools educate children about their responsibilities now, Surrey County Council’s scheme aims to create sustainable citizens and recyclers of the future.”

Waste is a key area in which residents can take direct action to help fight climate change. When residents reduce waste and recycle right, there are benefits for the environment. Fewer resources are used up creating new materials and fewer harmful emissions are made during resource production. There are also benefits for other council services as waste disposal is expensive for councils; reducing waste and increasing recycling saves councils money.

The window for schools to apply for a grant opens on Monday 23 February and closes on Wednesday 25 March 2026.

To find out more information and to apply for funding, schools should visit the Together for Surrey website page on the Surrey Schools Waste Engagement Grant Scheme.

Surrey County Council

SURREY
COUNTY COUNCIL

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

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Rainbow Leisure Centre secrecy row deepens after heated council clash

A bitter exchange between councillors over a confidential “urgent decision” concerning the Rainbow Leisure Centre has raised fresh questions about transparency, governance and the condition of one of Epsom’s major public buildings. The confrontation, between Residents’ Association Strategy and Resources chair Cllr **Neil Dallen** and Labour Court ward councillor Cllr **Chris Ames**, follows earlier coverage by the BBC’s Local Democracy Reporting Service [Cllr Dallen accused of £1/2 m Epsom & Ewell Council cover-up] into claims that up to £500,000 of dilapidations had been discovered at the council-owned facility.

Questions have been raised as to whether the secrecy being maintained over the matter is justified by a need to protect negotiations with contractors or is motivated by covering up possible negligence of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council in failing to ensure the proper maintenance of a major asset it owns.

£500,000 repairs estimate revealed in confidential decision

The urgent decision document itself that was obtained by the BBC’s LDRS — acknowledged extensive repair issues and stated: “The issues cover many aspects of the operation of the centre from issues like fire alarms, the lift, seating, glazing, sanitaryware, ventilation, damp, possible cracks in the roof etc.” It went on to estimate the scale of financial exposure: “The costs of the dilapidations are not yet fully known… However, an estimate is that this could cost up to £500k.” The report also confirmed that the council had spent little on the building during the previous operator’s tenure: “The previous operator GLL ran and maintained the Rainbow Leisure Centre… During that time… the council has spent minimal money on the RLC over that period.” At the same time, the decision warned that repairs were necessary to avoid jeopardising the new contract: “The key issue would be if we did nothing, which would be to jeopardise the contract.” It also acknowledged health and safety implications: “Some items identified by Places relate to health and safety issues… to ensure a safe and practical operating environment.” The urgent decision was approved on 17 December 2025 with the recorded support of Cllr Neil Dallen, who wrote simply: “Happy to support.”

Chair invokes safety risk — but secrecy questioned

At the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting on 27 January 2026, Cllr Dallen defended the urgency of the decision, suggesting that without it the centre might have faced closure on safety grounds. But Cllr Ames focused instead on why the decision had been kept secret, telling the meeting: “Falling into a category of exempt information does not make information exempt from publication… Has somebody made a decision that, in all the circumstances, the public interest in withholding this document outweighs the public interest in disclosing it?” He pressed repeatedly for an answer: “This document should have been published… Who took that decision, and on what basis? And I’m not getting any answers.” Cllr Dallen confirmed that he had supported the urgent decision and its confidential status but then halted further questioning, telling the committee: “We have given you an answer… This meeting is asked to note the urgent decision taken. I’m not going to have any more comments or questions.” When Cllr Ames persisted, the chair asserted his authority: “It is my meeting. I am chairman of this meeting, and I have made a decision there is going to be no further comments.” The debate ended without any explanation of whether a public-interest assessment had been formally carried out before the decision was withheld from publication.

After the meeting Cllr Ames stated to Epsom and Ewell Times his regret for calling Cllr Dallen “arrogant”, realising instead he should have raised a point of order concerning Cllr Dallen remaining in the Chair for the item.

Council and former operator give sharply differing accounts

The urgent decision suggested extensive outstanding repair liabilities and the possibility of legal action to recover costs. But the former operator, Greenwich Leisure Limited, has strongly disputed any suggestion it failed in its responsibilities, stating: “The Council undertook… a full survey of the building prior to GLL exiting… items… were all completed prior to handover and signed off… GLL handed the building over to the standard required by the Council and under the contract.” GLL added it was “unaware of any legal claim” by the council.

Council declines to answer key questions

Before publication, Epsom and Ewell Times put a series of detailed questions to the council, including whether it had exercised its inspection rights over the building and when councillors were first informed of the scale of repairs. The council declined to address those points directly, saying: “Details relating to terms and financial arrangements are commercially sensitive and therefore not in the public domain.”

Governance and accountability questions remain

The dispute raises a number of unresolved issues, including whether the council had been fully aware of the building’s condition during the previous operator’s tenure, why the urgent decision was treated as confidential, and whether councillors were given complete information before being asked to note the decision. It also raises procedural questions about the conduct of the committee meeting itself, where the chair both confirmed his own role in approving the confidential urgent decision and subsequently closed down further questioning on the subject.

Epsom and Ewell Times has submitted Freedom of Information requests seeking clarification on the council’s inspection regime, the origins of the repair backlog, and the decision-making process behind the confidential urgent decision. At the time of publication, the council had not yet provided those answers and has stated it needs more time in excess of the statutory 20 day period to respond.

Sam Jones – Reporter

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Image: Epsom and Ewell Borough Council YouTube channel

Surrey could have had elections last year after all

24 February 2026



The Government’s u-turn on reinstating elections across 30 local authorities shows just how “rash and reckless” last year’s decision was to cancel polls in Surrey, opposition councillors said. In 2025, residents were told elections in Surrey should be axed because councils needed time to focus on merging into two mega authorities. Now however, the Government has written to the High Court to set out its position that 30 councils, including 21 going through their own mergers, should proceed ‘in the light of recent legal advice’ – a year too late for Surrey. It comes after a legal challenge was brought against the decision to delay polls by Reform UK leader Nigel Farage. It means all local elections in May 2026 will now go ahead, leaving some in Surrey wondering what has changed and whether they needed to cancel their own polls.

In a letter to the affected chief executives, Steve Reed, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, wrote: “I recognise that many of the local councils undergoing reorganisation voiced genuine concerns about the pressure they are under as we seek to deliver the most ambitious reforms of local government in a generation. I am therefore announcing today that we will provide up to £63m in additional capacity funding to the 21 local areas undergoing reorganisation across the whole programme, building on the £7.6m provided for developing proposals last year. I will shortly set out further detail about how that funding will be allocated.”

Councillor Paul Follows, leader of the Liberal Democrat group at Surrey County Council, opposed the postponement in 2025 saying it robbed people of their democratic right and left in place dozens of unmandated councillors. Speaking after the Government’s announcement, he said: “I am sure those areas will welcome the chance to have their democratic rights restored and to have their say on the various proposals for local government reorganisation in those areas. Surrey of course will not be one of them, due to the rash and reckless actions of Conservative-led Surrey County Council. They have jumped into the unknown, exposed most of the county to significant debt and discord in the process with barely a plan of their own – joined at the hip on this subject to a Labour government that seemingly are abandoning their own plans on a daily basis.”

Epsom and Ewell Times adds: **Why the Government’s U-turn does not change anything in Surrey**

Despite the Government’s decision to reinstate elections in 30 other council areas, it does not alter the position in Surrey. Surrey County Council’s May 2025 elections were already formally postponed as part of the Government-approved programme to abolish the existing county and district councils and replace them with two new unitary authorities. The Government has confirmed that Surrey’s postponed elections are being replaced by elections to the new unitary councils instead, expected in May 2026. This means Surrey residents will not vote again for the current county council, and its existing councillors will remain in office until the new authorities take over, whereas voters in some other reorganising areas will now go to the polls as originally planned.

Surrey County Council wrote to the Government in January last year to take up the offer of delaying its own elections, arguing this would give officers time to focus on merging with its boroughs and districts. They added that spending millions on an election only to then dissolve the entire council within a year or two would be a waste of time and money. Asked what has changed since then and whether its decision in Surrey was still correct, the ministry gave a stock reply declining to answer the questions put to it. It said that, in the case of Surrey, last year’s elections to the county council

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and six of the district councils are being replaced by elections to the two new unitary councils and that the decision relating to the postponement of 30 local council elections is separate from the decision which impacts Surrey. The ministry declined to add anything further.

Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council, said: “In Surrey we remain focussed on delivering a smooth transition for devolution and local government reorganisation and we are gearing up for local elections in May as planned. Last year, we were confirmed on the Government’s accelerated programme and elections were postponed for one year so that the necessary preparatory work could take place at pace.” The council also pointed out that some of the reinstated council elections this year had already been postponed once and would have given their elected officials six-year terms.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

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Epsom and Ewell pledges to end poverty

24 February 2026



Following the 2024 lead of Surrey County Council, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council also has formally adopted the End Poverty Pledge, committing itself to pay the Real Living Wage, review accessibility of key public venues, and embed poverty considerations into future policy decisions. The pledge was endorsed at Full Council on 10th February 2026 as part of the same meeting that approved the council’s final budget before local government reorganisation, following earlier approval by the Community and Wellbeing Committee on 13th January, and forms part of a wider Surrey initiative led by the Epsom-based charity Good Company.

Under the pledge, the council has committed to pay the Real Living Wage to all council staff from April 2026, provide training to staff to improve understanding of poverty, review accessibility of community venues such as Bourne Hall, and include poverty considerations in Equality Impact Assessments for all future policies. Council leader **Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) said: “As a council, we are committed to supporting all our residents, including ensuring that those facing financial pressures are not left behind. The End Poverty Pledge helps sharpen our focus on understanding the barriers some of our residents face and working with our partners to remove them, so that Epsom & Ewell is a place where everyone feels supported and included. We also recognise the wellbeing of our workforce as an important part of that commitment. By adopting the Real Living Wage, we aim to help staff more reliably meet living costs, contributing to a better quality of life for those who deliver our services every day.”

Community and Wellbeing Committee chair **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) said: “We know that rising costs continue to affect many individuals and families across the borough. At Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, we have a long history of supporting vulnerable residents. Our Health & Wellbeing Strategy continues to deliver a range of initiatives aimed at improving mental and emotional wellbeing, alongside community services and support for key voluntary organisations including Age Concern and the Citizens Advice Bureau. We want every resident to feel included, and the pledge ensures that compassion, awareness and practical support remain embedded in everything we deliver for our community.”

The council will work alongside Good Company, which operates food banks and led the borough’s recent Poverty Truth Commission. Its founder **Jonathan Lees** said: “Good Company started its operations in Epsom & Ewell nearly 14 years ago; sadly, there is still a real need here. It’s fantastic that the council has officially committed and signed up to work with us and other partners to address poverty in our community.”

Although Epsom & Ewell is widely seen as prosperous, council data shows stark inequalities, including a seven-year difference in life expectancy between wards, with Ruxley, Court and Town wards performing worst, and significant numbers of residents relying on food banks or subsidised food schemes. Socio-economic factors account for about 40% of health outcomes, underlining the impact of income on wellbeing even in an affluent borough.

The Real Living Wage, which the council has pledged to adopt, is independently calculated each year by the Living Wage

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Foundation based on the actual cost of living and currently stands at £12.00 per hour nationally compared with the statutory National Living Wage, set by government, which is lower and forecast to reach £11.89 per hour from April 2026. The Real Living Wage is voluntary and intended to reflect what workers need to meet everyday living costs rather than the legal minimum employers must pay.

It remains unclear how many, if any, EEBC staff are currently paid below the Real Living Wage, as most council employees fall within nationally negotiated salary scales that already exceed that level. The pledge may therefore have limited direct financial impact on many existing staff, although it could affect lower-graded roles, casual workers or future contracted staff depending on procurement decisions.

Some of the pledge's commitments focus on awareness and culture rather than direct financial support, including training staff to recognise poverty issues and reviewing how welcoming Bourne Hall is to residents facing hardship. The council will also ensure poverty is explicitly considered when developing future policies through Equality Impact Assessments, which could influence decisions on service delivery and access.

The pledge was adopted during the same meeting that approved a 2.98% council tax increase, the maximum allowed without a referendum, raising questions about whether such increases could worsen financial pressure for some residents. In practice, many of the poorest households receive Council Tax Support, which reduces or eliminates their bill, meaning they may be shielded from the increase, but residents on modest incomes who do not qualify for support may still feel the impact.

The End Poverty Pledge reflects growing recognition that poverty exists alongside affluence in Epsom & Ewell, and while its commitments may influence how the council operates and makes decisions, its real significance will depend on whether those commitments lead to measurable improvements for residents facing hardship. As Jonathan Lees observed, there remains "a real need here," and whether the pledge marks a turning point or remains primarily a statement of intent will become clearer as the council approaches its replacement by the new East Surrey unitary authority in 2027.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Image: Mart Production

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Sweet success for Sutton and Epsom Rugby

24 February 2026



Beckenham 14 Sutton & Epsom 22. Saturday 14th February.

Last October a Tom Lennard penalty with the last kick of the game secured a Sutton and Epsom 22-19 win. A Beckenham side hit by injuries, with a George Bunton brace and the traditional Rimarni Richards try, had taken the game to the wire. Not quite as rare as the sighting of a fluffy-backed tit-babbler at Rugby Lane but the Black & Whites crucially won a second half. With the season meandering intermittently to a conclusion both clubs might be considering whether they will be involved in the inaugural play-offs. For the upwardly mobile fourth-placed hosts there is the possibility of embarking on four outings. Pessimists from the off-colour visitors might be fearing the 25th April match to decide who remains in Regional 2 South East. On Saturday, lightning struck twice as, once again, S&E won a second half and secured a vital 22-14 win to steady their nerves.

The Black & Whites were without their German international lock, Ewan McTaggart, as 'Die Schwarzen Adler' ('The Black Eagles') were in Portugal for the next round of the European Rugby Championship. Such inconveniences are most familiar

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to Beckenham with their Caribbean connections. For followers of rugby at this level it is a familiar tale of woe that injuries are never spread evenly from 1 to 15. This season for Sutton and Epsom the Number 9 shirt has been a hexed item of clothing and this week Sam Lovatt became the sixth player to don the cursed shroud. However, there was happier news with the return of Josh Pulvirenti to the colours. The Balmoral Avenue Brigade are no stranger to injuries and have done remarkably well this campaign despite regular absences of key personnel and once more they took the field minus stalwart players.

A year ago Beckenham lost their 2nd XV captain Graham Murray in a tragic traffic accident and there was a minute's applause in his honour before the kick off. Considering the recent weather, that might make a modern Darwin predict webbed feet for humans in the future, Balmoral Avenue was blessed with not only sunshine but a playing surface that was a credit to the hardworking ground staff. Freddy Bunting kicked off for Sutton and Epsom but it was Beckenham who seized the initiative. The home team dominated the opening 15 minutes playing at a high tempo they threatened to run away with the game. An ominous first scrum saw Sutton and Epsom shunted back on their own ball. The combination of desperate defence and inopportune handling near the line saw S&E survive until scrum half Jack Gurney opened the scoring from close range following mounting pressure. Josh Burke added the conversion for a worthy 7-0 lead.

This was not a case of the floodgates opening but, to the contrary, the visitors replied at once. A surging burst from Gareth O'Brien hitting the line at pace from fullback carried him from his own half to near the Beckenham 22. Adam Bibby running the perfect supporting line took the pass and coasted home. Freddy Bunting added the extras for a 7-7 score. Sutton and Epsom had weathered the storm and now began to dominate possession. What was to become the theme of the afternoon was errors undoing invention for both sides. A dropped pass, a penalty kicked dead and turnovers conceded all blighted the Rugby Lane men's progress. Approaching the 40-minute mark Jack Howes won a terrific turnover penalty and Captain Bunting decided on the 3-point option to put his team ahead 10-7. Despite a lengthy period of time added on the scoring for the first period had concluded and the Surrey men turned around 10-7 up.

With the alarming statistics for the 2025-6 season in terms of second half performances by the Black & Whites no one from Rugby Lane was counting numbers in the hen house. For the travelling supporters there was the satisfaction that the tide had turned. For the Balmoral Avenue faithful there had been more than enough evidence that they could take the honours as the fascinatingly poised match resumed. It was a fast start from all concerned as both teams sensed the importance of the first score of the second half. Reversing the policy of the season, much to the delight of ageing alickadoos, Freddy Bunting decided on taking a pot at goal after five minutes. Unfortunately for those with Black & White tinged glasses it narrowly missed.

The game became a stop-and-start affair as errors mounted. Though credit must go to the back row brethren on both sides whose industrious efforts thwarted promising openings, won turnovers and were a ubiquitous source of frustration. It was Beckenham, regaining the pomp of their earlier play, who seized the momentum and were rewarded with the next score. Winger Juai Charles carved through the defence to score and Josh Burke added the conversion to put the hosts 14-10 up. A perfectly struck restart from Freddy Bunting forced a restart drop out from the Beckenham line. Sutton and Epsom took advantage of the territorial position and won a penalty. The 3-point option was shunned for the kick to the corner with a dozen minutes of regular time on the clock. Fortune did not favour the brave but S&E only had themselves to blame as they lost the lineout.

Possibly the turning point of the match came with ten minutes left on the clock as Juai Charles saw yellow and Beckenham were reduced to 14 men. A simple three points were declined as Sutton and Epsom took a tap penalty. Lennie went close as the home forwards stood strong. However, as soon it went wide Gareth O'Brien took advantage of the visitors' numerical superiority to score out wide. The conversion failed but Sutton & Epsom had their noses in front by 15-14. It was a reinvigorated Black & Whites rather than the tiring version of recent times who now took the game by the scruff of the neck. The swerving, stepping and deceptively powerful Adam Bibby broke into the 22 to be felled by an excellent cover tackle. S&E maintained possession and replacement Dan Jones carried towards the line. Once more it was released to the backs and Tom Lennard dummied the cover and scored under the posts. Freddy Bunting chipped over the easy conversion for a 22-14 lead.

Two tries in a few minutes had altered the complexion of the contest. With the game within their grasp Sutton and Epsom tackled tenaciously and kicked sensibly to keep Beckenham at arm's length. The match concluded with two moments that were synonymous of the game. Firstly, Beckenham had an attacking lineout that gave them a great opportunity to get back into the match. It was inexplicably overthrown and lost… it was certainly not the first lost lineout during an afternoon punctuated by costly errors by both teams. Secondly, in the dying moments Sutton and Epsom were in a prime position to go for the bonus point try. The ball was secured and Tom Lennard floated the perfect kick to the corner where not one but two colleagues were waiting unguarded to score. Neither laid a hand on the ball and it hit a knee. The Benny Hill theme tune would have fitted perfectly for the ensuing fiasco as the ball went to halfway. Sanity was resumed and the ball was kicked off the field to secure the 22-14 win for Sutton and Epsom.

Once again this fixture provided excitement and tension until the final whistle. Sutton and Epsom prevailed for a win that was much needed after recent disappointments. Beckenham remained in fourth and have the prospect of promotional play-offs in their own hands. At the other end of the table Old Reigatian's 19-14 loss to Canterbury Pilgrims confirmed their relegation but who joins them is a matter for a very congested lower half of the table. As always the hospitality at Balmoral Avenue was exemplary. Amongst the throng of spectators was Dave Weller who had represented both 1st XVs. The erstwhile flanker, motor cycle racer and expert pumpkin carver diplomatically wore his Beckenham tie to the lunch but secreted his Sutton and Epsom version upon his person in case it would be appropriate. For those Beckenham members of a malicious disposition they may be praying for a heat wave in September because Mr Weller has entered the Welsh Iron Man in Tenby.

Another week off and the season resumes on the 28th February when Sutton and Epsom host Battersea Ironsides whilst Beckenham are at home to Gravesend who are snapping at their heels in fifth place.

Sutton & Epsom

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O’Brien, Symonds, Bibby, Bunting, Scott, Lennard, Lovatt, Boaden, Howes, Lennie, Duey, Glanville, Pulvirenti, Rea & Hegarty. Reps: Jones & Tame. Unused: Payne.

Beckenham: Bosch, Bennett, Pennacchia, Jebb, Charles, Burke, Gurney, Baker, Aoke-Tiamu, Brown, Prince, Keefe, Moran, Ward & Knowles.
Reps: Richards, Ryan-Coker & L. Caddy.

Epsom scoring a try against Beckenham from a previous fixture. Credit Robin Kennedy.

John Croysdill

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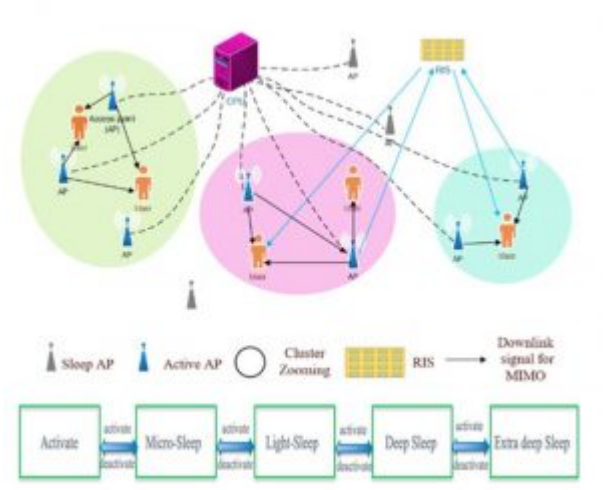
Surrey Uni finds energy-saving 5G features could cut carbon emissions

24 February 2026



An optimal combination of energy-efficient 5G network features – including AI systems that let mobile mast and antenna base stations go into sleep mode when usage is low, and phones that avoid unnecessary background network checks – could help cut indirect carbon emissions across the UK economy by around 25 million tonnes of CO2, suggests new research from the University of Surrey.

The study, published in Resources, Conservation and Recycling, challenges the assumption that 5G will inevitably increase the UK’s energy demand. Instead, researchers show that next-generation network technologies have the potential to reduce emissions across many industries that rely on the digital infrastructure that keeps them online – from finance and IT to transport and construction.

Using UK economic and emissions data, the team established an environmentally extended input–output (EEIO) model tailored specifically to the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector. This allowed them to trace how cutting energy use in 5G can send knock-on effects across 33 industries of the UK economy.

Working in collaboration with Professor Ming Xu from Tsinghua University, researchers looked at 10 emerging technologies – six targeting how base stations operate and four designed to make user devices more energy-efficient. These included AI-driven multi-level sleep modes, which let mobile masts switch off when demand is low, reconfigurable intelligent surfaces (RIS) such as smart panels that redirect radio waves using little power, “cluster-zooming” in cell-free MIMO networks that allow groups of small antennas to expand or shrink coverage so energy is not wasted, and smarter handset signalling.

They found that AI-powered sleep control for base stations and improved control-channel signalling on user devices delivered the most impactful reductions.

Dr Lirong Liu, Associate Professor at Surrey’s Centre for Environment and Sustainability, said:

“Smarter base stations and devices don’t just cut electricity use in telecoms – they reduce indirect emissions in the whole supply chain. The modelling framework allowed us to quantify effects that are usually hidden, especially the indirect emissions linked to electricity use and wider supply chains. It also gave us a clear way to compare different 5G features side by side and identify which combinations deliver the strongest environmental benefits.”

The analysis shows that sectors such as financial services, IT services and computer programming gain some of the largest indirect benefits, reflecting just how much modern industries depend on digital connectivity.

Professor Pei Xiao, Professor of Wireless Communications at Surrey’s Institute for Communication Systems, said:

“Many of these energy-efficient features are already on the engineering roadmap. What this study provides is a clear system-level view of where the biggest carbon wins lie – and why regulators, operators and industry should prioritise them as part of the UK’s net zero transition.”

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The research also suggests that to unlock these benefits, 5G policy must extend beyond coverage and speed targets and encourage the adoption of energy-efficient architectures. Measures could include building energy targets into spectrum licenses that mobile operators need to use 5G frequencies, incentives for low-power network design and making sure 5G research supports the UK's broader net zero goals.

Surrey University

The full paper can be found here: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0921344925005774?via%3Dihub

Image from Resources, Conservation and Recycling

Epsom and Ewell Town-Twinning Association invites Cyril Frazer Award entries

24 February 2026

Epsom and Ewell Town-Twinning Association is inviting applications for this year's **Cyril Frazer Award**, a prize established in memory of Cyril Frazer, who died in 2016. Cyril Frazer was Mayor of Epsom and Ewell when the town was first twinned with Chantilly in 1995 and was a founding member of the association. Alongside his commitment to town twinning, he was passionate about singing and was a keen member of the Epsom Male Voice Choir.

Both of these interests are reflected in the award, which offers a top prize of £500 and is open to individuals and groups within the Borough. The award will be made to qualified applicants who meet some or all of the agreed criteria, including living or studying in the Borough, meeting a special need such as mental or physical health, benefiting young people, having cultural or educational value, being related to music or the performing arts, furthering friendships or links with Chantilly, or supporting a key twinning or community event.

Last year's winner was Sarah Carpenter of Southfield Primary School, with runners-up Siobhan Cornell and Jo Johnstone from the French and Music departments at Wallace Fields Junior School, and Olivia Gioffredo from Epsom College. The winner received a £500 grant to support French visits and learning activities planned by Southfield Park School, while the joint runners-up each received £250 to support their work in French education and musical study.

Association secretary Diana Deavin said: "Last year we were very impressed by the quality of the submissions received, which is why we awarded a total of £1,000 in the end. We are looking forward to receiving ideas and suggestions and are hopeful that this year will exceed our expectations once again. Please do consider submitting an application, as we are keen to receive entries from as wide as possible a range of potential beneficiaries and keep Cyril's name alive in this very meaningful way."

The prize will be awarded at the Twinning Association's AGM in June, with a closing date for applications of **May 31, 2026**. For further information or to apply, contact **diana@epsomtwinning.com**.

Related report:

Epsom and Ewell Town-Twinning Association presents Cyril Frazer Awards for 2025

Epsom and Ewell Parish councils decision looms amid questions over cost, timing and scrutiny

24 February 2026

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Full Council set to decide weeks after consultation closes.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is preparing to decide whether to create new Community or Parish Councils for Epsom and Ewell, with a final decision expected at Full Council on 12 March.

The move follows the closure on 1st February of the statutory Community Governance Review consultation. The Council has confirmed that councillors will consider the consultation outcome and decide whether to make a Reorganisation Order formally establishing the new councils. The agenda and supporting analysis are expected to be published only in the week before the meeting, leaving limited time for councillors and residents to review the findings before a potentially irreversible decision.

Cllr **John Beckett** (RA Auriol – Chair of the Standards and Constitution Committee) said “I thank everyone who responded to the consultation for taking the time to have your say.”

Conservatives warn residents face “another tax” for limited services

Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative, Horton Ward) has warned that residents could face significant additional costs without any certainty that parish councils will deliver meaningful services.

He said the proposal risks introducing “another layer of local government and another tax” without a clear or guaranteed transfer of responsibilities.

At present, allotments are the only service clearly identified for transfer. Epsom and Ewell has 11 allotment sites which together cost around £20,000 per year to operate.

However, the administrative cost of running the proposed parish councils has been estimated at around £1.5 million per year.

Crucially, any expansion of parish council responsibilities beyond allotments would require the agreement of the new East Surrey Unitary Authority after the borough council is abolished in April 2027. There is no guarantee that such agreement would be given.

This raises the prospect that residents could face substantial additional council tax through a parish precept to fund administrative structures whose only assured function would be managing allotments costing a small fraction of the projected overhead.

Cllr Persand said residents were being asked to support a costly and permanent new tier of government without clarity on what it would actually do.

Move comes as borough council prepares for abolition

The parish council proposal comes against the backdrop of Local Government Reorganisation, which will see Epsom and Ewell Borough Council abolished and replaced by the new East Surrey Unitary Authority in April 2027.

Parish councils can preserve a layer of local representation after district councils cease to exist, but they also introduce an additional tier of governance funded through their own council tax precept.

Once established, parish councils are permanent public authorities and cannot easily be dissolved.

Questions over scrutiny and decision-making process

The timing and handling of the decision has also prompted procedural questions.

The Council’s Strategy and Resources Committee normally considers major financial and governance matters before final decisions are taken by Full Council.

Will the parish council proposal be referred to Strategy and Resources Committee or to the Standards and Constitution Committee for detailed examination on 12th March — as the Bucha (Ukraine) town-twinning motion was on 10th February — or will Full Council proceed directly to a final decision without prior committee scrutiny?

That earlier twinning proposal involved only a symbolic endorsement and no financial commitment, yet it was referred to committee without debate, delaying any decision.

The parish council proposal, by contrast, would create entirely new public bodies with tax-raising powers and long-term financial implications for every household in the borough.

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Decision will shape Epsom and Ewell's future governance

Supporters argue Community / Parish Councils will preserve local voice and identity. Critics warn they risk creating costly administrative structures without guaranteed powers or meaningful responsibilities.

With the consultation now closed and a decision imminent, councillors face a choice that could reshape local government in Epsom and Ewell for decades to come.

The Epsom and Ewell Times is keeping open its own Reader Survey for two more weeks. A survey that provides residents an opportunity to express their views on a wider set of options than the Council consultation provided.

Click HERE to access the Epsom and Ewell Times LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION SURVEY

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Public of Epsom and Ewell to be asked if they want two new Councils

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Epsom has no fear hosting primal premiere

24 February 2026



Valentine's Day brought screams instead of romance to Epsom Picturehouse as Craig Dowsett premiered his directional debut, *Bigfoot: Primal Fear*, on 14 February.

Dowsett began acting shortly after Covid and rose to prominence playing Winnie the Pooh in Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey, produced by Jagged Edge Productions. After the film's success, he moved into writing and directing, seeking full creative control over his own projects.

Bigfoot: Primal Fear is the first independent Bigfoot horror film shot in the UK and features well known faces from the UK independent film scene. It also stars American Bigfoot expert Ryan "RPG" Golembeske from Expedition Bigfoot and DJ Brewster from Alaskan Killer Bigfoot.

The story follows a group of campers whose woodland getaway turns into a nightmare when they realise they are not alone and something is hunting them. Every step could be their last as they fight to survive. Click HERE for a trailer:

Made on a small, self-financed budget, the film relies on practical effects, fast pacing and plenty of twists.

Sitting in the audience, my eyes were glued to the screen. The film moved at such a pace it felt over in a flash, each scene building tension and keeping viewers fully engaged. I will now look at Epsom Common very differently. Who knows what might be living there?

"Having our very first red carpet event at Epsom Picturehouse is absolutely amazing," said Dowsett. "Epsom is a fantastic place for red carpet premieres because it has the perfect balance of being intimate yet vibrant, bringing the local community together to celebrate independent cinema. Everyone had an amazing time and went away with magical moments. We will definitely be back later in the year for another premiere."

The film will be released on streaming platforms later this year, with Dowsett encouraging audiences to support independent filmmaking in what he describes as a tough industry, adding that he hopes viewers enjoy the film as much as the team enjoyed creating it.

Romana Sustar

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Photo: Craig and Emma Dowsett

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Stoneleigh & Auriol Voters Back Neighbourhood Plan – But What Will It Change?

24 February 2026



Residents of Stoneleigh and Auriol have decisively backed their Neighbourhood Plan in a local referendum, giving it formal authority to influence planning decisions in the area until 2039.

At the poll held on 12 February 2026, 1,296 voters supported the plan, with 92 voting against. Turnout was 20.7% of the 6,724 electorate, with just one ballot paper rejected.

Voters were asked whether Epsom & Ewell Borough Council should use the Neighbourhood Plan to help decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area.

The Council has confirmed that the next step is for the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee formally to “make” (adopt) the plan, after which its policies will be used in determining planning applications in Stoneleigh and Auriol.

What the Plan Covers

The Stoneleigh and Auriol Neighbourhood Plan (SANP) covers around 180 hectares broadly aligned with the two wards and runs to 2039.

Prepared by the Stoneleigh and Auriol Neighbourhood Forum, the plan’s stated vision is to retain the area’s “unique character and strong sense of community” while allowing it to grow to meet future needs.

Once made, it becomes part of the statutory development plan and must be used in deciding planning applications, alongside the Borough Local Plan and national planning policy.

Core Principles in the Plan

The plan does not allocate major development sites. Instead, it focuses on design control, protection of character, safeguarding retail and community facilities, environmental sustainability and parking standards.

Housing and design: New development must maintain consistent building lines and complement existing form, massing and roofscapes, reflecting the area’s largely 1930s suburban layout. Development should generally respect the prevailing two to three storey character, using materials sympathetic to the area. Backland development may be permitted only where access, amenity space and privacy standards are satisfied. The Forum supports higher-density development where it is demonstrably sympathetic and does not harm local character.

Retail and community facilities: Proposals that enhance local retail facilities will be supported, while changes of use that threaten the predominance of commercial uses in retail centres will be resisted.

Green spaces and environment: The plan designates and protects local green spaces, seeks to minimise flood risk and supports renewable energy and energy efficiency measures where compatible with local character.

Transport and parking: Development must assess transport impact and provide adequate residential parking and cycle storage.

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What Is Its Legal Weight?

Neighbourhood Plans derive their authority from national planning legislation. Once formally “made”, they form part of the statutory development plan.

Planning applications must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In practical terms, SANP policies will therefore carry weight in planning decisions and appeals.

However, they must be in general conformity with strategic policies in the Borough’s Local Plan and with national planning policy. They cannot override housing targets or contradict higher-level planning frameworks.

Does It Add Anything New?

The referendum result gives the plan a strong democratic mandate. Yet a legitimate question arises: does the Neighbourhood Plan introduce new planning principles, or does it largely restate existing ones?

Many of its core themes — protecting local character, limiting excessive height, maintaining building lines, safeguarding retail centres, supporting sustainable drainage and requiring parking provision — are already embedded in the National Planning Policy Framework, existing Borough Core Strategy and Development Management Policies, and established appeal decisions emphasising design quality and character.

The plan does not set housing numbers, allocate strategic sites or alter Borough-wide growth targets.

Its practical effect may therefore be less about introducing new rules and more about giving locally specific design guidance additional statutory status, strengthening the weight attached to character arguments at appeal, and sending a clear political signal about community expectations.

Whether that materially alters planning outcomes will be tested in future applications and appeals.

What Happens After April 2027?

The abolition of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council in April 2027 and its confirmed replacement by the East Surrey Unitary Authority will not invalidate the Neighbourhood Plan.

Neighbourhood Plans form part of the statutory development plan for the land area, not merely for the council that adopted them. The East Surrey Unitary Authority will inherit responsibility for applying the SANP in determining planning applications within Stoneleigh and Auriol.

However, the new authority will prepare its own strategic development plan covering a much wider geography. Over time, neighbourhood plan policies can be superseded or carry reduced weight if inconsistent with new strategic frameworks. The Neighbourhood Forum will also require renewed designation if the plan is to be formally reviewed or updated.

In short, the SANP is likely to survive reorganisation — but its long-term influence will depend on how it aligns with the policies of the incoming East Surrey authority.

A Strong ‘Yes’ — and a Test Ahead

With more than 93% of votes cast in favour, residents have clearly expressed a wish to shape development in their area.

The real question now is whether the Neighbourhood Plan will meaningfully change planning outcomes — or whether it primarily codifies principles already embedded in existing local and national policy.

That answer will emerge not at the ballot box, but in the planning committee room — and, potentially, on appeal.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Epsom & Ewell’s Council responds to Local Plan concerns

Stage 2 Examination of Epsom & Ewell’s Local Plan opens Tuesday

Epsom & Ewell’s Local Plan under the Green microscope

Epsom and Ewell Local Plan Submitted for Examination

Image: Typical Stoneleigh residential road. Google Street View

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Cllr prays for Priest Hill not to be developed in

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Ewell

24 February 2026



A controversial proposal to build hundreds of homes on Green Belt land at Priest Hill in Ewell has re-emerged, with developers now progressing a revised scheme for up to 300 homes. The land, adjacent to Ewell East Station, had previously been identified in the draft Local Plan as a major housing allocation but was later removed from the Regulation 19 version due to concerns over deliverability.

From 350 Homes to 300

Under the earlier Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan, the site — known as NON013 — was allocated for at least 350 net zero carbon dwellings, with buildings up to six storeys, ground-floor retail space and the re-provision of playing pitches at Hook Road Arena. However, concerns were raised during consultation. Sutton & Epsom Rugby Football Club (RFC), which leases part of the site until 2079, objected strongly, citing the importance of its pitches to its 2,000 members and warning of potential harm to its long-term viability. Sport England also raised concerns, noting that any loss of playing field land would have to meet strict national policy tests, including equivalent replacement in quality, quantity, location and accessibility. Following these issues, and in the absence of evidence that long leases could be surrendered, the Council removed the site from the Regulation 19 Proposed Submission Local Plan in November 2024.

What Has Changed?

According to the Council's latest position statement dated 22 January 2026, the landowner's agents are now seeking pre-application advice for a revised scheme. The updated proposal would redevelop approximately 4.9 hectares currently under the leasehold control of Old Suttonians for up to 300 homes, while retaining the 3.7 hectares leased to Sutton & Epsom RFC as sports pitches. Old Suttonians confirmed to the Council in December 2025 that their use of the land for sports ceased in 1999, the clubhouse and changing rooms were demolished in 2015, and they have signed an option agreement to return their land to the freeholder for redevelopment. They do not sub-lease or share the land with other parties. In contrast, Sutton & Epsom RFC confirmed in January 2026 that it fully utilises its leased land for three senior pitches and one mini pitch and has no intention of ending its lease early, with 53 years remaining.

Green Belt Concerns

Nonsuch Ward Conservative councillor **Shanice Goldman** has called for urgent clarity over the revived proposals. The site lies within the Green Belt and while the revised scheme indicates that rugby pitches would remain, residential development would still take place on designated Green Belt land. Cllr Goldman said: "The protection of Green Belt and transparency in process are not optional extras. They are fundamental." She added: "This is still Green Belt land. And once Green Belt is gone, it does not come back." Residents, she said, had been left with the impression that large-scale development at Priest Hill was no longer proceeding and were now asking what has changed.

Housing Need Versus Open Land

The landowner's agents have previously argued that the site is well served by public transport and should be reconsidered given the borough's unmet housing need. The current proposal is at pre-application stage, meaning no formal planning application has yet been submitted. However, the renewed activity is likely to reignite debate over housing numbers, Green Belt protection and the future of community sports provision in Ewell. Interested parties include Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, the freeholder Coldunell Limited, Old Suttonians and Sutton & Epsom Rugby Football Club. Further details are expected once a formal planning application is lodged.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Councillors belted-up on Green Belt?

Land adjoining Ewell East Station

Image: Development area approximately overlaid on Google Map aerial view of Priest Hill.

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Edinburgh Duke visits Surrey’s Arts University

24 February 2026



Thursday 12th February, The Duke of Edinburgh visited University for the Creative Arts (UCA) and its School of Creative & Cultural Industries, to celebrate it providing 170 years of practice-based, creative education and to meet its current young creatives who study across traditional and emerging arts.

UCA welcomed The Duke, who has a professional background in the creative industries and is a Patron of a range of organisations that aim to widen opportunities within the sector.

His Royal Highness was met at UCA by Joint Acting Vice-Chancellors, Professor Melanie Gray and Professor Mark Ellul, alongside Chancellor, Dame Magdalene Odundo; Executive Dean, Professor Sophy Smith; and Pro-Vice Chancellor Academic Partnerships & Industry Engagement, Professor Lyndsay Duthie.

Professors Gray and Ellul, commented: “We are honoured to welcome HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, a recognised champion of the arts, to UCA in Farnham. We were delighted to give His Royal Highness a tour of our specialist facilities, where he got hands-on experience of traditional crafts to future-facing technologies, and introduce him to the next generation of creatives, our talented student community.”

The Duke was also introduced to globally renowned fashion designer and UCA Chancellor Emerita, Dame Zandra Rhodes. Zandra began her own creative career at UCA, studying at one of its former art colleges in the 1960s, which she credits as the foundation for her creativity.

Other alumni to meet The Duke included actor Gabin Kongolo, who made history as the first Black person to perform and speak Welsh on stage at Shakespeare’s Globe and ceramicist Tim Fluck, a British Ceramics Biennial Fresh Talent Award winner.

The Duke’s tour formally commenced in UCA’s creative workshops, including its glass studio, where UCA is among only a handful of specialist institutions in the UK to offer a degree in the subject. Before the tour shifted up a gear, showcasing UCA’s high-tech filmmaking space, its Virtual Production studio. Students used real-time rendering software and motion capture to immerse His Royal Highness in a scene from Moryow, which was shot in the space and will make its debut on the film festival circuit later this year.

Professor Duthie then led a Creative Economy Roundtable discussion in which The Duke actively participated, alongside UCA academics and members of the University’s very own Creative & Cultural Industries Leaders Network, as well as alumni.

Professor Duthie said: “The UK’s creative and cultural industries contribute £126bn to the economy and support over 2.4 million jobs. Concurrently the sector is being fundamentally reshaped by emerging technologies. It was encouraging to hear His Royal Highness articulate a vision that aligns so closely with ours. At UCA, we are preparing the next generation not just to adopt new tools, but to shape how they are used — equipping students to think critically, create boldly, and lead an industry evolving faster than ever before.”

The Duke’s tour concluded with the unveiling of an artwork created by second year BA Graphic Design student, Ella Stevenson and received a piece of glassware designed by glass technician, Laura Quinn. The works marked The Duke’s visit, celebrating 170 years of UCA.

The Duke said: “Congratulations on 170 years of developing all those essential arts, crafts and keeping the creative flame well and truly alight.”

University of the Creative Arts.

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Government comes to Surrey’s SEND rescue

24 February 2026



The Government is ‘finally recognising the heavy pressure placed on local budgets to support children’ after agreeing to wipe out 90 per cent of the debt councils has accrued in Special Education Need and Disabilities spending.

Surrey has 46,000 children with Additional Needs and Disabilities (AND) with 16,870 children and young people with a statutory Education Health and Care (EHC) plan. This is more than double the number in 2018 and puts it at the third highest in the country.

Councils must, by law, have to identify and support children with special educational needs but the surge in numbers has seen spending far outstrip what they receive from Government. Surrey County Council has spent millions since 2018 as part of its recovery plan for the service – which it has said is yielding results, but has pressed for changes to the wider system, additional funding and reform.

MP Greg Stafford also told the Commons that the High Needs Block deficit in Surrey was forecast to run to £165m by 2027. It leaves councils having to find huge sums every year – with historically poor support from the Government. The news that £5billion will be spent to eliminate almost all historic debt in Englands, they hope, signals a major change in direction.

Helyn Clack, Surrey County Councl’s deputy cabinet member for children, families and lifelong learning said: “Surrey County Council welcomes the announcement on SEND deficits. It shows that central government finally recognises the heavy pressure placed on local budgets to support children with special educational needs, costs that should have been fully funded through the Government’s Dedicated Schools Grant.

“We are mindful that this SEND deficit funding covers overspends we have already incurred. We now await more detail on the expected ongoing costs of the SEND system and the long-promised reforms needed to make it sustainable in the future. In the meantime, we are reviewing the details of the announcement to understand what it means for the Council.”

The announcement follows Local Government Association (LGA) warnings that as many as eight in 10 English councils would be facing bankruptcy if forced pay back their SEND deficits in full.

Cllr Amanda Hopgood, chair of the Local Government Association’s children, young people and families committee, said: “Councils want every child and young person to get the support they need. But under the current failing system, the rise in need has left many councils buckling under the strain.

“We were pleased that government announced it will tackle 90 per cent of councils’ historic high needs deficits, following our call to address the deficits, which removes the immediate threat of insolvency for many councils. Fully writing off historic and future high needs deficits remains critical.

“The challenges within the SEND system are not just financial. The Schools White Paper must deliver brave and bold reform where more children can get the support they need in a mainstream school, without needing a statutory plan.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

New Surrey County Council HQ, Woodhatch Place on Cockshot Hill, Reigate. Credit Surrey County Council

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Surrey University installs Vice-Chancellor number six

24 February 2026



Guildford Cathedral played host as town and gown come together to see formal installation of Professor Stephen Jarvis as Surrey’s sixth Vice-Chancellor

In a ceremony that fused a message about the dual research and teaching purpose of the University, the urgency of a rapidly changing world, and age-old academic pageantry, Professor Stephen Jarvis was formally installed as the University of Surrey’s sixth President and Vice-Chancellor at Guildford Cathedral on 11 February.

The academic and civic occasion was attended by community representatives and leaders – including council leaders, current and former MPs and representatives from across the region’s business and academic communities, alongside hundreds of staff and students from across the University community.

Professor Jarvis shared a message of a University with deep local roots – bringing together our community of academics, students and graduates with the wider community in Guildford, Surrey and beyond to contribute to social, economic and cultural wellbeing. He spoke of a University with a critical leadership role in combining entrepreneurship and purpose to find solutions to the challenges of the modern world, and in driving economic growth, social opportunity and the future skills agenda.

A computational scientist and former Royal Society Industry Fellow who helped establish The Alan Turing Institute, Professor Jarvis is internationally recognised for his academic leadership in high-performance computing, data science and applied artificial intelligence. On these foundations, he has established himself as an institutional and sector leader. At the University of Birmingham, where he served as Provost and Vice-Principal, he played a central role in shaping strategic vision, whilst at the University of Warwick he led industry-academic partnerships in big data as Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research).

Professor Jarvis took up the role of President and Vice-Chancellor at the University of Surrey on 15 September 2025. In his address to a packed cathedral, he said:

“The University of Surrey is defined by a dual commitment to excellence in both education and research. Ours is also a university with a clear sense of purpose: to provide an education that equips graduates for the world of work, and to undertake research that addresses some of the most urgent challenges facing society.

“Surrey aspires to be recognised among the very best universities in the UK, with a strong and growing global reputation, reach and influence. I firmly believe that the UK needs universities like ours to navigate the opportunities and challenges of technological change, respond to critical skills needs, and prepare students for the workplaces of the future.

“The University of Surrey is deeply rooted in its local community – not only a place of learning and discovery, but also an active contributor to the social, economic and cultural wellbeing of the communities we serve. The long-term success of a place is built through a shared endeavour: universities, colleges and schools that educate and inspire; public services that protect and enable; infrastructure that connects people to opportunity; and governance that provides stability, trust and direction. Aligned, we don’t just function, we flourish.”

The installation ceremony featured a traditional academic procession with full regalia, a specially commissioned fanfare, and music from the University Chamber Choir. The fanfare has been arranged for the installation by Dr Christopher Wiley, Head of Music and Media at the University, having been originally composed by the renowned composer of the day Dame Ethel Smyth. Dame Ethel lived in Surrey for most of her life and is commemorated at the University and with a statue in her home town of Woking. More information on the fanfare is included in the Notes to Editors, below.

Professor Jarvis joins Surrey as the University continues to deliver Vision 2041, its long-term strategy to become a globally recognised top 100 leader in research, innovation, education and civic engagement. The University has achieved its highest-ever global position of 219th in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2026 and remains within the UK top 15 for student satisfaction, with 85% of graduates progressing into highly skilled employment.

Surrey University

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The specially commissioned fanfare was originally composed in the 1930s as one of eight Fanfares for the Musicians' Benevolent Fund, each composed by one of the eight best-known British composers of the day, based on a traditional military bugle call. The 'Men's Meal (2nd call)' bugle call, also known as 'Hot Potatoes' was composed as a fanfare by **Dame Ethel Smyth**, who lived in Surrey for most of her life and is commemorated at the University and with a statue in her home town of Woking. As well as producing an impressive canon of musical works, Dame Smyth was a much-published author and an influential suffragette. Her fanfare was first performed by the Royal Military School Bandsmen under Captain H.E. Adkins at a Musicians' Benevolent Fund Annual Dinner held in London's Savoy Hotel on 8 May 1930. It was recorded by the same ensemble and performed on other occasions, but the manuscript was lost, with Dr Wiley using the 1930s recording to bring the fanfare back to life for today's installation.

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