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

26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

Epsom and Ewell FC’s first home game of 2026 drawn

16 March 2026



Epsom & Ewell FC 0 v Camberley Town FC 0 14th March, Chalky Lane, Chessington Combined Counties Premier League

We finally saw our first home game of 2026 at Chalky lane after a stop start preparation.

After several hours of work in the morning, the referee passed the pitch fit for play in the morning but then on arrival required four further inspections. The club carried out additional work to make the surface playable, forcing kick off to be delayed until 3:10pm.

Courtney Swaby came in for his debut in the number 10 position, with Callum O’Keeffe moving to right back and Ore Allen back into centre midfield. Jason Vincent also returned to the club up top.

Both sides started brightly, with the Salts striking the crossbar early on through a long-range effort from Brendan Murphy-McVey and could have had 3 or 4 goals in the first half an hour as Camberley arrived to park the bus.

The match then took a dramatic turn when a dangerous high boot saw Camberley’s Mo Black sent off, while the Salts Stefan Aiwone suffered a serious head injury and had to be withdrawn. Luke Miller came on to make his 150th appearance for the Salts. The score remained goalless at half-time.

In the second half, Epsom & Ewell made a series of changes to dry to find a way through Camberley’s obdurate defence and keeper who was having a blinder.

Tom Smith was replaced by Ali Fofahan on 63 minutes then Anthony Nazareth made way for Karl Bailey on 74 minutes. New signing Courtney Swaby was replaced by Ryley Merrett and captain Brendon Murphy McVey was substituted for Leo Cunningham late on.

The Salts created several chances and had a strong penalty appeal, but despite their pressure—and the man advantage—the match finished 0–0.

On the plus side another clean sheet in short order which will please the management, but the inability to turn chances into goals remains a frustration. Teams around us in the league continue to slip up and provide some breathing space, but The Salts will be looking to Tuesdays’ home match against Redhill as a chance to finally hit the back of the net.

We would also like to thank our mascots from BMM Sports Coaching and Epsom & Ewell Colts for your support; we hope you enjoyed the afternoon!

Epsom and Ewell FC Media

.

.

.

.

.

.

.

.

The big child smartphone use debate starts in

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

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

26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

Surrey

16 March 2026



Parents are facing “no bigger issue” than the impact of smartphones and social media on their children, says Godalming and Ash MP Jeremy Hunt.

The former chancellor told a public meeting in Godalming that his own family are now also “in the thick of it”, debating whether to allow their kids to have smartphones and social media.

Doctors, teachers, parents and politicians gathered at Wilfred Noyce Community Centre in Godalming on March 13 to discuss concerns around children using smartphones and social media, and whether there should be a ban for under-16s.

The discussion forms part of ongoing work with the campaign group Smartphone Free Childhood Surrey, which have been working with Mr Hunt and other local campaigners to raise awareness on the impact smartphones might be having on young people’s learning and wellbeing.

Concern is growing among parents, carers and educators that smartphones are disrupting classrooms, compromising safety and chipping away at children’s mental health. Evidence shared at the meeting suggested only around 11 per cent of schools are currently smartphone-free, despite research indicating pupils in such schools can achieve GCSE results one to two grades higher.

Audience members also heard stark anecdotal evidence from a frontline healthcare professional in a statement she sent to be read at the meeting. Consultant paediatrician Dr Louise Mills described several cases she had treated linked to online trends and cyberbullying. They included a 14-year-old admitted after suffering a seizure while attempting a TikTok challenge, and an 11-year-old who suffered life-changing burns after copying something seen online. Another 14-year-old patient took their own life following sustained cyberbullying.

GP Susie Davies, founder of the charity PAPAYA (Parents Against Phone Addiction in Young Adults), said young people were experiencing a “mental health epidemic”.

She said teenagers now spend on average two to three hours a day on social media (some spend more than five) exposing them to constant comparison and harmful content.

“The tech is addictive by design,” she said. “It is structured with dopamine reward pathways which the teenage brain is particularly vulnerable to.”

Ms Davies told the community centre that problematic phone use makes young people more likely to experience depression. She added that children are missing out on sleep, real-world experiences and face-to-face friendships, with some even suffering trauma after viewing disturbing content online.

Shadow education secretary Laura Trott MP told the audience smartphones and social media were “not safe for our young people”. She argued schools should remove smartphones from classrooms and ensure technology is only used when it has proven educational value.

The MP for Sevenoaks, Swanley and the Dartford Villages said: “We’ve sleepwalked into the overuse of screens in schools to the detriment of education.”

Leader of Waverley Conservatives Councillor Jane Austin said: “As a mum of four, I’ve seen directly the impact smartphones and social media can have on children. A number of Surrey schools have already adopted no-smartphone policies, and the evidence is clear that this helps children focus and achieve better outcomes.

“If elected to run West and East Surrey, Conservatives will work to ensure all Surrey schools are smartphone-free so that children can learn without constant digital distraction.”

Some Year 11s in the audience raised the issue that some children might get VPNs to work round the social media ban, or might find other ways to source smartphones. “We have bans on alcohol and cigarettes for children,” she said. “They’re not 100 per cent perfect but they exist because those things are harmful. The same is true for social media.”

Campaigners from the group Smartphone Free Childhood also called for cultural change, arguing that delaying children’s first smartphone until at least 16 could dramatically improve attention spans, wellbeing and learning.

Headteacher Adam Samson said his school, Godalming Junior, already requires pupils to hand in phones at the start of the day, with Year 6 pupils sometimes allowed a simple “brick phone”. The policy has reduced cyberbullying incidents to zero, he said.

“Once children have a smartphone, they always have one,” he said. “We’re simply delaying it and giving them more time to be children.”

Emily Dalton LDRS

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

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

26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

Karl Nicholas honoured with Active Citizen Award at Borough Civic Reception

16 March 2026



A long-serving community volunteer whose work spans youth organisations, music, policing and education has been honoured with Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Active Citizen Award at the Mayor's Annual Civic Reception.

The award was presented to **Karl Nicholas** by the Mayor, Cllr Robert Leach, during the civic gathering held on the evening of 13 March at Bourne Hall in Ewell. The reception, hosted by the Mayor and Mayoress Marilyn Leach, brought together councillors, aldermen, freemen of the borough, past mayors and other invited residents who have contributed to civic life in Epsom & Ewell.

Among those attending was Mary Zoeller, Deputy-Lieutenant of Surrey, along with a wide range of community figures representing voluntary organisations, education, faith groups and public service across the borough.

The Active Citizen citation described Nicholas as someone with a "distinguished record of public service", highlighting decades of involvement across multiple areas of community life.

He has been involved with Second Cuddington Scouts for more than two decades, including 18 years serving as assistant commissioner for the area. The scout group provides activities for boys and girls aged six to eighteen and offers training opportunities for young people, including camps and leadership development.

Music has been another major thread in Nicholas's community service. He serves as bandmaster and assistant musical director of the Kingston and Malden Scout and Guide Band, a role he has held for 25 years. The band has performed at prestigious occasions including Buckingham Palace garden parties and the Lord Mayor's Show.

His musical contribution also extends to church life. Nicholas learned to play the organ at Cuddington Church and has been involved in church music there for more than 30 years, first as a choirboy and later as organist and choir director. The citation notes that he has frequently stepped in to support services when needed, including standing in at short notice to play for the Mayor's civic service when the regular organist was taken ill.

Alongside his voluntary work, Nicholas has also served as a special constable for 14 years, and in his professional life works as a teacher. He currently serves as Head of Inclusion and Special Needs at Southborough High School, having previously been deputy head at a school in Cheam.

The citation concluded that across these roles Nicholas has shown "commitment and competence" and that his personal manner and skill make him "a worthy recipient of the Active Citizen Award".

The civic reception itself provided a relaxed and celebratory atmosphere in Bourne Hall. The evening featured musical performances from Ukrainian musician Vladislav Voloshin, who entertained guests with a programme including pieces by ABBA and Bach, performed on saxophone and clarinet. The Mayor himself accompanied the performance on the piano.

Guests mingled over refreshments in the hall while reflecting the borough's long civic traditions. The gathering brought together representatives from across the political spectrum and many strands of local life, demonstrating the borough's continuing culture of voluntary service and public engagement.

Proceedings were guided with humour and warmth by Cllr Julian Freeman, the Liberal Democrat councillor who acted as master of ceremonies for the evening.

While politics often divides in the council chamber, the reception provided a reminder that the borough's civic culture rests on a broader shared commitment to public service and community life.

That spirit was embodied in the recognition of Karl Nicholas — a volunteer whose decades of work in youth development, music, education and policing have quietly strengthened the fabric of local life in Epsom & Ewell.

Lionel Blackman

Image: Karl Nicholas holding his award medal against the background of St Mary's Church (Des Blenkinsopp – CC BY-SA 2.0)

Related reports:

From Ukraine to Epsom: How Music and Kindness Struck the Right Note

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

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

26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

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

16 March 2026



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has formally abandoned plans to create parish-style community councils after a public consultation produced overwhelming opposition, bringing to an end a controversial review that has cost about £70,000.

The decision was taken at a full council meeting on 12th March following a debate that exposed sharp political divisions and prompted renewed criticism of the Residents' Association administration that initiated the review.

Councillors ultimately accepted a report concluding that the consultation "does not demonstrate sufficient public support for the proposals", after residents rejected the idea of creating two community councils covering Epsom and Ewell.

But the debate revealed tensions over the purpose of the consultation itself, the cost of the process, and the future of local representation in Surrey after local government reorganisation.

Beckett: residents "have spoken" but warns of democratic deficit

Introducing the report, Councillor **John Beckett** (Auriol), who led the Community Governance Review (CGR), said the council had carried out extensive engagement with residents and should be proud of the exercise.

He told councillors that more than 2,200 responses had been received, making it one of the council's most widely responded-to consultations in recent years.

Beckett said the consultation was justified because residents across Surrey had not been properly consulted about the government's decision to reorganise local government. He argued the borough had taken a different approach by asking residents directly what they wanted.

However, he acknowledged the result left the council with little option but to halt the plan. "Our residents have spoken on this matter, and with 82 per cent opposed to the idea of community councils, the recommendation of this report is not to proceed with CGR," he said.

Despite accepting the result, Beckett used both his opening speech and his closing remarks to warn that the new local government structure could weaken local representation.

He questioned how the proposed neighbourhood committees expected under the new unitary structure would address local issues. "How the non-funded, non-decision-making neighbourhood committees will miraculously deliver those local issues facing our residents," he asked, warning they may not resolve the democratic deficit created by large unitary councils.

In his summing-up he said the future system could leave a patchwork across Surrey of areas with and without meaningful local representation.

Opposition: "self-serving" and a "vanity project"

Opposition councillors were sharply critical of the review and its purpose. Labour councillor **Chris Ames** (Court) said the administration had been warned not to embark on the process. "The Residents' Association administration was warned not to take the council into this shambolic, costly and self-serving process," he said.

Ames argued the public had rejected what he described as an RA "vanity project". "The public saw through it. It's clear that the residents rejected the RA vanity project," he said, adding that residents also resented the idea of another layer of taxation.

He criticised the consultation structure, saying residents were effectively offered only one option. "It's laughable to present giving residents a choice of unwanted parishes or nothing at all as a choice," he said.

He also asked where accountability lay for the £70,000 cost of the review. "Seventy thousand pounds later, where does the CGR shambles leave us?" he asked.

Claims the review was about creating roles

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

Councillor **Julian Freeman** (Liberal Democrat, College) argued there had never been a public demand for parish councils in the borough. “There’s never been any demand for it,” he said. Freeman suggested the proposal had been linked to the approaching abolition of borough councils. “It was a way of trying to carve out some kind of role for soon-to-be former Residents’ Association councillors,” he said.

He added that residents reacted strongly once they realised the potential council tax implications. “People saw that it was going to cost an extra £50 plus on their council tax bill and quite rightly said, what on earth do we want to pay for another layer of government for?”

Criticism of consultation design

Several councillors criticised the structure of the consultation. Councillor **Bernie Muir** (Conservative Horton) said residents had not been offered alternative governance models. “We were given one option or nothing,” she said.

She added that neighbourhood area committees proposed under Surrey’s local government reorganisation had not been presented as an option. “Those committees should at least have been given a chance to see if they worked,” she said.

Another councillor said the consultation had effectively framed the issue as a choice between parish councils or losing local influence entirely.

Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative Horton) reminded the Chamber that the proposed Parishes would only manage a handful of allotments that residents grow fruit and vegetables in.

Administration defends consultation

Residents’ Association councillors strongly defended the review as an exercise in democratic engagement.

Councillor **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) said the borough had done what central government had not done during the reorganisation process. “We had the courage to ask our residents what they wanted,” he said.

He added that the council was respecting the outcome. “They’ve quite clearly said that they don’t want parish councils, and we will act upon that advice.” He claimed, wrongly as it transpired, that Epsom and Ewell would be the only area in the County without any parishes. See Epsom and Ewell Times table below.

Councillor **Rachel King** (RA, Town) also defended the cost of the consultation. She said the £70,000 spent equated to less than £1 per resident. “We’re talking about less than a pound per person for two full consultations,” she said.

King said the aim had been to explore how residents might retain local representation once the borough council disappears in 2027.

A consultation that defeated its own proposal

The consultation outcome – around 82 per cent opposition – effectively forced the council to abandon the idea it had been exploring.

But the debate highlighted a paradox. While the Residents’ Association leadership defended the consultation as a democratic exercise, several councillors argued the process appeared designed primarily to test support for parish councils rather than explore a range of possible governance models.

Critics pointed to the absence of alternatives such as neighbourhood area committees and the framing of the consultation around the creation of community councils.

At the same time, Beckett’s own speeches emphasised his belief that parish councils would have helped address what he described as the democratic deficit created by large unitary authorities.

End of a £70,000 process

The Community Governance Review had been one of the council’s strategic priorities for 2025–27. It involved two rounds of consultation, public meetings, publicity campaigns and engagement activities.

Despite the extensive engagement programme, the consultation produced a clear rejection of the proposal.

For now, Epsom & Ewell will remain without parish councils even after the borough council disappears under the planned Surrey reorganisation.

Parish councils across Surrey

Although Epsom & Ewell currently has none, several Surrey districts contain parish or town councils. In many cases these cover only parts of the district rather than the entire area.

District / Borough	Parish or Town Councils (examples)
Epsom & Ewell	None
Elmbridge	None
Guildford	Ash, Normandy, Pirbright, Shalford, Send, Worplesdon
Mole Valley	Capel, Charlwood, Newdigate, Ockley
Reigate & Banstead	Horley Town Council; Salfords & Sidlow Parish

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

District / Borough	Parish or Town Councils (examples)
Runnymede	Englefield Green; Egham Town Council
Spelthorne	None
Surrey Heath	Bisley, Chobham, Windlesham
Tandridge	Numerous including Bletchingley, Burstow, Caterham Valley, Lingfield, Oxted, Warlingham
Waverley	Cranleigh, Farnham, Godalming, Haslemere, Bramley, Chiddingfold, Elstead and others
Woking	Several parish councils including Bisley, Horsell, Pyrford and others

This means that even in districts with parish councils, significant urban areas often remain unparished.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

Epsom and Ewell to ditch Parish Councils plan

Epsom and Ewell Times LGR reader survey results

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

Letters from local Councillors on Epsom and Ewell parishes

Is Epsom and Ewell getting “proportional representation” under Council shake-up?

Long serving Epsom Councillor blasts LGR and NACs

Parish power, democratic ideals — and the Residents’ Association dilemma

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

---

Epsom resident launches UK Choir of the Year

16 March 2026



A Worcester Park resident and former Epsom College music scholar is behind a new national competition celebrating Britain’s thriving amateur choral scene.

Lucy Mitchell, founder of **UK Choir of the Year**, is launching the initiative with a fundraising concert at Cadogan Hall in London on 18th May, ahead of the competition opening for entries later this year.

Mitchell, who lives in Worcester Park and is a member of the Adam Street Singers, said the project had been in development for more than a year and aims to highlight the strength and diversity of choirs across the country.

The new competition will open applications in June 2026 and culminate in a live final at Milton Court at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in April 2027.

The launch concert will feature performances from the Adam Street Singers, Citi London Choir and the Lewisham & Greenwich NHS Choir – whose members famously topped the Christmas charts – alongside guest appearances by TV doctor Dr Ranj and The Choir with No Name.

Mitchell said the competition was designed to recognise the many high-quality choirs operating outside the fully professional music sector.

“So many choirs are doing extraordinary work but rarely get the chance to be heard nationally,” she said. “This competition exists to celebrate the standard, diversity, and community behind choral singing across the UK.”

UK Choir of the Year is being run as a not-for-profit initiative rooted in the belief that collective singing plays an important role in wellbeing and community identity.

Some of the proceeds from the competition will support **The Choir with No Name**, an organisation which runs choirs for people affected by homelessness.

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

The competition will be judged by leading figures from the UK choral world including composer Will Todd, conductor and vocal specialist Dan Ludford-Thomas and conductor and gospel specialist Karen Gibson MBE.

Funds raised at the Cadogan Hall concert will help develop the competition and create access bursaries to ensure choirs from across the UK are able to take part.

Mitchell said the initiative was intended to celebrate the “richness and diversity” of Britain’s choral tradition while creating a national platform for amateur ensembles of all styles and sizes.

Applications for UK Choir of the Year open at the end of June 2026, with the inaugural final scheduled for 10 April 2027.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Hope courted in new Surrey school for extra needs

16 March 2026



The official opening of Hopescourt School in Walton-on-Thames marks a new chapter for children with additional needs in Surrey. The Lord Lieutenant of Surrey joined pupils, staff, Bourne Education Trust, project partners and the Leader of Surrey County Council to celebrate the opening of a school designed to give children the support, stability and opportunities they need to thrive.

Hopescourt School will ultimately provide 200 specialist places for autistic pupils and children with communication and interaction needs by 2029. For many families, the new school means shorter journeys and stronger connections to their local community, ensuring children can learn and grow in an environment that feels safe, familiar and supportive.

With the first cohort of pupils already settling into their new learning environment, the school will continue to expand over the coming years, strengthening Surrey’s local specialist education offer. It forms a key part of Surrey County Council’s commitment to increasing high quality specialist provision close to home, helping more children access the right support without needing to travel long distances.

The opening event brought together students, families, Surrey County Council, Bourne Education Trust, construction partners Willmott Dixon and many others whose expertise and dedication have helped bring this new school to life.

The Lord Lieutenant of Surrey, Michael More-Molyneux, said: “I was so pleased to be present to celebrate the opening of Hopescourt School. Never having visited the new building, I was immediately taken with its design. For members of the teaching team, it was obvious that they were very enthusiastic about their new school. The pupils, it should be said, were equally enthusiastic about their new place of learning. It is a facility that is certainly needed in Surrey, and I send my congratulations to all concerned for the building of this most impressive centre of education.”

Surrey County Council’s investment of nearly £30 million to build the school reflects its long-term ambition to give children and young people with additional needs the best possible start. The expansion of specialist provision is a core aim of Surrey’s Inclusion and Additional Needs Partnership Strategy 2023–2026, ensuring children receive the right support where and when they need it.

Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council, highlighted the life-changing impact this new school will have on children and young people and their families: “Hopescourt School is a symbol of what can be achieved when partners work together with a shared vision, creating a school that is inclusive, sustainable, and truly life-changing for Surrey children and their families.”

Hopescourt is also Surrey’s first Net Zero Carbon in operation specialist free school, combining sustainability with child-centred design. Specially designed spaces support the school’s ethos of ‘pause, breathe, think and flourish’, ensuring a calm and nurturing environment for pupils aged 4 to 19.

Richard Poulter, Managing Director at Willmott Dixon, highlighted the lasting impact of the project: “Delivering Surrey’s first Net Zero in Operation school reflects our joint commitment to sustainability and community impact. This school will provide much needed specialist places and support generations of young people.”

The project is the result of close collaboration between Willmott Dixon, Surrey County Council, the school, Bourne Education Trust, Freemantles School, AtkinsRealis and many other partners. In particular, the dedication and expertise of

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

the council's Land & Property Capital Projects team and construction partners Willmott Dixon ensured the successful delivery of a school built around the needs of children.

Andy Field, Chair of Bourne Education Trust, reflected on the collective achievement: "Hopescourt stands as a powerful example of partnership in action. This school demonstrates what can be achieved when organisations come together with a shared purpose: to create exceptional, inclusive opportunities for young people. With these fabulous new facilities and excellent staff serving our children, we now have the opportunity to build a thriving school at the heart of the community with the aim of becoming one of the best special schools in the country."

Acting Headteacher, Nicky Meston, paid tribute to the dedication of the Hopescourt staff and the excitement of the school community: "I am incredibly proud of our team and the way they champion our pupils every single day. Today isn't just about opening a building, it's about opening doors to opportunity, belonging, and the very best start in life."

Hopescourt School embodies the council's vision for inclusive, high-quality and community-anchored provision, delivering sustainable support and improving outcomes for children and families across Surrey.

Surrey County Council

Three beers for Dorking

16 March 2026



Beer fans will be pumped to know that Dorking Halls will be able to offer customers a greater variety of booze after planning permission was secured to convert storage units into cellars. Antique hunters may be less than thrilled however. Mole Valley District Council has given itself the green light to convert the units at the northwest of the halls so they can be used by the town's flagship theatre. The block had been in long-term use by Dorking auctioneers P F Windibank to keep its wares and will force the company, which been based there for over half a century, to move elsewhere. Officers, who recommended the conversion be approved, said it would support the "popular leisure and cultural facility", Dorking Halls, and help its long-term viability.

They told the March development management committee: "They consider they need more (space), to provide a greater variety of drinks and they need more storage for beer kegs. The proposed change of use would support Dorking Halls and the wider town centre economy. Dorking Halls is an important venue for Mole Valley, it provides opportunities for leisure and recreation both for those living within and outside the district."

John Collins, speaking on behalf of the application, said the increased storage was needed due to the scale of activities and that revenues generated through bar sales underpinned the venue's viability. He said the Dorking Halls was cherished by the community and added: "The current cellarage was simply not adequate and more space needed to improve back of house operations and comfort within the facility. Being able to have a comfortable welcoming place with a decent bar is all part of that experience."

Councillors at the meeting expressed concern over how it would impact the town's antique scene – although that lies outside the committee's remit. Cllr Claire Malcomson (Liberal Democrat: Holmwoods and Beare Green) said: "I know Dorking Halls is an extremely precious asset that we have but I do also think this is going to (impact) some of the trade in Dorking. So I am not going to pass judgement or anything but I wanted to make that comment because I think this could be quite a loss for us." Cllr Kirstie Havard (Liberal Democrat: Capel, Leigh, Newdigate and Charlwood) added: "This application is causing great harm to that business they have been there for 80 years. It's arisen after the first phase of Dorking Halls (refurbishment) was completed and it was decided that space was needed, and I understand the reasons, but I'm very worried about Windibank and what they are losing, and it is very harmful to their business."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Dorking Halls (image Google)

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

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

26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

Some Surrey care services at a crossroads?

16 March 2026



A Surrey charity has warned that unpaid carers could be pushed “beyond breaking point” after Surrey County Council ended contracts for two carer support services.

Crossroads Care Surrey said the county council has withdrawn support for its Emergency Care Provision and Carer Emergency Planning services, decisions it claims were made with little notice and without consultation with carers who rely on them.

The charity said the changes follow earlier reductions in respite support for carers and could leave many families struggling at the most critical moments, particularly when dealing with medical emergencies or caring for loved ones at the end of their lives.

Crossroads said it received notification only days ago that Surrey County Council (SCC) would no longer support its end-of-life respite service, which enables unpaid carers to take short breaks while supporting terminally ill relatives at home.

The Carer Emergency Planning service will also end at the close of March, giving what the charity says is only three weeks’ notice. Crossroads says almost 1,500 carers who already have emergency plans in place will lose the safety net those plans were designed to provide.

The charity warned the changes could have “serious and far-reaching consequences” for vulnerable residents and already stretched health and care services.

It suggested that without emergency support, more carers could reach exhaustion and be unable to continue caring at home, potentially leading to avoidable hospital admissions or crisis interventions from social services.

Terry Hawkins, chief executive of Crossroads Care Surrey, said unpaid carers provide care worth an estimated £162 billion a year across the UK, a contribution broadly equivalent to the NHS budget.

He said: “Over the past year we have already seen vital support reduced following the removal of respite services. Now, further contracts are being ended early, leaving carers with fewer and fewer places to turn.

“Unpaid carers are the invisible backbone of our health and care system. Without them, the NHS and social care services would simply not cope.

“These services provide the basic safeguards that allow carers to keep going, knowing that if something happens to them, or when families face the end of life, support is there.

“Removing them risks pushing already exhausted carers beyond breaking point.”

Crossroads also questioned why the decision had not been considered by Surrey County Council’s Cabinet, arguing that services affecting thousands of vulnerable residents should be subject to public scrutiny.

The charity has said it will attempt to launch its own emergency support service to help carers who may now find themselves without practical respite assistance.

Surrey County Council has defended the decision, saying the contracts had not delivered the impact expected and that a new approach to supporting carers will replace them.

Sinead Mooney, Deputy Leader of the council and Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, said the authority had carried out a review before deciding not to renew the agreements with Crossroads.

She said: “After careful review, we’ve decided to end – or not renew – contracts with Crossroads Care Surrey for carer support services because the contracts have failed to achieve the impact we expected.

“Take-up has been lower than we intended and we can’t justify continuing to fund the arrangements.”

Cllr Mooney said the council would introduce a new model of support, including a flexible £300 wellbeing break payment for carers.

She said the council would also work with NHS partners and other care providers to ensure carers can access help through the wider health and social care system.

“Surrey’s carers do an extraordinary job, often in challenging circumstances,” she said. “We’re absolutely committed to making sure the transition from these contracts for carers is smooth, responsive and supportive.”

The council also rejected suggestions that emergency support would disappear, saying replacement care in crisis situations would continue to be provided by the county council.

Cllr Mooney added that carers currently receiving support through the end-of-life contract would see no reduction in

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

services until that agreement ends in September, after which support could be delivered by a different provider.

She said carers concerned about support should contact the council's information and advice service.

The dispute highlights the continuing pressure on social care services across Surrey, where unpaid carers play a central role in supporting vulnerable residents at home.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

Carers respite at the Crossroads in Surrey?

Green light for MRI scanner at Leatherhead Leisure Centre

16 March 2026



Surrey will get a new MRI machine at Leatherhead Leisure Centre after councillors were "all in favour" of building the musculoskeletal scanner. The new machine will be housed in a temporary building, with the aim of bringing accessible, community-based imaging technology to the area.

The idea has been in motion for the past 18 months after it emerged there was a significant shortfall in MRI access and missed waiting time targets. Leatherhead Leisure Centre, in Guildford Road, Fetcham, was identified as the ideal location to help cut travel distances and relieve pressure on NHS hospitals, papers presented to Mole Valley's March development management committee said.

The application was not without obstacles as the centre sits on green belt land where new buildings are normally considered inappropriate unless exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated. In this case, the pressing need for new medical facilities available to all patients, together with the temporary five-year nature of the development, proved compelling enough.

Officers told the meeting: "The centre lies within the green belt but in this case the very special circumstances – the need for this type of medical facility and the proximity to the centre, with its car parking space – are strong." Originally the building was to be navy blue but a change of provider means it will now be white. Two staff members will occupy the site at any one time, with space for a waiting room and a separate scanning area.

Councillor Roger Adams (Liberal Democrat: Bookham West) said: "I am all in favour of additional health facilities in this area." The plans were approved by nine votes in favour, with no objections and two abstentions.

Questions were raised about whether the land might be reclassified as previously developed green belt land after the temporary building is removed, amid concerns this could open the site to future development. Officers said the five-year nature of the scheme, together with its valued community use, would see the site revert to its original protected status.

Members also pushed for the building to be finished in a colour less likely to show wear and tear, but were told the appearance was determined by the materials available rather than a simple paint choice

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Leatherhead Leisure Centre (Image Google) – the padel centre will be built behind the facility

---

Epsom and Ewell Local Plan tensions surface as committee debate curtailed by chair

16 March 2026

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

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

26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771



A meeting of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Licensing and Planning Policy Committee (LPPC) on 10th March exposed growing tensions over the borough's Local Plan after councillors attempted to debate how revised evidence is being submitted to the Government's Planning Inspector.

The committee ultimately voted seven in favour with two abstentions simply to "note" the Local Plan update report, with the chair not voting.

But the discussion revealed frustration among some councillors over the level of member oversight of changes being made during the examination process.

Inspector requires further work on Local Plan

The meeting began with a detailed briefing from the council's Head of Planning Policy explaining that the Local Plan, submitted for examination in March 2025, had been judged "unsound" by the Planning Inspector and required further work before it could proceed.

He told councillors that the Inspector had requested additional technical work to determine whether modifications could make the plan sound.

Two pieces of revised evidence had already been submitted earlier this year:

• a revised section of the Green Belt Topic Paper
• an updated Land Availability Assessment

Further work has now been requested, including the preparation of potential additional site allocations and updates to the housing trajectory, sustainability appraisal, habitats regulations assessment, transport assessment and infrastructure delivery plan.

All of this work must be submitted to the Inspector by 10th April 2026.

Officers warned councillors that national policy now discourages long pauses in Local Plan examinations and that delays could risk the plan being withdrawn.

Debate centres on councillor oversight

Much of the discussion that followed focused not on housing sites themselves but on whether councillors had sufficient opportunity to scrutinise documents being submitted to the Inspector.

Independent councillor **Alex Coley**, who had requested the agenda item, raised concerns about the process and argued that wider oversight of the evidence base was necessary.

He told the committee that effective decision-making required proper evaluation of alternatives and meaningful access for councillors and the public to the decision-making process.

Coley also suggested that some of the conclusions contained in recently submitted evidence appeared contradictory and said this demonstrated the need for greater scrutiny.

"I believe that sets out just one example of why wider public oversight is so important," he said.

Chair maintains procedural limits

However, councillors were advised that the committee could not introduce procedural motions or amendments relating to the Local Plan submissions.

Coley told the meeting that members had received advice from the council's Monitoring Officer stating that motions from the floor were not permitted under the committee's procedures.

He questioned that interpretation, suggesting it relied on provisions from an older model constitution that the council had replaced in 2023.

Despite this, the chair, Councillor **Peter O'Donovan** (RA, Ewell Court), maintained the procedural position and the meeting proceeded without amendments to the report or further debate on altering the process.

The committee therefore confined itself to noting the update report.

Questions raised about future scrutiny

Councillors also asked whether the committee would have further opportunities to review documents before they are

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

submitted to the Inspector.

Officers said the timetable made that unlikely for the next stage of work.

“With the deadline for the evidence base being the 10th of April… there isn’t time for a committee to do that,” councillors were told.

Instead, public consultation on the new material will take place later in the examination process once the evidence has been submitted.

Campaign concerns continue

Outside the council chamber, the Local Plan debate continues to attract strong public interest, particularly over potential Green Belt development.

Campaign group Epsom Green Belt circulated a message to councillors following the meeting expressing concern that revised Local Plan documents could be progressing without full scrutiny by elected members.

The group urged councillors to ensure that any material changes affecting Green Belt land are properly reviewed and debated.

Next steps for the Local Plan

The Local Plan examination will now move into its next stage.

Key steps expected include submission of new evidence to the Inspector by **10 April 2026**, followed by consultation on the new documents and potentially further examination hearings.

If the Inspector concludes that the plan can be made sound with modifications, the final decision will return to Full Council, where councillors will vote on whether to adopt the revised Local Plan.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

Council response to Epsom and Ewell Green Belt concerns

Fresh Local Plan row as councillor questions Green Belt revisions and governance at Epsom and Ewell

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

Epsom & Ewell’s Local Plan under the Green microscope

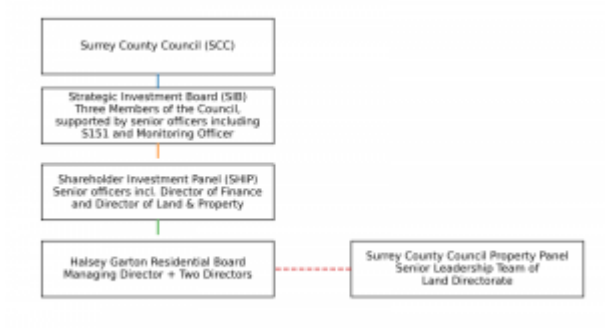
Epsom and Ewell Local Plan Submitted for Examination

and many more. Search “local plan”.

Image – Epsom and Ewell Borough Council YouTube channel

Surrey Council reviews property sales as it signs off business plans for own firms

16 March 2026



Surrey County Council has signed off the latest business plans for two companies it owns as it tries to strengthen its finances during a difficult period for local government.

The council’s Strategic Investment Board approved the 2026/27 plans for property company Halsey Garton Residential and recruitment firm Connect2Surrey on March 9. In a meeting mostly held in private (part 2) for commercial sensitivity reasons, the board also heard an update from the property data organisation TRICS Consortium Ltd, in which the council holds a smaller share.

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

What it means

Essentially, the council is reviewing how companies it owns or part-owns will operate over the next year and whether they can continue to bring in money.

Like many local authorities, Surrey County Council is under growing financial pressure, with rising costs and less support from central government. These companies are meant to help generate income and support council services.

Officials say the plans should help improve transparency and ensure the council keeps a close eye on how its investments perform.

Possible property sales

One of the biggest issues discussed was what to do with homes owned by Halsey Garton Residential. The council is considering the pace at which it sells off properties in the company's housing portfolio, and board members were asked to give direction on how quickly those homes should be sold.

That decision is partly being driven by changes to housing legislation coming into force in May 2026, which could affect how easily properties can be sold if they are currently occupied by tenants.

Selling homes more quickly could help the council bring in money sooner, but it also carries risks, including market uncertainty, reputational concerns and the challenge of completing sales before major local government changes take effect.

Financial pressures behind the move

Council officers warned the authority is operating in a "very challenging financial environment". Future funding reforms mean the council is expected to receive less support from central government, leaving it increasingly reliant on council tax and other income streams.

Investment companies like Halsey Garton Residential and Connect2Surrey are intended to help support the council's long-term finances, even if profits do not come immediately.

What happens next

The council will keep monitoring the performance of the companies over the coming year, with a half-year review planned later in 2026.

In the meantime, councillors are expected to continue weighing up how quickly to sell properties owned by Halsey Garton Residential. This decision could affect the council's finances and its property portfolio going forward.

Emily Dalton LDRS

.

.

.

.

Dorking housing plan rejected again over affordable homes shortfall

16 March 2026



Plans to build even more homes on the former Aviva site in Dorking have been thrown out after developers failed to include enough affordable housing. It is the second time the application has been before councillors after the original plans, which included no affordable homes, were deferred in November.

Then, Mole Valley District Council's planning officers had recommended the application for 69 homes at the Pixham Lane site be approved – despite there being no affordable housing included. The updated plan, which included 15 affordable units, was later recommended for refusal because it again fell short of the council's 40 per cent target, and independent assessors believed a higher proportion could feasibly be delivered.

Developers Stonegate Homes (Pixham) maintained it was economically unviable to include any more affordable homes

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

and warned that rejecting the proposal could result in no homes being built. They told councillors: “We genuinely understand this is a very important topic. However, critically no two sites are ever the same and while the overarching policy targets are in place the amount of affordable housing each individual site can deliver will be different.”

They said three different affordability consultants had reached different conclusions about what the site could support, arguing this showed there would inevitably be disagreement. “Within four months we’ve gone from the council’s own retained affordability consultants supporting zero affordable housing to the most recent ones concluding that 40 per cent is achievable. With respect this must not be the case of asking the same question until you get the answer you want,” they said.

The developer added that their proposal would still make a significant contribution locally. “Our offer is above what would be required at appeal and would provide 23 per cent of the council’s annual affordable housing in one go. Refusal would not help address shortfalls in affordability.”

There have already been a series of planning applications approved on the site, which was originally earmarked to be a new stadium for Dorking Wanderers FC. Around 300 new homes across the Pixham Lane development have already been granted planning permission.

Residents speaking against the latest proposal said developers were prioritising profit over community needs. “The developers are clearly trying to maximise the amount of space that is income generating while minimising the amount that isn’t,” they said. They also warned about the cumulative impact of development in the area, adding: “Residents are really concerned about the serious cumulative impacts that all these applications for the Aviva site, plus the developments close by at Station Approach and Lincoln Road, will have on the local environment. The overall total of around 300 new residential units on this site that have already been agreed is more than sufficient.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Former Aviva site in Pixham Lane, near Dorking (image Google)

Related reports:

Will sale of Dorking offices compromise housing plans?

Cycle hub in Dorking development

.

.

.

.

.

.

.

.

Council response to Epsom and Ewell Green Belt concerns

16 March 2026





In response to the report in the Epsom and Ewell Times, Fresh Local Plan row as councillor questions Green Belt revisions and governance at Epsom and Ewell, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has responded as follows:

“The Council submitted the Local Plan on the 10th March 2025 for independent Examination.

The Examination process is led by the Planning Inspector who is tasked with examining the Local Plan on behalf of the Secretary of State to determine whether the local plan is sound and legally compliant.

During the Local Plan Examination Hearings, the Inspector requested that the council undertake two discrete pieces of work that required revisiting and updating specific sections of two documents that form part of the Submission Library.

One of these pieces of work was updating Section 4 of the Green Belt Topic Paper in accordance with a revised

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

methodology agreed with the Inspector during the examination hearings. This work was completed and submitted to the Inspector by the agreed deadline under delegated authority.

The Council's letter to the Inspector dated 11th February 2026 makes it clear that the updated Section of the Green Belt Topic Paper does not consider other constraints to development or conclude whether the sites are suitable for allocation. However, we state that if this information is required to progress the Examination, then the Council can undertake this work.

The Inspector's letter dated 12th February 2026 confirms that the above work is necessary for the examination to proceed, and has asked the Council to undertake this work along with updates to specific pieces of evidence, notably:

- Housing Trajectory / 5 Year Supply
- The Sustainability Appraisal
- The Habitats Regulations Assessment
- The Infrastructure Delivery Plan
- The Transport Assessment

The Council is now undertaking this work.

The Local Plan Programme Officer confirmed on the 3 March 2026 that the evidence detailed above in addition to the two pieces of additional work submitted in January 2026, will be subject to public consultation.

There are no timescales for the public consultation at present and it is anticipated that the Inspector will require an additional Examination Hearing(s) to be held following this public consultation.

It is the Local Plan inspector who makes the final decision on the main modifications to be made to the Local Plan. Prior to the Inspector issuing her binding report, there will be a six week statutory public consultation on the main modifications which the inspector considers necessary to make the Regulation 19 version of the plan sound.

Once that process ends, if the Inspector is happy to confirm that the Plan is indeed 'sound' subject to main modifications, all Members will be invited to offer a view and make a decision at Full Council, where they will then be asked to vote on whether to approve the modified Local Plan or not."

The Council's explanation makes clear that revisions to the Green Belt Topic Paper were carried out following requests from the Planning Inspector and submitted under delegated authority as part of the examination process. It also emphasises that the updated section does not itself determine whether sites should ultimately be allocated for development.

However, the statement does not directly address the central issue raised by Horton ward Conservative Councillor Kieran Persand — namely whether revised evidence, including document COUD_021 and related material, was submitted without prior scrutiny by the Local Plan Policy Committee or Full Council. The Council's response focuses on the examination process and future public consultation, but does not explicitly confirm whether councillors were given an opportunity to review the revised evidence before it was sent to the Inspector.

As the Local Plan examination moves forward — with further evidence updates, public consultation and potentially additional hearings expected — the question of how and when elected members are involved in reviewing changes to the evidence base may remain a point of political debate within the borough.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

Fresh Local Plan row as councillor questions Green Belt revisions and governance at Epsom and Ewell

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

and many more. Search "local plan".

Affordable housing scheme approved on

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

Leatherhead green belt

16 March 2026



Greenbelt land in north Leatherhead will be built on after a 100 per cent affordable housing estate was granted planning permission.

Mole Valley District Council's development committee approved the proposals despite fears it could open the door to others looking to pick off valued sites. The 47 homes by developer Carmen Corp will be built in Oxshott Road, Leatherhead, next to the Tesco store after officers said the need for affordable housing outweighed damage done to green belt.

The site lies on rundown land near the M25 and its condition raised concerns with those opposed to development who argued it could encourage others to let greenbelt land fall into disuse to ease planning. Those in favour suggested the 47 affordable homes was too good to pass up – particularly as it was surrounded on three sides by development and currently looked like "no-man's land".

The plans were passed by seven votes in favour to four against.

Claire Malcomson (Liberal Democrat: Holmwoods and Beare Green) said: "Just because it's degraded land is not a reason. We welcome affordable houses, we really don't want people to think we don't.

"This piece of land has been used badly for flytipping, and yes it would be wonderful if it hadn't been. But I am concerned about this and I do feel that developers might be sort of almost trying to twist our arms just because it's affordable."

Others argued the site, derelict and surrounded on three sides, was exactly what was meant as grey belt. Its location next to a large Tesco store, as well as the affordable housing offer, meant the majority backed the plans.

The developer told the March 4 meeting the site suffered from historic misuse, flytipping and ecological decline – and highlighted the housing shortage in the borough. He also addressed questions on affordable housing, saying extra houses could only be occupied if they were made available at below market rates – such was the basis of Homes England funding.

Cllr Monica Weller (Liberal Democrats: Bookham West) said: "We need to be honest about what this site actually is now. Is this pristine, untouchable countryside or is it more, I hate to say, a wasteland?

"I felt that I was going into no-man's land. Let's not joke or kid ourselves that this is special, this is rough. And affordable housing is one of the biggest issues facing families."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Plans for Oxshott Road near Leatherhead (image MVDC)

Guide to the upcoming East Surrey Council elections

16 March 2026



When voters head to the polls on Thursday, May 7, the local election in Surrey will look very different from previous years. This local election will mark the first step in the biggest shake-up of local government in Surrey for decades.

Instead of voting for councillors to the current county council structure, residents will be electing members to two completely new councils: East Surrey Council and West Surrey Council. A whopping total of 162 seats are for the taking.

What is actually changing?

The elections are happening as part of a major reorganisation of councils across Surrey.

Currently, local services are split between Surrey County Council and 11 borough and district councils. The county

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

council looks after highways, education services, adult social care etc, while the borough councils take care of issues like planning applications, bin collections and managing parks. But that system is set to disappear.

The government has decided to replace it with two ‘unitary authorities’: single councils responsible for everything from planning and roads to social care and education. The aim is to make councils simpler, more efficient and quicker to make decisions, according to the government.

Why are the boundaries changing?

As part of the overhaul, the boundary lines have also been redrawn. The county will be divided into 81 new wards, with two councillors representing each ward.

That means:

•East Surrey Council will have 72 councillors across 36 wards

•West Surrey Council will have 90 councillors across 45 wards

Currently Surrey County Council is made up of 81 seats, including: 38 Conservative, 19 Liberal Democrat, 16 Residents’ Association/Independent, 2 Labour, 2 Green, 2 Reform UK,1 non-aligned independent and 1 vacancy.

Why were elections cancelled last year?

The vote also comes after the planned Surrey County Council elections were cancelled in 2025. The decision sparked criticism from some politicians, who argued residents had effectively lost their chance to vote while the government decided how the new council structure would work. Ministers said the delay was necessary to avoid electing councillors to a system that was about to be abolished.

What issues could shape the election?

Campaigning is only just getting under way, but some local issues are frequently raised by residents.

Among the biggest are:

- potholes and road repairs
- support for children with special educational needs (SEND)
- large housing developments and planning decisions
- council debt
- cost-of-living

Several parties are expected to field candidates, including the Conservative Party, Liberal Democrats, Labour Party and the Green Party, as well as independent councillors and residents’ associations. The Reform UK party is also expected to stand candidates as it looks to expand its presence in local government.

Will the new councils take power straight away?

Not immediately. Even after the elections, the new councils will initially operate as shadow authorities’ for almost a year. That means councillors will spend the next 10 months preparing for the handover, rather than immediately running services.

The current councils will continue delivering services until 1 April 2027. This is when the new East Surrey and West Surrey councils will officially take over and replace the 12 existing councils.

How and when people can vote

Polling stations will be open from 7am to 10pm on Thursday, May 7. Residents can vote in person, by post or by proxy vote (someone voting on their behalf). Ballot papers will be counted the following day, with results expected throughout Friday, May 8.

For Surrey voters, the elections will decide who runs the brand-new councils that will eventually take charge of all local services, making this one of the most significant local ballots the county has seen in years.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Related reports:

Party Leader visits Epsom to launch East Surrey election campaign

Epsom and Ewell to Go East in Surrey shake-up

Surrey declares experiment in community engagement a success

Surrey could have had elections last year after all

Surrey elections: Democracy delayed, democracy denied?

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY