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

26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

Party Leader visits Epsom to launch East Surrey election campaign

27 February 2026



The Liberal Democrat leader Sir Ed Davey visited Epsom yesterday to officially launch the start of the East Surrey election campaign, promising a “fresh start” to the county after years of Conservative rule.

Visiting Epsom alongside local MP Helen Maguire, Dorking & Horley MP Chris Coghlan and Esher & Walton MP Monica Harding, Mr Davey met local party members and called for a “fresh start” for East Surrey.

The Lib Dem leader also called the local campaign a “moral responsibility to win and a historic opportunity for the party”. He told members: “Reform is a threat to our country […] The Conservative Party has run out of road here, and Nigel Farage’s Reform offers no solutions to the problems people face.”

East Surrey Council is being created as a result of a major shakeup of local government in the county, with Surrey County Council and the county’s borough and district councils being abolished. Moving from a two-tier to a unitary model, East Surrey Council will oversee all local services in the area. People can look forward to casting their ballot on May 7.

“After years of Conservative failure here in Surrey, it is time for a fresh start,” Ed Davey said. ““Liberal Democrats will deliver the real change people are crying out for with our bold plan to fix the NHS, cut energy bills and tackle the sewage crisis in our rivers.”

When asked about the possibility of raising council tax to fund services, Mr Davey made no promises: “I think you’ve got to look at the books.”. He told the local democracy reporting service (LDRS): It will be challenging initially because of the financial situation we have inherited but over time, people will notice real differences: parks and local services improve, investments continue and cuts are avoided.”

Local MPs stressed the urgency of change and importance of local engagement. Helen Maguire said: “Voters want to know that the people they elect will make a real difference in their day-to-day lives- whether that is improving schools, clearing bins, or securing social care they need. When politics delivers for them, they will be motivated to vote.”

The Lib Dem MPs drilled the three most important issues in Surrey, issues they will no doubt be campaigning on, as: finance budget, potholes and special educational needs priovision (SEND).

Monica Harding pointed out some tangible results already being delivered by Lib Dem Surrey MPs like moving the derelict boats away on the River Thames. She said: “People want a fresh start and they want change. They want to stop having to fight the system and get things more easily and things they deserve.”

Chris Coghlan criticised the Tories’ record, saying: “Surrey’s Conservative Council has appallingly managed local services and traumatised SEND families. They must go.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Liberal Democrats launch East Surrey election campaign, with leader Ed Davey. (Credit: Emily Dalton/LDRS)

Battle of the skies above Surrey

27 February 2026



Air pollution, noise, and climate change are three of the reasons Surrey Heath Borough Council is objecting to plans to increase weekend flights at Farnborough Airport. The business travel hub has a cap on weekends and is looking to

© 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

increase that as part of a wider push to get to 50,000 annual flights. The airport has also seen an increase in demand despite only 2.6 people travelling per flight, the February planning committee heard.

The application, part of a neighbouring authority consultation, wants to increase weekend and bank holiday flights from its current limit of 8,900 to 13,500. As it stands there are about 30,000 flights using the airport, which sits 1.5km from the border of Surrey Heath, but it has a limit of 50,000 a year. If the application is approved by neighbouring Rushmoor Borough Council, airport chiefs expect it to reach its capacity by 2033. If it is rejected, that pushes the target date back to 2045.

Officers told the meeting: “The climate change manager has raised doubts about whether projections, which rely on the suggested level of uptake, are sufficiently robust. The council therefore raises objections on the noise, but also on the potential impact on air pollution, potential impact on biodiversity, potential impact on climate change, and that the economic benefits to this borough do not outweigh the harm.”

Councillor David Whitcroft (Liberal Democrat; Mytchett and Deepcut) said the airport was currently turning away weekend flights and felt the weekend slots would be used primarily for wealthy leisure travellers – with the borough paying for the impact. The meeting heard that about 70 per cent of aeroplanes landing at the airport come in over the borough, and that it misses out on any direct economic benefits. He said: “The current level is 8900, and that level has been met. So if this application were to go through, the weekend impact on residents particularly in Mytchett, Deepcut and Bisley would be immediate and dramatic. Weekend flights would go up by 50 per cent. Why does it need to go up on weekends for a business airport designed to relieve traffic from the bigger airports, because it has seen an increase in leisure travel. Should people be able to avoid what they consider to be the inconvenience of mass commercial flying in order to create noise and air pollution simply because they can afford it.”

The plans were universally objected to by all members. The final decision rests with Rushmoor Borough Council at a yet-to-be-set date.

Chris Caulfield LDRS Farnborough Airport (image SHBC)

Surrey’s big brains on tiny matters recognised

27 February 2026



Surrey ranked world’s leading university for nuclear isomer discovery, with three physicists in global top ten

A global database of nuclear physics discoveries spanning more than a century has ranked three University of Surrey physicists among the world’s top 10 for discovering and characterising nuclear isomers – rare, long-lived excited states of atomic nuclei that provide a unique window into the structure of matter and underpin modern medical imaging.

(From left to right: Professors Philip Walker, Zsolt Podolyák and Patrick Regan.)

Professors Zsolt Podolyák, Philip Walker and Patrick Regan – ranked second, third and tenth respectively in a global list of more than 1,000 researchers – are the highest-ranking university-based academics. Their work has helped position Surrey as the world’s leading university for nuclear isomer discovery, an exceptional distinction in a field typically dominated by large national laboratories.

Nuclear isomers occur when protons and neutrons inside an atomic nucleus rearrange into higher-energy configurations that live far longer than typical excited nuclear states, which usually last much less than a microsecond. Some isomers survive for microseconds, years, or in extreme cases, far longer than the age of the universe.

Alongside helping scientists understand how elements are formed in stellar explosions and neutron-star mergers – and how they decay to create the matter around us – isomers are most widely used in medicine. The world’s most common diagnostic imaging isotope, Technetium-99m, used in around 20 million diagnostic procedures each year, is itself an isomer, and the same techniques used to study these states allow for accurate cancer diagnosis and safe radiation dosing.

The rankings come from a new international database compiled by Professor Michael Thoennessen of Michigan State University and published in Nuclear Physics News International. The findings will be presented at the NUSTAR Annual Meeting in Germany from 23-27 February.

Zsolt Podolyák, Professor at Surrey’s School of Mathematics and Physics, said:

“Discovering and characterising nuclear isomers is technically extremely challenging. These states are rare and often hidden within enormous amounts of background data. What this recognition shows is the sustained strength of Surrey’s nuclear physics research and our ability to lead major experiments at the world’s most advanced accelerator facilities.”

The discoveries were carried out at major international accelerator laboratories, including the GSI Helmholtz Centre for Heavy Ion Research in Darmstadt, Germany, a leading hub for nuclear structure research. While the new ranking database has named GSI the world’s leading laboratory for isomer discoveries, Surrey is ranked number one in isomers

© 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

discovered by external users.

Patrick Regan, NPL Professor of Nuclear Metrology at the University of Surrey, said:

“Research into nuclear isomers helps us address some of the most fundamental questions in science – including where we come from and how the atoms that make up our bodies were formed in stellar explosions. To have three researchers from one university ranked in the global top 10 is highly unusual and reflects decades of sustained leadership in a very demanding field.”

Professor Philip Walker, Emeritus Professor of Physics at the University of Surrey, who has previously been awarded the Institute of Physics’ Rutherford Medal and the European Physical Society’s Lise Meitner Prize for his contributions to nuclear structure physics, said:

“Nuclear isomers have played a central role in shaping our understanding of atomic nuclei since their discovery in 1921. They provide some of the most sensitive tests of how protons and neutrons arrange themselves inside the nucleus and have repeatedly challenged and refined our theoretical models. I am honoured to be counted among the world’s leading researchers in this field.”

The NUSTAR (Nuclear Structure, Astrophysics and Reactions) Annual Meeting forms part of the FAIR (Facility for Antiproton and Ion Research) accelerator facility at the GSI site in Darmstadt, bringing together around 800 nuclear physicists worldwide. Surrey Professor Zsolt Podolyák serves as spokesperson for the international NUSTAR collaboration, helping to guide its scientific direction and coordinate research at one of the world’s most advanced accelerator facilities.

Photo: *From left to right: Professors Philip Walker, Zsolt Podolyák and Patrick Regan*

Surrey University

Fly-tipping “running out of control” but major incidents disappear in Epsom and Ewell

27 February 2026



Fly-tipping on an industrial scale is at risk of “running out of control” across England, with organised criminal gangs blamed for dumping tens of thousands of tonnes of rubbish in the countryside and urban areas.

Latest government figures show 52,000 large-scale fly-tipping incidents — involving at least a tipper-lorry load — were recorded by councils in England in 2024-25, up sharply from 31,000 before the pandemic.

Campaigners say the crime has become highly organised, lucrative and relatively low-risk for offenders.

A spokesperson for the Chartered Institute of Waste Management said: “Waste crime is at risk of running out of control across the UK. It is evident that waste crime at all levels continues to cause misery and anxiety for local communities and causes real damage to local environments and local economies. These are crooks and cowboy operators, often organised criminal gangs, deliberately profiting from other’s misery, from polluting our environment and exploiting loopholes in the system.”

The Countryside Alliance said: “Fly-tipping is not just an environmental nuisance — it has become a serious and organised crime issue and rural communities are on the frontline… For them it is low-risk and highly profitable… contributing to a criminal market worth an estimated £1 billion a year.”

Epsom and Ewell large-scale incidents fall to zero

Figures analysed by the Epsom and Ewell Times show a striking local trend.

Epsom and Ewell recorded 30 large fly-tipping incidents in 2019-20, falling to 19 in 2020-21 and 14 in 2021-22. Since then, none have been recorded, with zero incidents reported in 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25.

This suggests large-scale dumping in the borough has been eliminated — at least in the official statistics — contrasting with rising national totals.

However, smaller fly-tipping incidents, which make up the majority of cases, are recorded separately and remain a persistent issue across the country.

© 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

Who deals with fly-tipping locally

Responsibility for tackling fly-tipping is shared between councils and national regulators.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is responsible for clearing illegally dumped waste on public land in the borough, investigating incidents and prosecuting offenders. The Council can also issue fixed penalty notices.

The Environment Agency deals with larger, organised or hazardous waste crime, including illegal waste sites operated by criminal gangs.

Private landowners are responsible for removing waste dumped on their own land, though authorities may investigate and prosecute those responsible.

Tough penalties available — but few offenders caught

Fly-tipping is a criminal offence carrying severe penalties. Courts can impose unlimited fines and prison sentences of up to five years. Vehicles used in dumping can be seized and destroyed, and offenders receive a criminal record.

Councils can also issue fixed penalty notices of up to £1,000.

However, enforcement remains limited. Nationally, only 663 fines exceeding £1,000 have been issued since 2019.

One recent major case saw a prolific offender ordered to pay more than £1.2 million following an Environment Agency investigation.

Criminal gangs and fake waste firms driving problem

Experts say organised crime is increasingly behind large-scale fly-tipping. Criminals often pose as legitimate waste clearance companies, charging households and businesses before dumping waste illegally to avoid disposal costs.

The illegal waste market is estimated to be worth around £1 billion a year.

Local improvement but national concern remains

The disappearance of major fly-tipping incidents in Epsom and Ewell will be welcome news locally. But nationally the problem remains serious, with experts warning illegal dumping continues to expand and new sites regularly appearing.

Residents are urged to use only licensed waste carriers and report fly-tipping to their local council.

Those caught face potentially severe consequences — though many offenders still escape justice.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

Fly-tipping in Epsom and Ewell part of national problem

Illegal dumps dump a dumps in Surrey

Imge: Fly-tipping in countryside. Pixabay free

Surrey’s declining birth rate means fewer school classes

27 February 2026



Surrey’s falling birth rate has led to nearly 50 fewer classes of school children in less than a decade. That is according to a new strategy report aimed at protecting the future of local schools.

Cabinet members agreed to publish an updated Sustainability Strategy for Schools on February 24. The strategy sets out

© 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

how Surrey County Council will work with headteachers, academy trusts and dioceses to respond to declining pupil rolls and growing financial pressure.

The figures behind the decision are sobering. Births in Surrey have dropped by 21 per cent since 2012, from 14,237 to 11,244 in 2024. Reception numbers have fallen by 11 per cent since 2016, equivalent to around 47 classes across the county.

Presenting the report, Cllr Helyn Clack, cabinet member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning, said schools remain “at the heart of our communities” but are facing significant strain from lower birth rates, shifting parental preference for schools and tighter budgets.

“These pressures affect schools of every size and type,” members were told. “Many leaders and governing bodies are having to make difficult decisions to sustain high-quality provision.”

Schools are funded largely on a per-pupil basis, meaning fewer children directly translates into less money. While some parts of Surrey, particularly areas with new housing, are still seeing demand for places, others are experiencing sharp falls in numbers.

The county council leader, Tim Oliver, described the statistics as “quite stark”, pointing out that although Surrey saw families move in during and after the pandemic, the longer-term birth rate decline mirrors the national picture.

Councillors agreed the cost-of-living poses a challenge to the county as it can be quite difficult for families to afford to move to Surrey. On the other hand, Surrey hosts a lot of private schools which are very popular so there is less overall demand for state schools.

Cllr Sinead Mooney warned that decisions about school organisation are among the most sensitive the council makes. “This isn’t about a strategy document,” she said. “It’s about people’s local school, their children, and often the heart of their community.”

Cllr Mooney urged the council to ensure there is proper engagement with communities at an early stage as “too often there is a perception that options are being shaped before the conversation begins”. She said: “Once a school is lost, the impact is often lasting and irreversible.”

Cabinet members stressed that closures would only ever be considered as a last resort. Other options the council would explore included partnerships, shared leadership models, federations or reducing admission numbers

Particular concern was raised about small village schools, with councillors urging that decisions must not be driven “solely by financial metrics” but by a full understanding of community impact.

Cllr Clack raised concerns about a local village school in her area: “What was a thriving village school down to 13 pupils and is no longer finding it easier to maintain themselves.” She added: “We have to understand that schools are paid per pupil, and if they don’t have pupils in their schools then they don’t get the funding.”

The updated strategy commits the council to early engagement, transparent sharing of data and closer collaboration with schools and trusts. Officers will prioritise maintained schools considered most at risk and work with leaders on tailored solutions.

The council also acknowledged the wider context, including ongoing SEND pressures and looming local government reorganisation, which could reshape Surrey’s governance structure in coming years.

Despite the challenges, members emphasised their support for maintaining a broad and varied school offer across urban, suburban and rural areas. The cabinet unanimously endorsed the updated strategy and approved its publication.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Image – entirely imagined.

EV charger grants increased as thousands of Surrey drivers without driveways could benefit

27 February 2026



Renters, flat-owners and businesses in Surrey will be able to claim up to £500 towards installing electric vehicle (EV) chargers from April, after the Government increased grants by more than 40% in a bid to accelerate the switch away from petrol and diesel cars.

The Department for Transport says the higher payments could cover almost half the cost of installing a home or

© 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

workplace charge point, potentially allowing motorists to power their car for as little as 2p per mile using domestic electricity tariffs.

The scheme is particularly relevant to areas such as Epsom and Ewell, where many residents live in flats or terraced housing without private driveways, and where on-street parking remains common.

Up to £500 per charger from April

From 1 April 2026, households in rented accommodation, flat owners, landlords, and businesses will be able to receive grants of up to £500 per charge point, increased from the previous £350 limit. Schools will be eligible for up to £2,000 per socket.

The Government says the grants will run until March 2027 and are intended to remove one of the main barriers to EV ownership — access to convenient and affordable charging at home.

A parallel £25 million scheme is also helping councils install pavement cable channels so residents without driveways can safely connect home chargers across the pavement.

Running cost savings of £1,400 a year claimed

The Department for Transport claims drivers can save up to £1,400 a year in running costs compared with petrol cars if they charge at home on cheaper tariffs. Ministers say more than 55,000 motorists have already received discounts of up to £3,750 off the purchase price of new electric cars through a separate grant scheme.

Nationally, the UK public charging network has expanded rapidly to around 88,500 public charge points, with £600 million allocated to help councils install tens of thousands more.

Transport minister Keir Mather said: “We’re taking action to make EV ownership the affordable choice for everyone — not just those with driveways. Bigger grants mean families, flat owners, renters and small businesses can now install a charger for almost half the usual cost.”

Surrey already seeing rapid EV growth

Surrey has one of the highest rates of electric vehicle ownership in the country, reflecting its relatively high average incomes and commuter population. Department for Transport data shows EV registrations nationally now account for around one in five new car sales, compared with fewer than one in 100 just a decade ago.

However, lack of home charging remains a key obstacle. National surveys show more than half of small businesses say improved charging access would encourage them to switch to electric vehicles.

Local authorities, including Surrey County Council and borough councils such as Epsom and Ewell, are expected to receive further funding over the next three years to expand public charging infrastructure.

Landlords and businesses encouraged to act

The National Residential Landlords Association said almost nine in ten landlords would install charge points if tenants requested them, while the Federation of Small Businesses said improving infrastructure was key to helping firms cut fuel costs and emissions.

The Government has also simplified its charging support schemes, reducing eight different grants to five to make them easier to access.

Ministers say the measures are part of wider plans to prepare for the phase-out of new petrol and diesel car sales, currently scheduled for 2035.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

Surrey’s support for using electric vehicles

Let’s go Electric Epsom and Ewell

Council driving forward with electric chargers

Image: Electric Vehicle Charging Point. Ranjithsiji. Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license

---

Surrey to create 220 SEND places

27 February 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



Surrey will press ahead with two long-planned specialist free schools but councillors have admitted the plans will still leave “significant” gaps in provision.

The scheme will unlock £16.14m of government cash to create at least 220 new SEND places.

Cabinet members agreed to move forward with the Department for Education-funded delivery of Betchwood Vale Academy (180 places) and Frimley Oak Academy (170 places), rather than take a combined £18.9m cash alternative to build provision themselves.

At the same time the Surrey County Council will accept £8.1m, in place of a third planned SEMH free school, and use the money to create 150 places through other local projects.

The decisions are aimed at tackling mounting pressure on Surrey’s specialist system, where public special schools are running at 103 per cent capacity.

Cllr Helyn Clack, cabinet member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning, said the move would “accelerate projects that directly benefit Surrey families within months, not years”.

She told the meeting: “We know families can face long delays, longer journeys and too many children placed in independent settings, often far from home, simply because we do not yet have the places available locally.”

Scrutiny members warned that the expansion will not fully solve the problem. Cllr Catherine Powell, chair of the children’s select committee, told cabinet there is a current shortfall of more than 120 autism (ASD) places in West Surrey alone.

She urged the authority to publish clearer mapping of unmet need, including where children are still waiting for placements and where non-maintained independent (NMI) schools are being used.

“There is a clear shortage of special school places and SEND units today in Surrey,” she said, adding that the new projects “do not address all of the current unmet need which is still significantly higher in the West”.

Councillors acknowledged that even with the additional 220 places funded through the High Needs Provision Capital Allocation, plus the 350 places from the two free schools, “significant numbers” of children will still be without local specialist provision.

Council leader Tim Oliver said while the SEND expansion would not “fill all our gaps”, it was vital to proceed with deliverable projects now.

“We absolutely need to get on with as many of these projects as we possibly can, to create 350 new places is desperately needed, and even that will leave a significant number of children without a place,” he said.

The 220 places are expected to come forward through a mix of expanded special schools, new units in mainstream settings and alternative provision projects. The council says priority has been given to schemes that can open for September 2026.

The backdrop is sustained growth in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and heavy reliance on independent placements, which are typically more expensive and often outside the county. Expanding state-maintained provision is seen as key to reducing those costs and meeting Surrey’s “safety valve” agreement with the DfE to contain its SEND deficit.

Geography remains a sticking point. While overall provision is broadly aligned with population split between East and West Surrey, members accepted that unmet need, particularly for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is currently greater in the West. Leaders said the £8.1m accepted in lieu of the cancelled Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) free school would be ring-fenced while further site work is carried out.

The council must formally notify the Department for Education of its decision on the free schools by the end of the week.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Related reports:

Government comes to Surrey’s SEND rescue

Surrey SEND place surge – is it enough?

Epsom and Ewell MP calls for SEND action

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

© 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

Epsom and St Helier Trust doctor appointed by Privy Council to GMC

27 February 2026



The General Medical Council (GMC) has announced a paediatrician as the latest member of its governing body, the GMC Council. Dr Lucinda Etheridge, a consultant in general and adolescent paediatrics, is the latest registrant member to join the body. She joins from St George's Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals and Health Group in Surrey, where she is Site Chief Medical Officer. Her appointment replaces Dr Alison Wright on the Council, who stepped down after being elected as President of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

The Council's primary role is to protect the public by setting the GMC's strategy and goals and overseeing the work of the regulator. It is led by GMC Chair, Professor Dame Carrie MacEwen, and comprises up to six lay members and six registrant members. Following her appointment by the Privy Council, Dr Etheridge will start her role on Tuesday, 3 March. She has worked with the GMC since 2007, initially in the development of fitness to practise assessments, then as a performance assessor and training others for that role, before becoming a Responsible Officer for an acute trust.

Dr Etheridge, whose clinical interests are in the management of eating disorders, will step down from her current medical director role in spring 2026. She will then combine her work at the GMC alongside three days of clinical practice each week.

Professor Dame Carrie MacEwen said: "I'm delighted to welcome Dr Etheridge to the Council. She brings a wealth of experience to support us in our role overseeing the GMC and supporting registrants to deliver the best possible care. Dr Etheridge joins at an important time as we continue our work to be a more compassionate and effective regulator, and ahead of vital reform to the regulation of UK healthcare professionals. I would also like to thank Dr Alison Wright for her work and her contributions to Council. On behalf of the GMC, I wish her the very best in her new role."

Dr Etheridge said: "I am delighted to be joining the GMC Council as a registrant member. I look forward to working collaboratively across the four nations to help shape a fair, transparent and forward-looking regulatory environment that enables registrants to provide the highest standards of care for patients."

GMC Council members work a minimum of three days each month with the regulator. More information about the Council is on the GMC website.

The GMC Press Office

Bourne Hall row escalates as Chief Executive suspends councillors' decision

27 February 2026



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's decision to delay plans for investing in Bourne Hall Museum has itself been suspended after the Council's Chief Executive intervened, raising questions about whether councillors have the authority to demand disclosure of the full report they say they need.

At a special meeting on 25 February, the Community and Wellbeing Committee voted to defer any decision on the museum's future until councillors could see the complete, unredacted service review. But in an email to all councillors the following day, leaked to the Epsom and Ewell Times, Chief Executive **Jackie King** said the resolution could not yet be implemented and was now on hold pending legal advice.

She wrote: "While the resolution was agreed at Committee, it relates to the Council's broader constitutional arrangements

© 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

around access to information and the respective roles of elected Members and statutory officers… As legal advice was not available at the meeting, it is necessary to seek clarification from the Monitoring Officer regarding the constitutional effect of the resolution and appropriate next steps. In the meantime, implementation is suspended to ensure that any action taken is consistent with the Council's governance framework."

Her intervention leaves the museum decision in limbo and raises a wider constitutional question: whether a committee of elected councillors can compel disclosure of information that council officers have decided should remain confidential.

Chair expressed "disappointment" after councillors voted to delay decision

The committee had been reconvened after the Council's Audit and Scrutiny Committee ruled that the original January decision had been taken without councillors seeing key reports, including the Bourne Hall service review and peer challenge findings.

Opening the meeting, committee chair Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) said: "This is being called as a result of a calling of a decision that we took back in January. Councillor Coley… called the decision in on the basis that the committee did not have all the information necessary to make the decision, in particular that we did not see the LGA corporate peer challenge report." He said councillors could either retake the decision or uphold it.

Instead, members voted to defer the matter entirely. After the vote, Cllr Woodbridge said: "I can't hide my disappointment at the decision, but it is the decision that you've taken."

Coley: "If we're spending public money… I find it very difficult to justify secrecy"

Independent councillor **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley), who initiated the call-in, said councillors were still being denied crucial financial detail. He told the meeting: "The Service Review provided has significant redactions which amount to several pages of missing content, especially that which relates to the financial aspects of the museum… If we're spending public money on services the council owns and operates directly itself, I find it very difficult to justify secrecy."

He warned councillors they were being asked to commit future funding without proper scrutiny. "Year one requires additional funding from revenue that was not allocated in our recently passed budget. Years two to five require funding from a council that doesn't exist yet… Surely, the most sensible option is to leave things as they are and allow the new unitary council to decide how best to proceed."

Lawrence: "You need to see the plan in front of you before you spend a quarter of a million pounds"

Cllr **James Lawrence** (LibDem College) criticised both the timing and substance of the information provided. "As of Monday at 2pm appendix three, the service review hadn't been published… Public money was paid for this report." Referring to the peer challenge findings, he added: "The peer challenge team were unable to access more detailed income slash expenditure relating to Bourne Hall… You need to see the plan in front of you before you spend a quarter of a million pounds on this."

Muir: "We do not have enough information… this is unacceptable"

Cllr **Bernie Muir** (Conservative Horton) said the redactions were unprecedented in her experience. "I'm actually very, very concerned about the lack of the information we have. We are the front line of making decisions, and we don't have enough information on which to make one." She added: "I have literally, in nine years, never seen a document like the one that… we've been given… This is unacceptable. No company I've ever worked for would accept making a decision if we provided this."

Chinn: "Every single recommendation is redacted"

Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court), who proposed the deferral, told the meeting councillors were still missing the report's most important section. "A redacted version shall be appended… but every single recommendation is redacted. I don't understand how we can say that we've got all the information… I don't think this has moved on at all."

Her amendment to defer the decision until the full report is disclosed was carried by the committee.

Reynolds warned of consequences of continued delay

Cllr **Humphrey Reynolds** (RA West Ewell) cautioned councillors about the risks of postponement, saying delay could itself harm the museum's future and create further uncertainty. He argued councillors needed to balance transparency with the need to move forward with decisions affecting services.

Chief Executive's intervention raises constitutional questions

The Chief Executive's subsequent decision to suspend implementation of the committee's resolution now creates a new layer of uncertainty. Her email makes clear the issue is no longer just about the museum, but about the balance of authority between elected councillors and statutory officers.

Councillors voted to delay a decision until they could see the full evidence. The Council's most senior officer has now paused that instruction pending legal advice on whether councillors have the constitutional power to require disclosure.

© 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

Future of museum — and decision-making authority — now unclear

The original plan involved investing substantial additional funding to improve the museum, with the aim of securing its long-term future ahead of the borough council's abolition in 2027 and replacement by a unitary authority.

For now, both the museum's future and the committee's attempt to obtain full disclosure remain unresolved. Councillors are awaiting legal advice from the Monitoring Officer, which will determine not only what happens next with Bourne Hall Museum, but potentially who ultimately controls access to key information at Epsom and Ewell Borough Council.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

Ewell's Bourne Hall plans knocked back by scrutiny

Independent view of Ewell's Bourne Hall

Ewell's "UFO" shaped Bourne Hall to take off anew

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

27 February 2026



Primark will open the doors of its new store at Epsom's The Ashley Centre on Wednesday 25 March at 10am, taking over the former House of Fraser unit.

To mark the moment, the first customers and loyal Primark fans will be welcomed by a live DJ. The new store will cover 31,400 sq. ft set over two floors and follows the retailer's recent recruitment of 90 new team members ready for opening day.

Customers will be able to shop the bestselling Primark products they know and love across clothing, kidswear, beauty, lifestyle and home.

In further good news for local shoppers, its popular Click & Collect service will also be coming to Epsom to enable customers to browse and order on the Primark website before picking up their items in store, at a time that best suits them.

Ewa Klepczuk, Primark Epsom's store manager, said: "After working at Primark for many years, I'm excited to now be part of bringing our exciting new store to Epsom. We know there is a lot of anticipation for our arrival, and with 90 new retail colleagues now in place, we're all working hard behind the scenes to ensure we're ready for opening day. I'm really looking forward to seeing the reaction of local shoppers when our doors open, where they'll find our famous Primark must-haves, all at unbeatable value for the entire family. Everyone is welcome to join in with our celebrations – we can't wait to see everyone there!"

Louisa Butters, Head of Urban Destinations (Retail & Offices) at CBRE Investment Management, owners of Ashley Centre, said: "The opening of Primark marks a significant milestone for the Ashley Centre and is a strong acknowledgement of the progress we've made through our recent refurbishment programme. As one of the UK's leading retailers, Primark brings both scale and drawing power, playing a key role in strengthening the scheme's anchor line-up and enhancing its overall proposition. Its arrival will further elevate the quality, accessibility and relevance of the destination, while reinforcing the confidence that major national brands have in our long-term vision for its continued transformation."

The new Epsom store will be Primark's 199th store on the UK high street and follows the retailer's last store opening in December 2025 in Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

As shoppers prepare for the opening day, Primark customers can continue to shop at nearby stores in Sutton, Kingston-Upon-Thames and Guildford — and use Primark's handy online stock checker tool to track down their favourite styles before heading in-store.

© 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

Primark Press Release

Related reports:

Primark finally indicates a season to open in Epsom

Primark to open in Epsom

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

Epsom and Ewell’s four year commitment to Ukraine

27 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.

© 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

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.

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

Related reports:

Appeal to twin Epsom with Bucha in Ukraine

Festival of Friendship –Epsom and Ewell – Ukraine

From Abramovich’s frozen wealth to Epsom’s Ashley Centre – support for Ukraine continues

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

Music and dance for Ukraine at Epsom Methodist Church

Epsom MP leads cross-party delegation to Ukraine to examine impact of explosive weapons

Epsom Stands in Solidarity with Ukraine on War’s Third Anniversary

Fire Assembly for Ukraine

2 years on Epsom to gather in solidarity with Ukraine

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

The Ripley effect of rural development in Surrey

27 February 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



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

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

© 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

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)

Surrey armed officers in fatal shooting to remain anonymous?

27 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

© 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

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.

Surrey wasting education in primary schools

27 February 2026



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

"It's my meeting": Cllr Dallen stops questions about his role in alleged Rainbow "cover-up".

27 February 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



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.”

© 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

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



.

Related reports

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

Epsom's Rainbow Leisure Centre Places new operators

Image: Epsom and Ewell Borough Council YouTube channel

© 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