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

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East Surrey gets new Police Station

19 December 2025



Surrey Police's near two-year hunt for a replacement to its shut, dangerous, crumbly concrete riddled Reigate station is over – with people only needing to walk travel miles to the new one. The new base for the Reigate and Banstead area will give the force a permanent presence and front counter for the public, the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) said after securing a building at Perrywood Business Park in Honeycrock Lane in Salfords. It comes after the 2023 closure of its Reigate Station that left officers and staff stationed in Mole Valley and Caterham Police Station.

Commissioner Lisa Townsend hailed the purchase as great for policing presence in East Surrey and follows what she described as an extensive search in the Reigate and Banstead area. The new building was considered to be the only suitable site in the area and will be funded by selling Reigate Police Station. This station will run alongside the force's new eastern division headquarters in Leatherhead, which was granted planning permission earlier this year. The PCC and senior officers wanted to find a secondary site in the Reigate and Banstead area specifically for a police station and front counter service for residents.

Surrey Police maintain a counter service during office hours in the Town Hall, The Parade. Epsom.

The Perrywood Business Park keeps the trend of police sites in industrial sites and will be just a three minute drive from the Surrey Custody Centre in Salbrook Road. Lisa Townsend said: "I know how much residents value their local policing presence so this is really fantastic news for our communities in the area. The discovery of RAAC and subsequent closure of Reigate Police Station has meant it has been a disruptive time for our hard-working teams in East Surrey. I want to pay tribute to their continued patience, professionalism and resilience in challenging circumstances. The search for a site in the Reigate and Banstead area has been extensive and Perrywood was the only building which met our needs so I am delighted that we have been able to secure the purchase. I believe that together with the progress being made on our new Eastern Division HQ in Leatherhead, this heralds a bright future for policing in East Surrey."

Deputy Chief Constable of Surrey Police Mark McEwan said: "We believe this new building will provide sufficient space and facilities for our teams, be fit for purpose and enable us to continue delivering the high levels of service our residents expect. Whilst we are still at the very early stages, considerations continue into where individual teams across the Eastern division will be based in the future and we will provide updates as and when we have them. The safety of our communities remains our priority and there will be no change to officers."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Reigate Police Station (Image Google)

Related reports:

Surrey police station futures

Reigate Police Station closes with a concrete problem

New Surrey police division HQ plans

Surrey police to move to Epsom and Ewell constituency

Epsom Christmas carols of two colleges and a council

19 December 2025

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In the first and a unique festive venture for the Borough of Epsom Ewell a special carol service was held in the Chapel of St Luke, Epsom College this evening. Organised on the joint initiatives of Julie Kapsalis (CEO NESCOT), Jackie King (CEO Epsom and Ewell Borough Council) and Mark Lascelles (Head of Epsom College).

The event brought local choirs together including NESCOT's own choir, singers from Epsom College and the local Ukrainian choir Renaissance.

Solos were sung by Evie Kingsley, Sienna-Leigh Campbell, Benedict Raper and Caleb Mangatal-Francis.

Julie Kapasalis read from the Gospel of St Matthew 2: 1-12 and Jackie King recited her own reading "The Heart of Christmas", reprinted below.

The service was officiated with humour and aplomb by The Reverend Canon Andrew Haviland.

Epsom Racecourse supported the service.

And no less a figure than the Worshipful Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, Cllr Robert Leach (RA Nonsuch) accompanied the congregation on the magnificent Chapel organ and played the processional at the end J.S. Bach's Prelude and Fugue in F from his book of 8 preludes and fugues.

The carol service was an uplifting beginning for many to the festive season and promises have been made to make it a regular feature in the Borough in future years.

Lionel Blackman



The Heart of Christmas

There are so many ways to tell the story of Christmas.
Some begin with angels, some with gifts, some with the hush of falling snow.
But however the story starts, it always finds its way to one place-
the warmth we share when we come together.

Christmas is found in the quiet moments:
in the smell of something baking,
the sound of wrapping paper being carefully – or not so carefully – torn,
in the giggles of children who can't quite sleep,
and in the gentle nod of someone who's seen many Christmases before.

It's in the messages sent to far-off friends,
the unexpected kindness from a neighbour,
the extra chair pulled up to the table,
and the thought that maybe – just maybe –
there is more that connects us than divides us.

And in this season of gathering and giving.
we also pause for a moment to hold in our hearts
those who are not with us tonight-
loved ones we remember with tenderness,
and friends or family who are far away.

We think of Christmases past –
of laughter spilling across the table,
carols sung a little off-key,
hands held during snowy walks,
stories told beside the glow of the tree.
Those moments, though now memories,
are treasures we carry with us –
poignant reminders of love shared,
and joyful times that shaped who we are.
Their voices may have quietened,
but their light has not dimmed.

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It lives in our hearts,
woven into every song, every smile, every candle we light.

Distance and time may keep us apart,
and for some, separation comes through hardship or conflict.
Tonight, we think of them too –
those far from home,
those seeking safety,
those waiting for peace.
May they feel the warmth of the world's compassion
and know that they are not forgotten.

For love is wonderfully stubborn;
it travels in our thoughts, in our stories,
and in the quiet spaces where we still feel their presence.
Each memory, each name whispered with a smile,
becomes part of the light that surrounds us now.

For some, Christmas means faith.
For others, it means family, friendship, or the turning of the year.
But for all of us, it can mean light-
the light we share when we care,
when we welcome,
when we choose to hope.

So tonight, as the music rises and the candles glow,
may we remember what truly makes this season shine:
not the decorations or the presents,
but the people-
those beside us,
those we miss,
and those we have yet to meet.

Because the heart of Christmas is not found under a tree –
it's found in us,
in every act of kindness,
every hand extended,
every loving thought that crosses the miles or the years.

For when we give, include, and love-
we keep the heart of Christmas alive.

Jackie King



Epsom waste site plans refused after years of noise and disruption complaints

19 December 2025



Plans to retrospectively approve changes at a controversial waste and recycling site near Epsom have been refused, following years of complaints from residents about noise, dust and early-morning lorry movements.

Surrey County Council's planning committee voted to reject the application for land at the Chalk Pit on College Road, where skip hire firm Skip It Epsom Ltd operates, at a meeting on December 17.

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Residents speaking at the meeting and objecting to the scheme online slammed the plans. They described how the site had been “destroying their lives” and making it a misery with constant noise, intruding on their home life and impacting nearby schools. Locals complained that site has not been built according to its planning permission.

The application was not for a brand-new site, but to regularise changes that had already been made to buildings and operations at the former waste transfer station, which was granted permission in 2023 to become a materials recycling facility.

However, councillors were told the development had not been built as approved and crucially, a required drainage system was never installed.

The operator wanted permission to change several conditions attached to the original approval, including:

- Buildings being built on a different footprint and with altered materials
- A new entrance and staircase
- Moving noisy waste-sorting machinery into a different building
- Changes to HGV parking and electric vehicle charging points

Officers described most of these changes as relatively minor and, on their own, acceptable even though the site sits in the Green Belt.

So why was it rejected? The refusal came down to one major issue: drainage. Councillors heard that the surface water drainage scheme approved in 2023 had never been installed, and that new assessments now showed a much larger soakaway was needed.

But part of the required drainage system would sit outside the application site, meaning it could not legally be approved or enforced through this planning application.

As a result, officers said an essential planning condition could no longer be met or reimposed, leaving the council with no option but to recommend refusal.

Local residents spoke passionately against the application at the meeting, describing years of disruption since operations ramped up in 2020.

Bernie Muir, local councillor for Epsom, told the committee that the site had been “destroying lives for five years”. She said: “People can’t use their gardens, open windows or work from home […] There are serious mental health impacts from the constant noise.”

More than 170 objections were submitted overall. Residents complained of:

- Banging, clanging and crashing from skips being dropped
- Heavy lorries arriving as early as 5.30am
- Dust, light pollution and breaches of operating hours
- Noise carrying across the landscape due to the bowl-shaped chalk pit

Fiona, who lives around 350 metres from the site, said she had no problems for years after moving to the area until operations changed. “On some days the noise I experience in my garden is banging, clanging and repetitive crashing,” she said.

She also raised concerns about drainage, saying the site sits near a protected groundwater zone and the chalk geology is highly porous. “This is an unfixable flaw,” said John Beckett, an Epsom and Ewell borough council member.

Residents’ groups also argued that moving noisy machinery and changing the building entrance had directed sound towards homes that were never properly assessed in earlier reports.

Speaking for the applicant, a representative said she was aware of concerns but claimed the developer had not been invited to some of the multi-agency meetings.

Cllr Tim Hall said he was “surprised” by the claim, given the number of meetings held with residents, agencies and council officers over five years.

The applicant’s agent defended the criticism by describing the chalk pit as a “very busy site” and it is difficult to keep all the workers across the procedures to keep the doors closed and noise down. She also said the early starts referred to residents were “alleged breaches on the site” and the noise could be coming from elsewhere nearby.

Some councillors acknowledged residents’ frustrations, while others pointed out the site has long been industrial. Cllr Ernest Mallett MBE said: “At the end of the day, people bought houses next to an industrial site.” But others felt the problems went beyond normal industrial impact.

The refusal does not shut the site down but it does mean the unauthorised changes cannot be approved. To move forward, the operator would need to submit a new full planning application, including a drainage solution that can be properly assessed and enforced.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Related reports:

A question of Chalk Pit noise and dust

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Chalk Pit action – a tale of two committees

Chalk Pit debate deferred by late abatement

Will the dust ever settle on Chalk Pit conflict?

“Heat and Dust” epic in Epsom

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

19 December 2025



The Government has announced that £2.5 billion from the frozen proceeds of the sale of Chelsea Football Club by sanctioned Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich is to be directed towards humanitarian aid for Ukraine, following years of political and legal delay.

The money has been held in the UK since the forced sale of the football club in 2022, after Abramovich was sanctioned in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Ministers have now confirmed that the funds will be transferred to a foundation dedicated to humanitarian support for Ukraine, with legal action threatened if the process is not completed.

Helen Maguire, Liberal Democrat MP for Epsom and Ewell, welcomed the decision, describing it as “long-overdue action” and a step towards accountability. She said billions of pounds linked to sanctioned Russian oligarchs had remained frozen while Ukrainians continued to suffer the consequences of what she described as Putin’s illegal war, and that she would continue to press the Government to ensure the money reaches Ukraine swiftly.

While £2.5 billion is a significant sum, it represents only a small proportion of the overall cost of the war’s impact on Ukraine. According to the World Bank, the United Nations, the European Commission and the Ukrainian government, the estimated cost of recovery and reconstruction in Ukraine now stands at around $524 billion over the next decade. That figure includes widespread destruction of housing, hospitals, schools, energy infrastructure and transport networks, alongside the long-term costs of healthcare, rehabilitation, psychological trauma and landmine clearance.

Direct physical damage to infrastructure alone is estimated at more than $170 billion, while millions of civilians have been displaced and tens of thousands injured. The long-term health consequences of the war, including treatment for complex injuries and trauma, are expected to place a continuing burden on Ukraine’s public services for many years. Against that backdrop, the Abramovich funds amount to well under one per cent of the estimated total cost of rebuilding, though they could make a substantial difference to targeted humanitarian and medical programmes.

The announcement has renewed local focus on the role of Surrey Stands With Ukraine, a volunteer-run charity based in Epsom which has been providing humanitarian aid since the early weeks of the invasion. Operating under Harrop HR Missions Ltd, the group has sent more than 148 vanloads of aid to Ukraine and has supported both medical relief overseas and displaced Ukrainians in the UK. The charity has also been recognised in Parliament, with Helen Maguire MP praising its work in providing medical aid and rehabilitation support.

For nearly four years, Surrey Stands With Ukraine has maintained a highly visible permanent kiosk in the Ashley Centre near Waitrose, which volunteers describe as central to sustaining donations, public awareness and community engagement. The kiosk is due to close permanently on 1 January 2026 following a change in the Ashley Centre’s policy on charity fundraising.

Under the new arrangements, Surrey Stands With Ukraine has been selected as one of a small number of charities allowed to operate a branded market stall inside the centre for limited periods each month. From January 2026, the charity will operate a stall near the soon to open Primark on a restricted schedule, typically four days per month. Physical donations will continue to be accepted at the charity’s Ukraine Hub in Global House, accessed via the rear entrance to the Ashley Centre.

Surrey Stands With Ukraine will operate a fundraising and information stall inside the Ashley Centre on the following dates in 2026. The stall will be located near Primark.

January: Tuesday 6, Thursday 8, 15 and 22
February: Tuesday 3, Thursday 5, 19 and 26
March: Tuesday 3, Thursday 5, 19 and 26
April: Tuesday 7, Thursday 9, 16 and 30
May: Tuesday 5, Thursday 7, 14 and 21
June: Tuesday 2 and 16; Thursday 4 and 11

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July: Tuesday 7, Thursday 9, 16 and 30
August: Tuesday 4, Thursday 6, 13 and 20
September: Tuesday 1, Thursday 3, 10 and 17
October: Tuesday 6, Thursday 8 and 15

Physical donations can also be made at the Surrey Stands With Ukraine Hub in Global House, accessed via the rear entrance of the Ashley Centre by pressing the “Ukraine Hub” buzzer.

The loss of a permanent stand is expected to reduce income by around £30,000 a year and significantly limit the collection of physical aid. A spokesperson for SSWU stated the daily presence allowed volunteers to build relationships with regular donors and served as a constant reminder of the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Ukraine.

The Ashley Centre provides Surrey Stands With Ukraine with a suite of rooms and storage space in Global House, Ashley Avenue. The premises also are home to the Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network and is known as the “Ukraine Hub”. Previously a retail unit facing the mall was used by SSWU until the unit was re-let commercially. The Ashley Centre has not responded to questions from the Epsom and Ewell Times about the decision to remove the permanent kiosk.

Surrey Stands With Ukraine thanks the Ashley Centre for its ongoing support and confirmed it will continue its work, stressing that the reduction in visibility makes public backing more important than ever. The charity says it is exploring alternative ways to maintain a visible presence in Epsom town centre and is encouraging residents to visit the new stall dates in the Ashley Centre and to continue donating through the Global House hub.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has repeatedly warned that Russia’s war against Ukraine is not an isolated conflict but a direct threat to the security of the whole of Europe, arguing that Moscow’s actions demonstrate a willingness to use military force to pursue imperial ambitions beyond its borders. Sustaining humanitarian support for Ukraine is essential in maintaining civilian morale, stressing that resilience among the Ukrainian population is a decisive factor in resisting aggression and deterring further expansionism by President Vladimir Putin.

The contrast between the scale of national and international funding announcements and the challenges faced by local charities has highlighted the continued reliance on community-level support to meet urgent humanitarian needs. While the release of frozen oligarch assets has been widely welcomed, organisations working on the ground say sustained public engagement remains essential as the war and its consequences continue.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Since the war began the 14th Ukraine Social and Music Evening will take place at the Epsom Methodist Church this Saturday 20th December. Helen Maguire MP will welcome guests and performers. See listing here for details.

Related reports:

Sir Ed supporting Epsom based Ukraine charities

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

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

Fire Assembly for Ukraine

2 years on Epsom to gather in solidarity with Ukraine

Image: Abramovich – licensed HERE. Credit: IAN KINGTON / AFP / picturedesk.com. Ashley Centre entrance – Google Maps

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Surrey countryside campaigners warn new planning rules risk more speculative development

19 December 2025



Local countryside campaigners have voiced strong concerns over the Government’s newly announced changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), warning that the reforms could increase speculative development across

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Surrey without delivering the affordable housing and infrastructure communities need.

The changes, announced by the Housing Minister this week, form part of the Government's wider pledge to accelerate housebuilding and address England's housing shortage. Ministers say the revised framework is intended to simplify the planning system, reduce delays, and ensure local authorities play a more active role in meeting housing need.

Among the key changes outlined by the Government are a renewed emphasis on meeting housing targets, revisions to how land supply is assessed, and proposals to allow some areas of the Green Belt to be reclassified as so-called "grey belt" land where development is judged to have limited environmental or landscape value. Ministers have also argued that the reforms will reduce repeated legal challenges and appeals that, they say, slow down development.

Responding to the announcement, CPRE Surrey said it was "deeply concerned" that the changes would fail to meet their stated aims while placing greater pressure on countryside land.

Andy Smith of CPRE Surrey said the proposals were "unlikely to meet the Government's aim of speeding up housebuilding but will certainly blight more of our countryside with the shadow of unwanted development".

"Yes, we need more affordable housing but these proposals won't achieve that," he said. "What we will see is a further increase in speculative development which boosts the profits of developers but will not produce the housing or public services that we really need."

CPRE Surrey has questioned why the Government is pursuing development on Green Belt land when national figures indicate there is capacity for at least 1.4 million new homes on brownfield sites across England. Campaigners argue that the absence of a legally enforceable "Brownfield First" policy means developers will continue to prioritise greenfield sites, where land values are higher and projects are more commercially attractive.

"Why, when across England there is space for at least 1.4 million new homes on brownfield sites, does the Government still want to reclassify much of the Green Belt as 'grey belt' and build on it?" Mr Smith asked. "Why do Ministers want us to lose farmland and open spaces to the developers?"

The Government has also said the changes are intended to prevent repeated attempts to overturn planning decisions. In Parliament, the Housing Minister said the reforms would help end a system that allows parties to "come back again and again if they don't get the outcome they want".

CPRE Surrey disputes that characterisation, arguing that it is developers, not local communities, who benefit from repeated appeals. Mr Smith said that if a planning application is approved by a Surrey council, local residents generally have no right of appeal, whereas developers can submit multiple revised applications or appeals following refusals.

"Developers can indeed 'come back again and again' with appeals and revised, often barely changed, planning applications, aiming to wear down the objectors," he said. "The proportion of legal challenges brought by local communities is tiny compared to the number of developments that are pushed through."

While ministers insist the revised NPPF will streamline decision-making and unlock new housing supply, CPRE Surrey said it could not see how the changes would genuinely speed up development or improve outcomes for communities.

"All these changes will do is play into the hands of speculative developers," Mr Smith said.

The revised National Planning Policy Framework is expected to guide planning decisions across England once formally adopted, with local authorities required to update their planning policies in line with the new national framework.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Image: View of development land west from Hookwood, Horley. (Credit: Google Street View)

Related reports:

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Mole Valley setting a green belt development trend?

Epsom Green Belt Debate Intensifies

Surrey to have a Mayor?

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Surrey will get a mayor despite months of uncertainty and a lack of solid confirmation from the government, the county council leader has insisted. Tim Oliver said he is “confident” a mayor of Surrey would go ahead, even though the central government has yet to formally sign off and has delayed mayoral elections in other parts of the country.

“I can assure you, it will happen,” Cllr Oliver said, speaking to the local democracy reporting service (LDRS), on December 17. Surrey was placed on the government’s first wave of local government reorganisation specifically to unlock devolution and create a mayor. The leader added that ministers were fully aware of the county’s position.

The delay, he suggested, was more about shifting national priorities and new ministers rather than any change of heart over Surrey itself. “It’s slightly frustrating,” he said. “We didn’t get a confirmation date of the mayoral election when we thought we would.”

Since reorganisation was announced last year, there has been a change of secretary of state and a rethink over how quickly devolution should roll out. Mayoral elections have already been pushed back to 2028, something Cllr Oliver believes Surrey is now being caught up in. “They haven’t said no,” he said. “But equally they didn’t say yes at the same time as the announcement, which is what we had expected.”

The county leader said he has already met with the minister responsible and is due to have another meeting in early January, saying discussions with the government were “active”. Despite the uncertainty surrounding a mayor, Cllr Oliver said Surrey’s positioning has remained strong and that the county would likely follow whatever timetable the government agrees with other mayoral areas: potentially bringing elections forward to 2027 rather than waiting until 2028.

While residents may find the process confusing, he said the end goal was clearer leadership and more powers devolved from Westminster. The LDRS reported in October there was “no promise” that Surrey could have a directly-elected mayor as part of the government’s devolution despite this being described locally by councillors as the entire main purpose of reorganisation.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has previously said that the references to Surrey getting a directly elected mayor were “not quite accurate” as the decision “has not been confirmed” and that they were only “committed to working with partners to establish a strategic authority for the area”.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Council Leader Tim Oliver speaking at full council meeting October 8. (Credit: Surrey County Council live stream)

Related reports:

Government Casts Doubt on Surrey’s Mayoral Devolution Promise

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A year in the life of Epsom’s Deputy Lieutenant Mary Zoeller

19 December 2025



From scout band concerts to royal visits, the past year has offered **Epsom** resident **Mary Zoeller** a front-row view of some of Surrey’s most inspiring community activity. Appointed a Deputy Lieutenant of Surrey in 2023, Mary Zoeller is now well into the rhythm of a role that quietly connects the Crown with everyday life across the county — celebrating voluntary service, youth achievement and civic endeavour.

Based in Epsom, where she has lived for 33 years, Mary Zoeller was asked to take on the role in part because of her long-standing involvement with the voluntary sector, particularly youth organisations. “I was honoured to be asked to support the Lord-Lieutenant as one of his Deputy Lieutenants,” she said. “My location of Epsom and my connections with the voluntary sector were some of the reasons I was approached.”

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An ancient office with a modern purpose

The Lieutenancy is one of the oldest institutions in county life. The role of Lord-Lieutenant was created by King Henry VIII, originally to act as the Monarch's personal representative and organise local defence. While the military function has long since disappeared, the modern Lieutenancy plays a vital civic role.

In Surrey, the Lord-Lieutenant — currently Michael More-Molyneux — represents the Sovereign at major events, supports Royal visits, promotes voluntary service and recognises achievement through honours and awards. He is supported by a team of Deputy Lieutenants (DLs), drawn from across the county to reflect Surrey's diversity of place, background and experience.

Deputy Lieutenants deputise for the Lord-Lieutenant at engagements across Surrey and may be appointed for a fixed term, typically five years, or serve until the age of 75.

On the ground across Surrey

Over the past year, Mrs Zoeller has represented the Surrey Lieutenancy at a wide range of events, many focused on young people and volunteers.

Highlights have included attending the 1st Claygate Scout and Guide Band Concert, the Elmbridge Junior Citizen event, and a Chief Scout's Gold Award presentation evening, where she met young people being recognised for exceptional commitment and leadership.

One particularly notable occasion saw her escort HRH The Duchess of Edinburgh during a visit to Brooklands Museum for an International Space Station live contact, linking local students with astronauts in orbit.

Reflecting on her experiences, Mary Zoeller said she has been repeatedly struck by the scale of voluntary effort across the county. "I have met volunteers who have astonished me with their commitment and passion for the organisations they represent," she said.

Epsom connection

Although born in Bookham, Mary Zoeller has made Epsom her home for more than three decades and remains closely connected to the town's community life. Her contribution has already been recognised locally, including being named one of Epsom & Ewell's Coronation Champions in 2023.

Asked whether she wished to comment on questions of Surrey identity in the context of local government reorganisation, Mary Zoeller was clear that this would not be appropriate in her official capacity. "It would be my personal opinion and not that of the Surrey Lieutenancy," she said.

As she enters another year as a Deputy Lieutenant, Mary Zoeller's experience offers a glimpse into a role that is largely unseen but deeply woven into the county's civic fabric — quietly celebrating service, commitment and community across Surrey.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Photo: Deputy Lieutenant Mary Zoeller at Gold awards for Chief Scouts

Related reports:

Epsom & Ewell's Coronation Champion

Derby Prize Money to Rise to £2m as Epsom Seeks to Reassert Its Place at the Top of British Racing

19 December 2025



The Derby at Epsom is set to regain its position at the very summit of British flat racing after The Jockey Club confirmed

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that prize money for the 2026 renewal will rise to £2 million, making it the joint-richest race in the UK.

The £500,000 uplift takes the Derby's total prize fund to £2 million, with £1 million awarded to the winner, placing the race on a par with Ascot's King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes, long regarded as Britain's most valuable middle-distance contest.

The announcement comes after a six-month review by Epsom Downs Racecourse and The Jockey Club, prompted by a notable fall in attendance at this year's Derby meeting. Official figures show the Derby crowd dropped by more than 4,500, from over 26,800 in 2024 to 22,312 in 2025, raising concerns about the long-term appeal of Britain's most famous Classic.

A race whose prestige once eclipsed prize money

Historically, the Derby's importance has never rested on prize money alone. For much of its 245-year history, victory at Epsom carried unparalleled breeding and reputational value, dwarfing the cash rewards on offer.

Well into the late twentieth century, the Derby paid significantly less than major jumps races such as the Grand National or Cheltenham Gold Cup, yet remained the race every owner, trainer and breeder wanted to win. A Derby victory could transform a colt's value overnight, securing a lucrative stud career that far exceeded any prize cheque.

In recent decades, however, that imbalance has begun to shift. With global investment in racing concentrated increasingly in prize money-led jurisdictions such as Ireland, France, Australia and the Middle East, British racing has faced mounting pressure to compete financially as well as historically.

How the Derby now compares

At £2 million, the Derby will now sit at the top tier of UK racing alongside:

- **King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes (Ascot)** – £2 million
- **The Derby (Epsom)** – £2 million from 2026

By comparison:

- **Cheltenham Gold Cup** currently offers prize money in the region of £625,000
- **The Grand National**, Britain's most famous jumps race, has a total prize fund of £1 million
- **The Oaks**, run on the Friday of the Derby meeting, remains below the Derby but continues to hold major Classic status

The uplift therefore restores a sense of hierarchy at the very top of British flat racing, ensuring that the Derby once again leads from the front rather than trailing its peers.

Wider changes to the Derby meeting

Prize money is not the only area where change is planned. In an effort to attract a younger and more diverse audience, under-18s will be given free entry to both days of the Derby meeting in 2026. Racecourse officials hope this will help introduce a new generation to Epsom Downs and to racing more generally.

There are also significant changes to the structure of the meeting itself. The **Coronation Cup** will move from Friday to Saturday, where it will be run alongside the Derby. Its prize money has more than doubled, rising from £450,000 to £1 million following new sponsorship from leading racehorse breeders Coolmore.

Across the two-day meeting as a whole, total prize money will increase by £1.375 million, while the **Oaks** will remain the feature race on the Friday.

A response to changing times

The changes follow a 2025 Derby won by **Lambourn**, trained by Aidan O'Brien, who recorded a record-extending 11th victory in the Classic. While the quality of racing on the track remains undiminished, the attendance figures suggest Epsom is grappling with wider challenges facing British racing: competition from other sports, rising costs for racegoers, and shifting leisure habits.

By restoring the Derby's financial standing, restructuring the meeting, and lowering barriers to entry for younger fans, Epsom Downs is clearly attempting to balance tradition with modern realities.

Whether higher prize money alone can reverse attendance trends remains to be seen. But with the Derby once again sitting at the very top of the British racing prize-money tree, Epsom is making a clear statement of intent: that the world's greatest flat race should also be one of its most valuable.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Horses racing Image: Credit Paul. CC BY 2.0

Epsom mural project to celebrate neurodiversity

19 December 2025



A major new public art project celebrating neurodiversity is planned for Epsom, led by local autistic artist **Marcele Silvina Rodrigues White**, following support from the rail operator and council to create a large mural close to Epsom railway station.

The mural, expected to be painted in late spring or early summer next year, aims to raise awareness of neurodiversity while celebrating inclusive artistic expression. It will involve artists who are autistic, neurodivergent, and disabled, with the project designed to give visibility to artists who often face barriers within the mainstream art world.

Marcele, who has lived in Epsom for the past seven years, said the project is both personal and community-focused. After moving from London, she describes settling in Epsom as “coming home”, drawn by its green spaces, calm rhythm of life and supportive community. It was in Epsom, five years ago, that she began painting and started the artistic journey that has since taken her work across the UK and internationally.

An autistic artist and curator, Marcele has exhibited widely, including in London, Greece, New York and Rome. In 2024 her work was shown internationally, including at an exhibition organised by DaisY at The Lightbox in Woking and later at the Dantebus Art Gallery in Rome. She subsequently exhibited at Art Expo in New York and was invited to present her work in France at a special event organised by Fondazione Effeto Arte.

Alongside her own practice, Marcele has focused on creating platforms for other artists. In March 2025 she launched *Evoking Connections*, her own exhibition and arts initiative, at Horton in Epsom. The event brought together autistic, neurodivergent and disabled artists with the aim of raising awareness of neurodiversity and celebrating difference through creativity. Further editions followed at venues including Art & Grind in Guildford and Caballo Lounge in Epsom, with participating artists including those with multiple sclerosis, wheelchair users, autistic artists and neurotypical contributors.

More recently, Marcele was selected as one of the curators for the DaisY-Chain network, which supports artists in the spectrum and artists with different kinds of disabilities. She also shares her artwork and advocacy through her Instagram page, *thoughts_art_poem*.

The planned Epsom mural will reflect these values, with design approval forming part of the next stage of the project. The rail operator has expressed enthusiasm for the proposal and may also provide financial support, subject to confirmation. Images from Marcele’s previous work will be used to accompany coverage of the project, and a group photograph of Marcele with participating artists will form part of the public launch.

Marcele said she hopes the mural will not only brighten a prominent public space, but also help challenge perceptions around disability and neurodiversity. “I understand the transformative power that art can have in our lives,” she said. “I want others to experience that same sense of expression, connection and empowerment.”

Further details about the mural design and painting dates are expected to be confirmed in the coming months.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Cobham Cruise Past Epsom & Ewell in 4–0 Chalky

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Lane Defeat

19 December 2025



Epsom and Ewell FC 0 – 4 Cobham Combined Counties League Premier South. Venue Chalky Lane Chessington.

The Salts succumbed to their worst home defeat of the season, losing 0-4 to Cobham. The fact that Cobham are running away with the league (13 points clear with 2 games in hand on 2nd place) meant it would be a difficult game, but unfortunately a poor performance made it easy for them, and they didn't have to get out of second gear in order to claim the 3 points in front of 101 fans.

Injuries and suspensions meant we had to move players around again, although, after the fact, the suspensions were probably best today rather than Tuesday evening, with a more winnable game v Badshot Lea.
Sami Nabbad returned in goal, Shane Dunne came into midfield as Adam Green went to centre-back in place of the suspended Antonios Nazareth, Callum O'Keefe returned in place of Jason Bloor, Filip Ksaidz replaced Andrew Herring, and finally Karl Bailey came in for Ali Fofahan.

There was a little bit of hope in the early stages as Luis Oliveira managed to get to the goal line in the 2nd minute, but he was forced out by three defenders and unable to get the cross in, and the ball ricocheted off him, not even getting the corner. Cobham had the first chance of the afternoon when No. 9 Marklew had a shot across the goal after a good move down their left. Fortunately, there was no one coming in on the far post — something that was to change shortly. Nabbad was forced to make a couple of diving stops to prevent the ball going across the goal. He then had a poor kick-out and his ball went straight to a Cobham player who tried to play in No. 10 Hayford, but fortunately there was a bit too much on the pass and it ran out for a goal kick.

We then lost Shane Dunne to a knee injury after 15 minutes which would cause us problems as he holds the midfield together, and with Adam Green in defence, we were in for a difficult time. After 17 minutes Cobham got their reward for their control of the game. Again it came down their left with No. 11 Rule playing a nice ball across the goal, with Marklew running in unopposed and passing the ball into the net.
Epsom & Ewell 0-1 Cobham.

Cobham were now in control and on 31 minutes a nice ball was played into Marklew, and he found himself 1-on-1 with Nabbad, who had moved quickly off his line. Marklew attempted to lift the ball over the onrushing keeper and fortunately put a bit too much on it and it went over the bar too. Shortly after, we managed to put a nice move together and the ball was played to Oliveira who burst towards the box only to be brought down just outside. McVey, who normally takes the kick, stepped aside for No. 9 Robinson to have a go, but his shot hit the bottom of the wall and rebounded easily back to the keeper. On 36 minutes we gave away a free kick outside the box, which earned Nelson-Roberts a yellow card, in a similar position to our previous kick. Cobham No. 7 decided to go under the wall as well. He also managed to hit the bottom and it rolled easily back to Nabbad. Unfortunately, Sami managed to let the ball go through his hands and legs and it rolled into the goal. I don't even think it managed to hit the back of the net.

Cobham continued to create more and keep us pinned in our half and they had a couple more chances that didn't really trouble Nabbad, but a header in the box from Marklew appeared to strike an Epsom & Ewell arm. There was a big shout from Cobham players but the referee waved it away. Difficult to see from where we were standing but we went in 0-2 down.
HT Epsom & Ewell 0-2 Cobham.

There needed to be a big talk from the management to get the players focused for the second half. 2-0 down still means we are in the game, but our performance in the first half was poor and lacked any real energy. Hopefully, we would give it a go in the second. Alas, it was not to be and despite the fact we were playing down the hill in the second half, Cobham continued to exert pressure. Again they had a couple of chances and a third goal looked on the cards rather than us getting back into the game, and on 62 minutes we gave them a third goal. Trying to play out from the back, Nabbad played the ball to Green who attempted to play the ball across goal to Aiwone. He tried to let the ball run across his body whilst facing the goal, but No. 11 Rule anticipated the move and took the ball off Aiwone and slotted the ball into an empty net.

In the meantime, Oba Akinniranye had replaced Karl Bailey and, as always, he started to cause trouble on our right; however, he managed to get himself booked after a little bit of trouble with Cobham No. 4, and both ended up in the book. Oba did manage to provide an assist for our first real shot on goal and good movement found Ryley Merritt (who had replaced Dunne in the 1st half). He had a good shot, but it went across the goal. As the keeper scrambled across it must have been close. Cobham seemed to think *we have to stop this* and on the 85th minute another move down the Cobham right had the ball played across goal and No. 14 Simpson had another easy finish at the far post.

We managed to create a couple of chances towards the end and finally their keeper had to make a save, after Oba again created problems and his shot was stopped just short of the goal. Jack Torbett, returning after another lay-off, hit the bar

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from a cross/shot. There was nothing really after that, and Cobham continued their march to the title.

After a great mid-week performance v Step 4 Bedfont Sports in a friendly, today's performance was disappointing and with only one shot on goal for the whole game it is probably the worst since we lost to Sutton Common Rovers. Losing to Cobham is also not the worst result either, but we need to gather ourselves for Tuesday night v Badshot Lea at Chalky Lane. KO 7.45, as some of the teams below us are putting in good results and we don't wish to be drawn into another relegation battle.

We look forward to seeing you there.

Team:
Nabbad, Oliveira, Nelson-Roberts, C. Green, Dunne, Aiwone, O'Keeffe, Murphy-McVey, Robinson, Ksaidz, Bailey — Subs: Gilfillian-Waul, Dundas, Akinniranye, Merrett, Torbett.

Epsom and Ewell FC Media

Late Penalty Breaks Epsom Hearts in 34–33 Thriller

19 December 2025



Dartfordians 34 Sutton & Epsom RFC 33 Saturday 13th December.

The midpoint of the campaign has been reached and the return journey has begun in Regional 2 South East. In Round 2 back in September, the Black & Whites hosted Dartfordians and snuck home by 33–29, with Rob Hegarty scoring a hat-trick. Sutton & Epsom had led 33–17 with five minutes to go and were no doubt grateful that there were not five more minutes to play. While the hosts then sat just a solitary place above winless Old Reigatian and the visitors were nestled in fourth spot, S&E arrived in Bexley on a run of four successive defeats. Added to this were the usual seasonal effects of wear and tear, and few were anticipating a comfortable afternoon. So it came to pass that Dartfordians won 34–33 with the final kick of the game.

Sutton & Epsom fielded 11 players from their September squad. Niall McCormack made his debut from the bench and Angus Nelson, having his first outing of the season, kept him company, while Matt Symonds made his first appearance of the campaign on the wing. Dartfordians were marginally more settled, with 12 of the 18 who appeared at Rugby Lane also taking part, though Jarlath Hetherington was once again a notable absentee. Traffic accidents and congestion delayed the kick-off until 2.15pm, and disaster struck Sutton early when an interception allowed centre Harvey Whyte to run in from his own half. The conversion was missed but Dartfordians led 5–0, playing up the slope.

The early setback was compounded when S&E flanker Dan Jones' return from injury lasted less than ten minutes. Undeterred, Sutton took the lead when Tom Lennard made the initial break and the Black & Whites exploited an overlap for Matt Symonds to score with his first touch. Freddy Bunting converted to edge Sutton ahead at 7–5. It was the start of a topsy-turvy encounter, with the lead changing hands repeatedly. On the half-hour mark, Dartfordians regained the advantage after sustained pressure forced Sutton onto the back foot. Despite strong defence, with Lennard prominent, a poor clearance led to a catch-and-drive from which prop Louis Chapman scored. Tom Gubby converted for a 12–7 lead.

Within five minutes Sutton were back in front. A superb break from Bunting, well supported by Gareth O'Brien, took S&E to within five metres, and from the ensuing penalty the forwards took charge. Despite valiant resistance, prop Tom Boaden forced his way over, with Bunting again converting to make it 14–12. From the restart, winger Jack Bunce was rewarded for his kick chase as Bunting lost possession in the tackle. After heroic defence denied full-back Joe Scott, it was captain Kieran Clarke who eventually scored from a five-metre scrum. Gubby converted to restore Dartfordians' lead at 19–14.

There was still time for one more score before the break, and it went Sutton's way. O'Brien initiated a counter-attack from inside the Sutton half and the Black & Whites produced their best attacking rugby of the half, advancing through multiple phases to reach five metres out. A retreating Dartfordians defence conceded a penalty, which O'Brien took quickly, weaving his way to the line with pace and skill. Bunting added the extras and Sutton led 21–19 at the interval. After a breathless, see-sawing first half, it would have taken a brave soul to predict the final outcome.

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The visitors broke the pattern ten minutes into the second half. A superb break by Adam Bibby almost brought a try, but excellent cover defence denied him. Hegarty and Sam Lennie continued the move and S&E appeared to have scored, only for the referee to rule the final pass forward. That disappointment was short-lived, as play was brought back for a Sutton penalty. Slick back play then provided Symonds with his second try of the afternoon, and Bunting's magnificent touchline conversion extended the lead to 28–19.

Five minutes later Dartfordians responded. A series of penalties forced Sutton deep into their own 22 and, after multiple phases of determined forward play, centre Harvey Whyte powered his way over. Gubby converted to reduce the deficit to 28–26. Both sides had now secured their try bonus point as the game entered its final quarter, with everything still to play for.

A pivotal moment followed when Bibby was yellow-carded for a high tackle as he chased down a long clearance. In such a tightly contested match, ten minutes with a numerical advantage proved crucial. Sutton dug deep, monopolising possession and running down the clock, but Dartfordians eventually forced their way back into the S&E 22. Another penalty piled on the pressure, and from a catch-and-drive the ball was released for flanker James Garvey to squeeze over in the corner. The difficult conversion was missed, but Dartfordians were back in front at 31–28.

With some irony, the referee then reduced the home side to 14 just as Sutton returned to a full complement. It appeared the Black & Whites had missed their chance when a harsh pass to Symonds resulted in a knock-on, but they were rescued by a colossal scrum effort that earned a penalty. Sutton camped on the line as Dartfordians' defence held firm, twice denying Lennie within inches of the line. From the drop-out, Sutton surged back again and were awarded a penalty in front of the posts. Declining the draw, they kicked to the corner, and from the line-out the pack ushered Lennie over. Bunting's kicking had been immaculate all afternoon, so it was a surprise when the conversion drifted narrowly wide, but Sutton led 33–31.

There was still time for the restart. As so often, Sutton proved most vulnerable immediately after scoring. Almost inevitably, Dartfordians were awarded a penalty. In a moment of intense drama, Tom Gubby held his nerve and landed the decisive kick. It was agony for the men from Rugby Lane and pure ecstasy for the Kent crowd. With no time remaining, Dartfordians had won 34–33.

The lower reaches of the table are tightly congested and, after several near misses, Dartfordians finally emerged on the right side of the scoreline. Aside from the interception, their four tries came from excellent forward ball-carrying, with a physical and committed pack posing a constant threat from attacking line-outs. With Old Reigatian now 25 points adrift at the bottom, Dartfordians will look upwards with optimism, as the next three teams are within two points.

This was a painful defeat for Sutton & Epsom. They regained the lead on four occasions, scored five tries and have accumulated the most bonus points in the league with 14. Errors, whether missed kicks to touch or costly penalties, handed Dartfordians valuable territory and attacking platforms. To snatch the lead in the dying moments only to concede a penalty from the restart made this the hardest defeat of the season to bear.

Next Saturday at 2pm, Sutton & Epsom host Old Reigatian in their final league fixture of 2025. The visitors are enduring a tough campaign, one that Rugby Lane supporters of a 2011–12 vintage will recall with empathy. The Black & Whites will hope their Christmas charity does not extend to gifting the Old Boys their first win of the season. Such is the cyclical nature of rugby that the side from Geoffrey Knight Fields topped Regional 2 South East as recently as 6 January 2024.

Sutton & Epsom:
O'Brien, Symonds, Bibby, Bunting (c), Scott, Lennard, Munford, Johnson, Lennie, Boaden, McTaggart, Duey, Rea, Jones, Hegarty.
Replacements: Howes, Nelson, McCormack.

Dartfordians:
Scott, Kpaka, J Taylor, Whyte, Bunce, Gubby, M Taylor, Garrett, Hooban, Chapman, Adams, Chandler, Garvey, Clarke (c), Wright.
Replacements: Clayton, Rackley, Chappell.

John Croysdill

Image – action from a previous fixture – Robin Kennedy

Neurodiversity good for business Surrey study shows

19 December 2025



Businesses and policymakers risk missing out on workforce potential by misunderstanding neurodiverse conditions and

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the biological differences that shape entrepreneurial strengths, according to new research led by the University of Surrey. Instead of considering ADHD, dyslexia and bipolar conditions only as static clinical challenges, researchers build on the existing entrepreneurship literature to argue that these conditions can equip people with unique abilities that drive entrepreneurial action, innovation, and business growth.

In a study, published in Neurodiversity in Entrepreneurship, researchers carried out a systematic review of scientific evidence published between 2011 and 2023, mapping 139 papers and 28 core studies across business and management. Importantly, they focused on using organisational neuroscience evidence, spanning from brain activations to genetic mechanisms linked to ADHD, dyslexia and bipolar conditions.

Researchers found evidence that entrepreneurs with ADHD often show high entrepreneurial alertness and strong performance in innovation and risk taking. Dyslexic entrepreneurs may instead compensate for reading and writing challenges by developing advanced delegation strategies to accelerate business growth. Meanwhile, traits linked to bipolar conditions correlate with creativity, idea generation and willingness to pursue bold ventures.

Dr Sebastiano Massaro, co-author of the study and Associate Professor (Reader) of Organisational Neuroscience at the University of Surrey, said:

“We often behave as if neurodiversity automatically means a deficit. The biological evidence shows something completely different. These conditions span a continuum and there is strong evidence that in entrepreneurial contexts they bring valuable strengths. Simply put, we need to stop treating them as problems to be fixed.”

The research advocate for a shift in how businesses support programmes and employers view neurodiversity. It argues for business environments that value difference rather than seeking to normalise it and calls for practical organisational strategies that actively harness neurodiverse strengths. The study also highlights policy implications, noting that entrepreneurial settings can provide pathways to work and equality for people who are often miscategorised as unemployable.

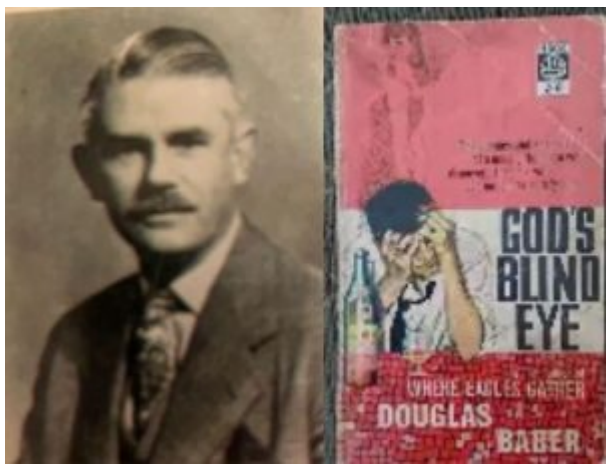
Dr Sebastiano Massaro continued:

“To the best of our knowledge, we are presenting the first grounded explanation of why neurodiversity matters in business by drawing a direct connection between neural mechanisms and entrepreneurial behaviour. If universities, industry and governments overlook how these biological foundations impact entrepreneurship, they might miss valuable capability hidden in plain sight.”

Surrey University

Tragedy of War Hero turned writer who lived in Epsom

19 December 2025



In June 1960, Douglas Baber, 42, was found comatose through drink in the garden of his former home in Woodcote Green, a well-to-do housing estate in Epsom. A court appearance followed, during which the magistrate noted that Baber had been before the Epsom bench seven times on drink-related charges. Baber, for his part, expressed appreciation for the care the Epsom constabulary had shown him while in custody. The Sutton and Epsom Advertiser described him as a “local author”, but there was far more to Douglas Gordon Baber than that.

Born in Belfast in 1918, he was living in middle-class comfort in South Croydon by 1921 in a household that included his mother Isabella, siblings and two servants. His father, Charles Johnstone Baber, was absent, later remarrying in 1929 and fathering a daughter, Hazel. Charles was an entrepreneur in the high-end footwear trade, at one time operating a shop on London’s Regent Street.

The family later moved to Bexhill on the south coast. At 11, Douglas came to public attention when newspapers reported his dramatic rescue after being swept out to sea by Channel currents — perhaps an early sign of the adventurous spirit that would define him. He developed a passion for flight and, in 1935 at just 17 years old, obtained a flying licence in a

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Gipsy Moth plane. On his certificate, he described himself as a student in boot and shoe manufacturing, likely intending to follow his father's trade.

In 1937 Douglas travelled to Canada, finding work in factory administration. But the outbreak of the Second World War brought those plans to an end. He returned to England, enlisted in the RAF and, at 21, was flying bomber planes over occupied Europe as a Flight Lieutenant in 77 Squadron.

On 17 August 1941 he bailed out over Belgium and survived. He fled the crash site and was given refuge by the Rigaux family, farmers in Zingem, who risked their lives by sheltering him under German occupation. After nearly three weeks, German soldiers raided the farm following a suspected tip-off. Douglas was captured and the Rigaux family taken away to an uncertain fate. At Gestapo HQ in Brussels, he later said he was first subjected to rough treatment, then friendliness, then threats to shoot him — a deliberate psychological tactic.

Douglas passed through several POW camps: Dulag Luft in Germany, then Oflag XC in Lübeck, followed by Oflag VI-B Warburg, where he was imprisoned at the same time as the celebrated pilot Douglas Bader. The similarity in their names likely caused administrative confusion, and it is improbable the two men were not at least aware of each other.

In 1942 Baber was transferred to Oflag XXI-B Schubin in Poland, where fellow prisoners included future Chancellor Anthony Barber and Eric Williams, author of *The Wooden Horse*. He was later sent to Stalag Luft III at Sagan — now Zagan, Poland — famous for *The Great Escape*. Fellow prisoners included Paul Brickhill, who would later write *Reach for the Sky*, and actors Peter Butterworth and Rupert Davies. In February 1945 Douglas was moved again, to Marlag Nord, where he was soon liberated by Allied forces.

After returning home, Douglas collaborated with two former POWs to write *Oflag 3*, a play about prison camp life. Directed by Charles Hawtrey and featuring a young Pete Murray, it was staged at the X Theatre in Richmond and well received. Misleading online claims that Hawtrey collaborated with Douglas Bader rather than Douglas Baber have unfortunately muddied the historical record.

Douglas married Phyliss Fox in 1947. Their daughter Vivienne was born in 1950, and the family settled first in Christchurch Mount and later on the Woodcote Estate. His writing career flourished. He first signed with avant-garde publisher Werner Laurie, then with Heinemann, who released his debut crime novel *My Death is a Mockery* in 1952. The book, involving the murder of a policeman, was an immediate success and was quickly adapted into a film starring Donald Houston, Kathleen Byron and Bill Kerr.

The film became embroiled in the notorious Craig and Bentley case after Christopher Craig, the 16-year-old who shot PC Sidney Miles, revealed he had seen it earlier that day. Tabloid speculation unfairly pointed towards Baber, and he began receiving hate mail. This publicity placed immense strain on him and his family. Douglas had already shown vulnerability: in 1950 he was convicted of assaulting a ticket collector after a POW reunion. He expressed deep remorse in court, admitting to having drunk too much.

Through the 1950s Douglas published prolifically, producing *Where Eagles Gather*, *The Guarded Years*, *Love on the Verge*, *A Road to Disaster*, *The Mortal Triumph* and *The Slender Thread*, alongside short stories and journalism. He also published under the name John Ritson and worked as a publishing editor and executive. In 1956 he became advertising promotion manager at ABC TV, part of the early ITV network. On the surface, life in the stockbroker belt appeared successful.

But privately Douglas was spiralling. He increasingly found himself in Epsom Police Station for drink-related incidents, and once smashed his car into a shop in Bexhill. His marriage appears to have come under great strain. According to his daughter Vivienne, Douglas was devastated when he learned during the 1950s that members of the courageous Rigaux family who had sheltered him had been murdered by the Gestapo or deported to camps, where some later died. She said the guilt haunted him for the rest of his life.

It is easy to imagine how the emotional burden drove him towards alcohol. In 1963 he was still producing work — he published a short story in the *Birmingham Evening Mail* and took a post as advertisement controller on the Reverend Timothy Beaumont's magazine *Aspect*. But on 21 October 1963 Douglas Gordon Baber died at 21 The Hill, Wheathampstead, near St Albans. He was only 45.

One of his later works, *God's Blind Eye* (1960), features a businessman battling alcoholism. A line from the book seems to echo Baber's own torment: *"When the effects of the alcohol wore off, the sense of impending disaster and loneliness was far worse, crouched in his mind like an enemy."*

Martin Knight



Million-pound FIFA-standard football pitch opens at Glyn School in Ewell

19 December 2025

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A new state-of-the-art FIFA-standard 3G football pitch and pavilion has been officially opened at Glyn School in Ewell after more than £1 million of investment from national and local partners.

The Premier League, The FA and the Government's Football Foundation contributed just over half of the total cost, with further funding from Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, Your Fund Surrey (Surrey County Council) and the Epsom & Ewell Colts. The new pitch will be used by Glyn School, other GLF Schools, Epsom & Ewell Colts FC and the wider community.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Playing Pitch Strategy and Corporate Plan identified the need for high-quality sports provision to promote healthy lifestyles, widen participation and meet the needs of a growing population. With more than 1,800 students at Glyn and around 5,000 across other GLF Schools, the facilities are expected to make a significant daily impact on school and community sport.

A partnership with Epsom & Ewell Colts FC means the pitch will become a major hub for grassroots football, supporting over 1,200 players across 82 teams, including 30 girls' and women's teams. The GLF Schools Foundation will help expand access for disadvantaged groups, disabled players and young people historically underrepresented in sport, aligning with both borough and national priorities for community wellbeing.

The official opening took place on Wednesday (Dec 10), with GLF Schools Interim CEO James Nicholson addressing guests and the Mayor of Epsom & Ewell, **Cllr Robert Leach**, cutting the ribbon. Also present were Liz Pill from the Football Foundation and Rosanne Fine from Surrey Football Association. Visitors toured the pitch and pavilion after watching players take to the new surface.

Jo Garrod, Headteacher at Glyn School, said: "This new pitch and pavilion are a fantastic addition to the sports facilities at our school and will be a huge benefit to all our students. We're extremely grateful to the Football Foundation for the funding and investment and delighted that they have made such a significant contribution to improve the quality of sports facilities for everyone in the community."

James Nicholson, Interim CEO of GLF Schools, said: "The range of sports and activities we offer at GLF Schools is central to the educational experience for all students. Having the latest modern facilities is key to giving every student the best opportunities to reach their full potential and enjoy their time with us. I'd like to thank The Football Foundation, whose major grant made this development possible, Epsom & Ewell Council, Your Fund Surrey (Surrey County Council), and the Epsom & Ewell Colts, who also supported this project with substantial financial contributions. As well as Surrey FA for their strategic guidance and endorsement, and all the consultants in design, fundraising, planning, and project management who worked so hard to build such an impressive pitch and pavilion."

Robert Sullivan, Chief Executive of the Football Foundation, said: "The Football Foundation is working closely with our partners, the Premier League, The FA and Government, to transform the quality of grassroots facilities in England by delivering projects like this across the country. Good quality playing facilities have a transformative impact on physical and mental health and play an important role in bringing people together and strengthening local communities. We're delighted that the local community in Epsom and Ewell will now be able to enjoy all these benefits thanks to the new facilities at Glyn School."

Epsom & Ewell MP Helen Maguire said: "The opening of this new pitch and pavilion at Glyn School is a real milestone for Ewell and the wider borough. It gives young people and local clubs a first-class space to train, play, and grow – and it strengthens the role that sport can play in building confidence and aspiration, as well as the improvements it can bring to both physical and mental health. I'm delighted to see this project completed and look forward to visiting soon."

Many local clubs, organisations and community groups provided letters of support, including NESCOT, Chelsea FC Foundation, Fetcham United FC, Active Surrey, Surrey Schools FA, Surrey Cricket Foundation and Tidy Keepers.

A 3G (Third Generation) astro pitch is an advanced artificial turf surface combining synthetic grass, sand and rubber infill to mimic natural turf, offering all-weather durability and consistent performance.

About the Football Foundation

The Football Foundation is the Premier League, The FA and the Government's charity dedicated to delivering outstanding grassroots facilities. Since 2000 it has raised £1.3 billion to improve facilities nationwide, including 1,300 3G pitches, 15,000 grass pitches and 1,700 changing rooms, attracting an additional £1.5 billion in partnership funding. It works with local authorities, County FAs and community partners to create Local Football Facility Plans for every area of England. More information at footballfoundation.org.uk.

About GLF Schools

GLF Schools is a multi-academy trust of 43 schools serving more than 17,000 pupils aged 2 to 19 across Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Surrey, West Sussex and parts of London. The Trust includes eight secondary schools and 35 primary settings, each serving its own community while sharing a commitment to excellent educational outcomes.

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Sam Jones – Reporter



New Pitch at Glyn School x 2. Credit: GLF Schools

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

19 December 2025



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has voted to continue exploring the creation of two new community councils—one for Epsom and one for Ewell—following an often heated debate at the Full Council meeting on Tuesday 9 December. The decision means the proposals will now go to a second phase of public consultation before a final vote in March 2026.

The meeting also saw **Cllr Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) elected—by 17 votes to 11—over **Cllr Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) as the Borough's representative on a Local Government Association forum related to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

The main item of the night, however, was whether to progress the Community Governance Review (CGR) and consult residents further on the proposed new parish-style councils.

What was decided

Two recommendations were voted on separately, both by recorded vote:

• Recommendation 1: Proceed to a second-stage consultation
• Recommendation 2: Confirm the amended Terms of Reference and delegated arrangements for running that consultation

Both recommendations were carried by 17 votes to 6 (or 7) with 6 (or 5) abstentions, depending on the motion.

Supporters: "Residents must have a voice before the borough is abolished"

Cllr John Beckett (RA Auriol), who proposed the motion, framed the issue as a democratic response to the looming abolition of the borough council under Surrey's move to two unitary authorities. He warned of a 75% reduction in elected representation once Epsom and Ewell's 35 borough councillors and 5 county councillors are replaced with just 10 unitary councillors.

Beckett said: "*These changes are about the centralisation of power and money all at the expense of local democracy.*" He added that the first consultation—352 responses, with 67% supporting further investigation—was "*the second highest response to a borough-wide consultation outside the Local Plan*".

He argued that parish-style councils could preserve local identity and provide continuity: "*For our residents… this gives our residents a choice, and it gives our residents a voice.*"

Cllr Hannah Dalton told councillors that other areas undergoing unitary transitions, including Northamptonshire, Wiltshire and Somerset, saw unparished areas "*left behind*". She said that if Epsom and Ewell did not act now, it risked becoming "*the only unparished area in East Surrey*".

She added: "*Tonight we are only asking you to support further consultation… with a precept that has no transfer of assets, whatever our colleagues are saying.*"

Cllr Neil Dallen (RA Town) said the proposal was modest: "*We go out to the residents and we ask them… whether they want us to continue.*"

Cllr Rachel King (RA Town) emphasised that the public had only given feedback on principles so far: "*We now need to give them a proper opportunity to respond to a fleshed out proposal… We owe it to our residents to give them a voice.*"

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Opponents: “A flawed consultation, a financial burden, and a political stitch-up”

Opposition councillors delivered some of the sharpest criticism heard in the chamber for years.

Claims of a flawed consultation

Cllr Julian Freeman (Lib Dem College) said the consultation process was “*flawed*” because respondents were forced to select an option rather than reject the idea outright. He argued: “*This is the wrong issue at the wrong time… The only reason this is being raised now is to create a role for the people in this room.*”

Cllr Rob Geleit (Labour Court), speaking also on behalf of absent **Cllr Kate Chinn**, said the proposals lacked community backing: “*A flawed and skewed consultation, a lack of engagement… giving no mandate… and poor financial analysis.*” He added: “*I see no point in removing a layer of democracy only to add it back again on a lesser level.*”

Cllr Alison Kelly (Lib Dem Stamford) said residents were mostly concerned about planning, but that the parish proposals did not address this: “*Most people… give the issue of allotments very little thought. We are showing a cost of a parish council around £45 for an allotment you don’t need in a flat.*” She noted that only around 230 respondents had expressed a desire for a parish council.

Financial warnings: 98.7% admin, 1.3% allotments

Cllr James Lawrence (Lib Dem College) highlighted the ratio in the report: approximately £1.5m in administrative overheads versus £20,000 for allotment running costs. “*You will be telling [residents] you’re creating a parish council that is just for allotments… the allotments cost is 1.3% of the tax you’re going to charge.*” He added that consultation documents risked misleading residents by listing admin and allotments side-by-side “*as if they were roughly equal*”.

“An uncapped tax burden on struggling households”

Cllr Alex Coley warned that the real precept could be much higher—up to £180 for Band D properties—if the community councils later took on community buildings with significant maintenance liabilities such as Bourne Hall: “*It would be disingenuous to go to residents with £40-something pounds when it could be £180… We should not seek a view from residents with a lower figure and then quadruple it.*” He said many residents were “*struggling financially*” and called the proposals “*an astonishing waste of time, energy and money.*”

Cllr Bernie Muir (Conservative Horton) urged councillors to wait until the new unitary structure and Surrey’s pilot Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) bedded in: “*I think this is a premature discussion… we should see how the unitaries and NACs pan out and then move forward if we need to.*”

Cllr Chris Ames (Labour Court) was highly critical of the RA leadership: “*This wasn’t a review. This was one option chosen by the Residents’ Association to meet its own purposes… It’s all about providing a jumping-off point for the clique that runs this council.*”

Admin cost vs allotment cost: the core numerical controversy

Using the figures in the Report to Council:

- Admin and support costs for new community councils: approx. £1.5 million
- Cost of allotment management: approx. £20,000

That means roughly:

- 98.7% of the expenditure is administration
- 1.3% is allotment provision

This ratio became a central argument for opponents, particularly **Cllr Lawrence**, who said allotments would be a “*rounding error*” in the parish budget.

Supporters responded that these were not final budgets, merely illustrative maxima, and that Phase 2 consultation would use the *true* starting point—around £43–£46 Band D—with no asset transfers.

Conclusion

The council has opted to continue exploring parish councils despite sharp divisions. The second public consultation will now seek residents’ views on more detailed proposals before a final decision in March 2026—months before the borough is abolished and replaced by the new East Surrey unitary authority.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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