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Surrey MP intervenes in local prison transgender issue

30 November 2025



The Member of Parliament for Reigate has called for biologically male inmates to be excluded from the women's estate at HMP Downview in Banstead. **Rebecca Paul MP** argued that the presence of male-born prisoners in a women's jail placed vulnerable female inmates at risk and reflected a wider policy approach that "put inclusion and ideology above safety and reality". She made the remarks during a House of Commons debate on 24 November concerning the management of transgender prisoners at HMP Downview.

The debate heard that transgender women are placed at Downview primarily for their own protection and are escorted by guards when mixing with the wider prison population. MPs were also told that, since 2019, there had been no recorded case of a trans inmate assaulting a biologically female prisoner. Evidence was cited that transgender women held in the men's estate themselves experience disproportionately high levels of sexual assault.

Mrs Paul said HMP Downview includes a dedicated E Wing "specifically for biological males who identify as women", used for transgender women who, with or without a Gender Recognition Certificate, cannot be safely housed elsewhere in the female estate. She stated that between five and seven such prisoners had been accommodated in E Wing over the past year. Citing Ministry of Justice data, she said: "In 2024, of the 245 transgender males in prison, 151 — or 62 per cent — were convicted of a sexual offence, far higher than the 17 per cent rate for the overall male prison population. A similar pattern can be seen in 2023."

She concluded that "the male transgender prison population poses a much higher risk to women and girls," and urged the Government to "take action and protect women at HMP Downview and across the female prison estate".

Responding for the Government, The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice **Alex Davies-Jones MP** acknowledged that transgender women had specific vulnerabilities, but said the allocation of prisoners required "thought and tact" to ensure fairness and safety. She emphasised that exemptions allowing transgender women into the general women's population are granted only when there is a compelling reason, such as acute self-harm or suicide risk, and only when there is high confidence that the prisoner poses a low risk to others. No such exemptions have been issued recently.

The Minister noted that more than 95 per cent of transgender women are held in men's prisons and that those placed in Downview are mostly housed on the stand-alone 16-bed E Wing unit, separated from biological women and situated within its own secure compound. The unit, introduced in 2019, was created because transgender women in men's prisons face disproportionate levels of bullying, harassment, self-harm and sexual assault.

She told MPs: "There have been zero assaults and zero sexual assaults committed by transgender women in the women's estate since 2019," adding that she hoped the figures demonstrated the Government's attempt to "strike a balance" in the placement of transgender prisoners.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

HMP Downview (image Google)

Here's some Spring cheer as Winter approaches Epsom and Ewell

30 November 2025



Nonsuch Park has been awarded two top honours at the 2025 South & South East in Bloom Awards, taking **Gold** for

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both *Heritage Park of the Year* and *Large Conservation Area*. The Gold Award is the scheme's highest accolade, reserved for entries judged to have achieved exceptional standards across all assessment categories.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council said the result reflects a sustained programme of heritage restoration and environmental management, including the refurbishment of garden features such as the greenhouse, continued care of its champion trees, and conservation work across the wider landscape. Judges described Nonsuch Park as "an exceptional example of conservation in action", commending its carefully managed habitats, historic setting and community engagement projects.

Councillor **Anthony Froud** (RA Stoneleigh), Chairman of the Nonsuch Park Joint Management Committee, said: "This is an incredible achievement and a reflection of the dedication of our volunteers and staff. Local volunteers, the Nonsuch Voles, and the Council's Countryside, Property and Estates, and Operational teams work year-round to protect and enhance this unique heritage landscape for the benefit of wildlife, visitors and future generations. These Gold Awards celebrate their hard work and the deep pride our community takes in Nonsuch Park."

Governance of Nonsuch Park

Unlike most parks in the borough, Nonsuch Park is not managed solely by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council. It is overseen by the Nonsuch Park Joint Management Committee (JMC), a long-standing partnership between Epsom & Ewell Borough Council and the London Borough of Sutton. The arrangement dates back to the 1930s, when the two authorities jointly acquired the estate to prevent the land from being sold for development.

Under the current structure, the JMC is responsible for strategic decisions concerning the park's maintenance, heritage assets, conservation plans and public access. Day-to-day operations are delivered by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council on behalf of the partnership, with Sutton contributing towards the running costs through an annual financial agreement. Representatives from both councils sit on the committee, ensuring shared oversight of policy, budget and long-term planning.

The Joint Management Committee model is one of the reasons Nonsuch Park has been able to maintain its character and heritage significance. It enables coordinated management across borough boundaries while preserving the historic landscape as a single entity. Local volunteer groups, notably the Nonsuch Voles, play an important supporting role, undertaking conservation tasks, habitat improvement, garden restoration and public engagement throughout the year.

With thousands of visitors each week, Nonsuch Park remains one of the region's most valued open spaces. This year's double Gold Award adds to its growing list of recognitions and underlines its importance as both a heritage landscape and a biodiversity-rich green space for the wider community.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Surrey Police Commissioner responds to morale report

30 November 2025



Surrey's Police and Crime Commissioner has defended a reported drop in police officer morale, pointing to public and media criticism of the force. Only 57 per cent of officers believe they are making a difference, according to a new report, but **PCC Lisa Townsend** said the decline reflects wider tensions between the force and the field. Speaking at a Surrey Police and Crime Panel meeting on November 27, she said: "It doesn't matter what this job you're in, if the profession that you do is being attacked by the public, is being attacked in the news, attacked by colleagues or other people – there is an inevitable correlation in terms of morale." She added that Surrey's proximity to the Met Police, "that features in the news on a regular basis", may also be influencing Surrey officers' perceptions. "Our officers feel that. They see police officers being attacked and it's not surprising they are not completely immune to feeling that themselves," she said.

However, Ms Townsend warned against assuming pressure is spread evenly across the force: "We've got to be careful about treating it as a single… as a uniform [experience] across all police officers or police staff." Backlogs in the justice process, not feeling adequately equipped and workload were also cited as frustrations potentially chipping away at morale. Nearly 66 per cent of officers said they were unable to finish tasks on time, according to council documents. Despite the uncertainty of local government reorganisation and the government's plan to scrap the PCC role in 2028, Ms Townsend stressed that officer numbers remain strong. "We would never have enough police officers to deal with

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everything every member of the public will want to deal with. It is always going to be an issue. Police officers are always going to be under a certain amount of pressure, as everyone in the public sector."

The Commissioner said work to improve retention and reduce stress is making progress but a tough reality remains: demand continues to feel high and work–life balance remains "the most common reason for leaving the force".

Emily Dalton LDRS

Image: Lisa Townsend, Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner. (Credit: Surrey PCC office)

Leatherhead ruined recycling road repair

30 November 2025



A crumbling, pothole-ridden road that has been the source of countless insurance claims could be given a new lease of life. The North Leatherhead Access Road leading into the Surrey County Council recycling centre off Randalls Road has been slowly destroyed by years of heavy goods vehicles entering and leaving the site. Now, Mole Valley District Council has agreed to spend £60,000 to begin the process of repairing the heavily rutted road. The task is made more complicated as the road is co-owned by Surrey County Council and Thames Water, and it is hoped the initial work, from an overall £300,000 budget, will determine not just what needs to be done, but who pays for it.

Presenting the item to the November meeting of Mole Valley District's cabinet was **Councillor Keira Vyvyan-Robinson**. She said: "Anybody who uses the recycling centre on a regular basis will be very familiar with the problems that road has. Obviously, it is heavily used by very heavy vehicles and over a period of time that heavy use has resulted in a lot of problems with the carriageway, with rutting in the verges and the channel blocks. That has resulted in increased insurance claims and also increased complaints. In February 2024, it was agreed that we would allocate just over £300,000 in order to improve that road. It is a complicated project because Mole Valley District Council owns about half of the road, the majority of the balance of it is the responsibility of Surrey County Council and Thames Water, so it's necessary to liaise with them and reach agreements with them over the work that needs to be carried out. This budget is to start the full design and to get the proper costing, because at the moment it's a provisional figure of about 300,000. The drawdown will enable us to finalise that, submit the planning application and reach the legal agreement with Thames Water and Surrey County Council over how much they will contribute towards the costs. For anybody who uses it, it's quite plain that we can't do nothing, as it's such a detrimental situation at the moment and it will only get worse if we don't."

Cllr Gerry Sevenoaks, Independent member for Ashtead Park and chair of the council's scrutiny committee, said: "As a user of that road I know it very well. It's dangerous, especially if you are going down there and two refuse carts are coming the other way. I say 'let's get on with it'."

Cllr Caroline Joseph (Liberal Democrat, Fetcham) added: "There is a huge strength of feeling locally. It's such a small thing but it makes such a huge difference to people. If we can get this moving it will be a very positive thing to Leatherhead, Fetcham, Bookham, Ashtead, everyone locally."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Image: North Leatherhead Access Road (image Google)

Nirvana comes to Epsom care home

30 November 2025



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Sponsored article: **Linden House Care Home in Epsom** is proud to announce a new era under its new owners, Nirvana Care Group. Established in the 1980s, the home has long served the local community, and the new leadership has already made significant investments to further elevate care standards across Surrey.

Phase 1 of a resident-led refurbishment is now complete, shaped by meaningful input from those who live at the home. Linden House has also invested in modern technologies and strengthened service partnerships to enhance safety, comfort, and wellbeing.

The transition has been warmly received by staff, with six former team members returning to support the refreshed vision. The home is also delighted to welcome back former manager Reshma Tupsy, reflecting Linden House's strong sense of community and continuity. With a dedicated multicultural team and an in-house chef, residents enjoy personalised menus tailored to cultural and faith requirements, along with fully customised activity programmes.

Following the renewed leadership, upgraded facilities, and a focus on truly personalised care a small number of vacancies remain for families seeking warm, modern, and compassionate care.

For enquiries or to arrange a visit, contact Reshma on **01372 721 447**

Epsom celebrity visits his old college

30 November 2025



Joe Wicks MBE, widely known as The Body Coach, recently visited his former college, Nescot (North East Surrey College of Technology), the place where his journey into fitness and education began. His visit to Nescot was filled with inspiration, energy and memorable moments.

Joe was warmly welcomed by Nescot Principal and CEO, Julie Kapsalis, students and staff to the college. He toured the Nescot Fitness centre where Julie proudly presented him with a commemorative plaque, 'Joe's Gym' in his honour. He also signed copies of his bestselling cookbooks for staff and the college's Learning Resources Centre and was delighted to receive his original college lanyard and a thoughtful gift from the college.

Students from our Sport, Public Services and Foundation Learning courses joined Joe in the sports hall for an unforgettable workout session. Joe led the students in a fun and energetic routine, sharing his passion for fitness and wellbeing.

Sports students, Patrick and Nathan shared their thoughts on meeting Joe. Patrick said, "It's been a huge honour meeting Joe who's done so much for fitness, inspiring young kids at an early age and even raising money for charity. A good day for Nescot too." Nathan added, "It's incredible to meet Joe who's a household name and who's been to the same college as me!"

Joe's visit continued in the college theatre, where he took part in a packed Q&A session hosted by Julie Kapsalis. Staff and students gathered to hear about Joe's incredible journey and his time at Nescot.

Joe Wicks, who completed a National Diploma in Sport at Nescot in 2002, spoke warmly about his time at the college, "Nescot started me on my journey to education. The college helped me to grow and mature, and to be more independent as a learner." Speaking candidly to the students, he encouraged them to persevere, "Always try your hardest and put your heart into what you do. It won't always be easy, but never give up – give it your all."

Nescot Principal and CEO, Julie Kapsalis, said, "It has been a privilege to welcome Joe Wicks, The Body Coach, back to his hold college. His visit was particularly meaningful as his journey began here at Nescot, and we are so proud that his time here laid the foundation for a thriving career in fitness, exercise and nutrition. A huge thank you to Joe for taking the time to inspire our community with his message to stay 'Fitter, Happier and Healthier'. We look forward to welcoming him back again in the future."

At the end of the Q&A session, Julie Kapsalis presented Joe Wicks with a Nescot Honorary Fellowship, the highest accolade that the college can bestow, in recognition of his outstanding contributions to fitness, wellbeing and nutrition education, and his mission to improve the nation's health.

Nescot's NVQ Catering and Hospitality students also presented Joe with a cheque for £300 in support of his charity, The Body Coach Foundation. They fundraised by preparing and selling meals inspired by his recipes. The visit concluded with excited students lining up for a group selfie and reflecting on how Joe's message of resilience and ambition left a lasting impression.

To learn more about Joe Wicks' journey and his time at Nescot, visit our alumni feature on our website

NESCOT

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Surrey University balloon study of solar flares informs current air safety concerns

30 November 2025



New balloon-mounted radiation probes developed by the Surrey Space Centre at the University of Surrey have captured their first readings of a major solar storm, confirming that levels of cosmic radiation at typical cruising altitude briefly surged to their highest point in almost two decades. The findings come as aviation authorities worldwide are responding to unrelated but highly publicised technical concerns affecting a small number of long-haul aircraft, prompting the UK Transport Secretary to offer public reassurance.

The powerful X5-class solar flare recorded on 11 November 2025 triggered a rare Ground Level Enhancement (GLE), in which solar energetic particles penetrated unusually deep into the atmosphere. Within an hour, the UK Met Office and the Dutch meteorological agency KNMI launched rapid-response weather balloons equipped with Surrey's newly developed sensors, sending them through commercial-aircraft altitudes and far higher.

Early analysis shows that radiation at 40,000 feet briefly reached almost ten times normal background levels. Scientists stress that the spike posed no immediate health risk to passengers or crew, but they note the potential for temporary pressure on aircraft electronics. Surrey researchers estimate that during the storm's peak, "single-event upsets" — tiny, unpredictable bit-flips in onboard computer memory caused by energetic particles — may have reached around 60 errors per hour per gigabyte.

Clive Dyer of the Surrey Space Centre said the November surge was the strongest event of its kind since December 2006, with new UK neutron monitors at Guildford, Lerwick and Camborne helping to map the storm's radiation footprint across global airspace. Researchers emphasise that while far larger historical events are known — including the record 1956 radiation storm and the ancient "Miyake Events" revealed through tree rings — such extremes have never struck during the modern aviation era.

The renewed scientific focus on space weather arrives during a period of public sensitivity around flight safety. In recent days, several international carriers have reported technical issues affecting specific aircraft types, prompting precautionary inspections and, in some jurisdictions, temporary operational restrictions. Although no link has been made between these aircraft issues and solar activity, the incidents have heightened passenger concern.

Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander, responding to the situation, said: "I am aware of the technical issue impacting certain aircraft and concerns over how this will affect passengers and flights this evening. Passengers who are due to fly this weekend should check with their carriers for the latest information. The good news is it seems the impact on UK airlines seems limited with a smaller number of aircraft requiring more complex software and hardware changes. I would really like to thank the experts, staff and airlines who are working at pace to address this and reassure passengers that work is ongoing. It is heartening this issue has been identified and will be addressed so swiftly, demonstrating the high aviation safety standards globally."

The Surrey sensors, engineered to withstand near-vacuum conditions and temperatures down to –70°C, stream real-time radiation data up to 100,000 feet. Their results will be used to refine models at the Met Office Space Weather Operations Centre, improving forecasting for sectors reliant on high-altitude electronics, including aviation.

Keith Ryden, Director of Surrey Space Centre, said the 11 November flare provided the team's first opportunity to use the rapid-launch sensors in a live event, producing a "3D picture" of radiation patterns across UK airspace. Met Office Space Weather Manager Krista Hammond added that this is the first time radiation has been measured across such a broad range of altitudes during a solar storm, describing the new data as "a big leap forward" for forecasting capability.

Further launches are planned from Met Office sites in Lerwick and Camborne, and from KNMI in the Netherlands, as the current solar cycle moves into a more active phase. Aviation regulators say the Surrey results will help inform future operational guidance during solar storms, while the Transport Secretary emphasised that UK passenger safety remains "of the highest priority".

Sam Jones – Reporter

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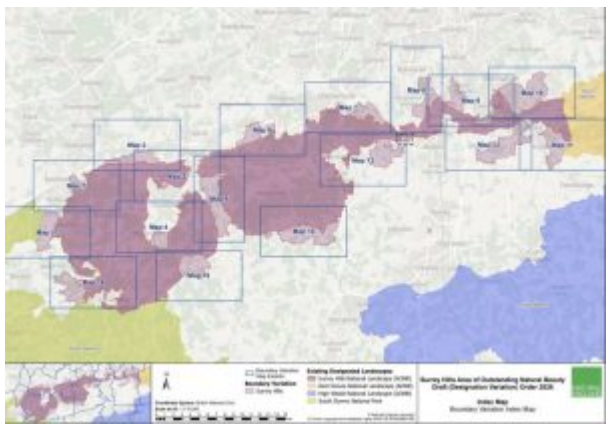
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Surrey Hills expansion

30 November 2025



The Surrey Hills could be expanded for the first time since it was first designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty almost 70 years ago.

The Surrey Hills National Landscape boundary has remained the same since it was first introduced in 1958 but throughout that time there have been calls locally to reconsider increasing the beauty spot's borders.

Some of the land that lies next to the Surrey Hills is currently classed as Areas of Great Landscape Value by councils to recognise its value at a county level.

Now, Natural England is exploring whether to formally include 129 square kilometres of these areas into the Surrey Hills National Landscape following a series of consultations on the proposed extensions.

The first took place in 2023 with 1,518 people taking part, a second held in 2024 received over 375 responses. Natural England's report read: "The evidence provided through the first consultation process presented strong arguments to include additional land in the Surrey Hills.

"Following the decision to add further land to the proposal a second round of consultation was required in accordance with our duties under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

"The second consultation was launched with stakeholders invited to provide a response on the changes to our proposals, including further additions, minor deletions and new land in East Hampshire. We received over 375 responses to the second consultation, the vast majority of which were supportive of the proposals."

The final review period, which the public can take part in, runs until January 14, 2026. The prime purpose of the designation is to conserve and enhance the natural and scenic beauty although it understands that the Surrey Hills is not a museum, and development may need to take place.

"A fundamental role of the local planning authorities is to ensure that the very features that make the Surrey Hills special and worthy of its designation are protected. This is achieved by strict development plan policies and through the vigilant exercise of development management powers.

" The Surrey Hills Management Plan seeks to ensure that both are applied in a consistent manner across the National Landscape. Development proposals should take into account any Landscape Character Assessments for the locality and the Surrey Hills publication", the Surrey Hills National Landscape website reads.

The draft Order 2026 relates to an area of approximately 129 square kilometres in the counties of Surrey, Hampshire and Greater London in and around:

- Wey Valley, Farnhan (in Waverley Borough Council)
- Hog's Back (in Guildford Borough Council
- Binscombe Hills (in Guildford Borough Council)
- Wey Valley (in Waverley and Guildford Borough Councils)
- Enton Hills (in Waverley Borough Council)
- Cranleigh Waters (in Waverley and Guildford Borough Councils)
- Hatchlands and East Clandon (in Guildford Borough Council)
- Headley Hills (in Mole Valley District Council)
- Chipstead Valleys (in Reigate and Banstead Borough Council)
- Happy Valley (in Tandridge District Council and London Borough of Croydon)

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- Caterham Woods (in Tandridge District Council)
- Woldingham Valleys (in Tandridge District Council and London Borough of Bromley)
- Limpsfield (in Tandridge District Council)
- Godstone Hills (in Tandridge District Council)
- Betchworth Hills and Mole Valley (in Reigate and Banstead Borough Council and Mole Valley District Council)
- Ockley Low Weald (in Waverley Borough Council and Mole Valley District Council)
- Dunsfold Low Weald (in Waverley Borough Council)
- Whitemoor Vale (in East Hampshire District Council)
- Ludshott and Bramshott Comms (in East Hampshire District Council)
- Dockenfield Hills (in Waverly Borough Council and East Hampshire District Council)
- Minor boundary refinements (various)

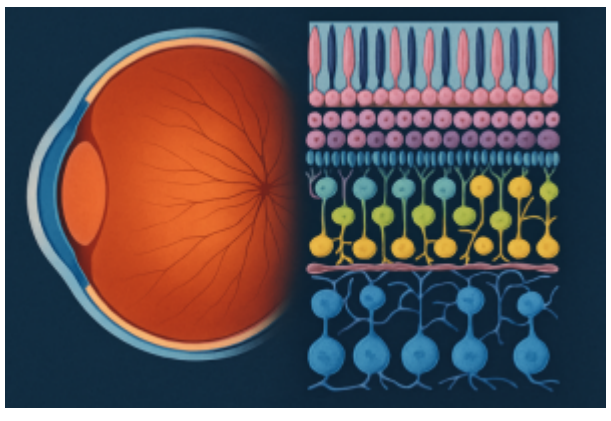
Copies of the draft Orders and maps are also available for download online from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/surrey-hills-area-of-outstanding-natural-beauty-boundary-variation.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Graphic: Surrey Hills (image Natural England)

Surrey Uni study may show way to reverse vision loss

30 November 2025



New computer modelling could help scientists better understand how the retina regenerates, opening the door to new treatments for vision loss, according to a study from the University of Surrey.

The first-of-its-kind model is capable of detailing how the retina – the light-sensitive layer at the back of the eye – can build its complex structure from just one type of stem cell, deepening our understanding of how sight develops and how its development could inform studies of injury or disease.

Using advanced agent-based modelling, the research team have simulated key stages of retinogenesis – the process by which identical progenitor cells diversify into the six types of neurons that make up the retina.

The model shows how simple genetic rules and subtle randomness work together to form the retina's precise layered architecture, a structure essential for how we see.

The paper was presented at IWWBIO 2025 and published in Lecture Notes in Computer Science (LNCS).

Cayla Harris, lead researcher from the University of Surrey's Nature Inspired Computing and Engineering Group, said:

"The beauty of biology is that complex structures can emerge from simple rules. Our simulations show how genetically identical cells can, through intrinsic bias and chance, self-organise into the retina's highly ordered layers – a pattern that underpins how we see the world."

Using the BioDynaMo software platform, the team modelled virtual "cells" that grow, divide and make fate decisions based on internal gene-regulation logic, mimicking biological behaviour. They tested different network designs for how genes might interact when cells decide what kind of neuron to become.

Two particular designs – called the Reentry and Multidirectional models – reproduced real biological data most accurately, suggesting that retinal cells may make their fate decisions through overlapping and flexible genetic pathways, rather than a fixed sequence.

This approach could help researchers better understand not only healthy eye development but also what happens in retinal diseases and in regenerative research exploring how stem cells might rebuild tissue.

Dr Roman Bauer, senior author on the study from the University of Surrey, added:

"Computational modelling gives us a powerful way to explore biological processes we can't easily observe in real time. By

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simulating every cell's decision and interaction, we can test hypotheses about how tissues like the retina form – and how to restore them when damaged."

This research is supported by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC).

Cayla Harris added:

"We think that our research is a step forward in linking genetics, computation and developmental biology to understand one of the body's most complex neural structures."

Surrey University

Surrey to sell off property in Epsom and elsewhere to fill budget gaps

30 November 2025



Surrey County Council is looking to bank a major cash boost by selling off a string of properties sitting idle across the county. The money is earmarked to help plug budget pressures and support future investment in council services.

Cabinet members gave officers the green light to pursue the sale of six unused council sites at a meeting on November 25. Cabinet papers show the deals are expected to generate significant capital receipts, while saving taxpayers thousands more in ongoing security and maintenance costs. The detailed sale values were kept behind closed doors in restricted documents due to commercial sensitivity.

The properties, spread across Staines, Ewell, Tongham, Wallington, and Mickleham, include former social care and nursery buildings, vacant houses, and small plots of land. The sales follow open marketing campaigns and recommended offers from prospective buyers.

Properties up for sale include:

- 33 Rookery Road, Staines: Former supported living houses, now demolished, being marketed for residential redevelopment.
- Former Fairways Day Centre, Staines: A large, partially vacant building in a flood zone that the council said would be costly to maintain.
- **Beechcroft Nursery, Ewell**: An empty house and three acres of scrubland, with 11 bids received from developers.
- Land west of Oxenden Court, Tongham: Small 0.03-hectare plot with access and contamination issues.
- 42 Little Woodcote Estate, Wallington: 3-bed house previously leased to Halsey Garton Residential Ltd, now vacant. Sale includes surrender of the lease.
- 2 Pressforward Cottages, Mickleham: Terraced 3-bed house with a leasehold to be surrendered before sale.

Together the properties have been vacant and unused for months, in some cases years, leaving the council to pick up costs for business rates, insurance and preventing vandalism. By selling them, the authority says it will cut those losses and funnel the money into frontline priorities: ensuring the stable provision of services for Surrey county council and the future unitary authorities.

Officials stress that legal checks, including anti-money-laundering safeguards, will be completed before any contracts are signed. Cabinet is also being asked to give senior directors delegated authority to finalise the deals swiftly, avoiding developer drop-out and market risk.

Decisions on the disposals will be made at upcoming Cabinet meetings, with the detailed sale values kept behind closed doors for now due to commercial sensitivity.

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Emily Dalton LDRS

Image: Beechcroft Nursery Reigate Road Ewell Epsom – Google maps

Tunnel vision for Heathrow’s 3rd runway?

30 November 2025



Heathrow Airport’s plan for a third runway – requiring a major re-routing and tunnelling of the M25 – has received Government backing as the preferred option for expansion. A competing proposal for a smaller runway put forward by Arora has been rejected. Heathrow welcomed the decision to proceed with the 3,500m runway, arguing it would deliver economic gains and improved passenger experience. Critics have long criticised the plan, saying it undermines climate targets and that the motorway works risk repeating the chaos seen with the delayed A3/M25 junction upgrade, potentially bringing parts of Surrey to regular standstills. Heathrow insists the M25 realignment would be built on adjacent land, allowing the switch to the new carriageway to take place “in a series of carefully planned overnight operations”.

A Heathrow spokesperson said the expansion would mean “more connectivity, increased trade, improved passenger experience and a huge economic boost for the British businesses that will help design and build it”, but added that “further clarity” is required on regulation of the next phase. “We need definitive decisions from the CAA and Government by mid-December so that delay to the project can be avoided and we can get on with delivering this vital project for our customers and for the UK.” The £33 billion scheme is expected to be entirely privately funded. Around £21bn would cover the runway works, including £1.5bn for the M25 realignment, with £12bn for new terminal infrastructure. Heathrow says it will also invest £15bn to modernise existing facilities, including a new terminal “T5X”, an expanded Terminal 2 and three new satellite buildings.

In 2024 the airport handled 83.9 million passengers, operating at 99% of its annual flight cap of 480,000 flights. The expansion would lift these to 756,000 flights and around 150 million passengers. Heathrow’s plan will now inform the review of the Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS), the framework on which the eventual planning decision will be based. The Government said Heathrow’s proposal is the most deliverable and most likely of the options to be approved before the next general election. The Department for Transport stressed this is not a final decision; any changes to the ANPS will be subject to consultation and parliamentary scrutiny next year, with details such as runway length, layout and infrastructure impacts considered throughout the review.

Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander said Heathrow is the UK’s only hub airport, supporting “trade, tourism and hundreds of thousands of jobs”, adding that the announcement is “another important step to enable a third runway and build on these benefits”. She said the Government is acting “swiftly and decisively” to realise the project’s potential for passengers, businesses and the wider economy. Ministers also said the scheme must comply with legally binding climate obligations, while balancing economic growth, as well as air quality and noise requirements. The independent Climate Change Committee will be consulted to ensure compatibility with the UK’s net-zero framework. A planning application is expected after the ANPS review is complete.

In a promotional video, Heathrow sought to reassure the public about the M25 works: “We understand people may be concerned this could cause congestion or delays. Following previous consultation with National Highways we have developed a smarter solution. We build the future right next to the present. The vast majority of construction happens off-line. A new realigned section of the M25 is built on adjacent land while the current motorway operates as normal and the tunnels and bridges for a new runway are constructed while minimising impact on the airport or the existing motorway. Then in a series of carefully planned overnight operations, we make the switch. Traffic is transferred on to the new alignment with minimal disruption. Our approach also ensures local traffic and access for surrounding communities are kept moving with minimal disruption. This frees up the old route of the M25, creating a safe, traffic-free zone to build the final parts of the runway. The result is an upgraded and expanded M25, with new link roads separating M4 traffic from M25 mainline journeys, easing congestion and improving safety.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Heathrow shown with a third runway over the M25 (image Heathrow)

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Heathrow expansion – what it may mean for Epsom

Heathrow expansion reaction

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Epsom and Ewell’s first neighbourhood plan

30 November 2025



A leafy Surrey suburb is about to make its mark for the local community. Stoneleigh and Auriol are poised to be able to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to planning developments that do not match their design plan for the neighbourhood with legal backing.

Members of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council’s (EEBC) licensing and planning policy committee gave the new local scheme the go ahead to move to the next stage on November 25. The Stoneleigh and Auriol Neighbourhood Plan (SANP) is the first of its kind in Surrey’s smallest borough.

“This plans’ compilation has taken an immense amount of effort by all those involved and it’s been an enormous undertaking,” said Cllr **Tony Froud** (RA Stoneleigh), part of the SANP working group. “The remarkable thing about this is they [the residents group] have done it all on their own with just a keen interest in preserving the character of the neighbourhood. It’s an immense body of work by residents, lay people and non-professionals. Due to the costs involved, no outside help could be sought or brought in.”

The SANP, along with some tweaks, is set to go to a public referendum in February 2026. If residents vote ‘yes’, this plan will become law for the area. This will shape what can be built, how it looks and protect things like shops, green spaces, housing character, and more.

If adopted, future planning applications in Stoneleigh and Auriol will be judged against the neighbourhood plan’s policies as well as broader strategic policies.

For locals, that could mean tighter control over what gets built. This aims to preserve the area’s distinctive character, leafy streets and sense of community, while still allowing carefully managed change. The SANP must strike a balance between protecting what residents love and accommodating new housing and development where appropriate.

The journey has not been quick. The neighbourhood forum behind the plan took on the task over five years ago in gathering evidence, consulting residents, drafting policies, and refining proposals.

Cllr **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) said: “This has been a great example of what residents can do when they want to put together really clear guidance around planning.” He told the committee that not every group of residents can put in the amount of work, time and effort into making a neighbourhood plan rather than campaigning and protesting about developments and planning decisions.

After the Plan was submitted to EEBC in May 2025, a six-week public consultation took place between June 20 and August 1. Eight organisations and individuals, including expert bodies, submitted comments. An independent examiner was then appointed and delivered their report on 23 October 23, recommending the plan proceed to referendum subject to a number of changes.

Council planners and the neighbourhood forum have now accepted all the examiner’s recommendations. The revised plan contains 11 clear policies, setting out rules for building, design, green spaces, flood risk, transport and more.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Image: View from Newbury Gardens down to Stoneleigh Park Road. (Credit: Epsom and Ewell Borough Council documents)

Surrey consults on next year’s budget

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Surrey County Council has opened a public consultation on its draft budget for 2026/27, asking residents across the

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county to comment on proposals ahead of final decisions next year. Each year the council sets out how it will fund essential local services including adult social care, children's services, special educational needs provision, highways, libraries, public health programmes, fire and rescue, and environmental maintenance. The authority says the coming year presents one of its most difficult financial challenges for over a decade due to the government's Fair Funding Review, which will reduce Surrey's central government grant and increase reliance on council tax and other locally-raised income. At present, the council reports a provisional £21.3 million funding gap for 2026/27.

The Fair Funding Review is a long-anticipated national reform intended to change how Whitehall allocates money to local authorities. Early modelling indicates that areas with strong tax bases such as Surrey will see reduced relative need-based funding, while more deprived areas gain. Surrey has already seen its core government grant fall dramatically over the past decade. According to publicly available Local Government Finance Settlement figures, Surrey's Revenue Support Grant dropped from over £130 million in 2010 to effectively £0 in recent years, leaving the council heavily dependent on council tax, which already accounts for around 74% of its income. Rising inflation, growth in demand for adult social care and special educational needs services, and ongoing cost pressures linked to contract inflation and staffing shortages have compounded these challenges.

Councillor Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council, said Surrey was "facing one of the most challenging financial periods in its history". He added that the government's new funding approach "has a direct impact on the services we provide", stressing that protecting the most critical functions remains the priority, including support for vulnerable adults, children, and families and the infrastructure that keeps the county moving. He noted that this is the final budget to be set before Surrey's existing county structure is dissolved and replaced with two new unitary authorities, East Surrey Council and West Surrey Council, from April 2027 following the government's recent decision on local government reorganisation.

Surrey County Council has pointed to its past record of setting balanced budgets in contrast to several authorities nationally that have issued Section 114 "bankruptcy" notices in recent years, including Northamptonshire, Croydon, Slough, Woking and Birmingham. However, the council's financial resilience has been tested. The county faces one of the largest high-needs deficits for special educational needs in the South East.

Councillor David Lewis, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, said that reduced government support combined with rising costs means the authority must "plan even more carefully to ensure support reaches those who need it most". Adult social care, children's services, and SEND support together account for close to two-thirds of the council's entire net budget. He acknowledged that residents also value "visible services" such as road maintenance, libraries, and community spaces, emphasising the importance of public feedback in prioritising investment.

The draft budget consultation will shape the final budget papers to be published in January 2026 and submitted to Full Council in February. Residents can view the proposals online and submit comments until 11.59pm on Sunday 4 January 2026.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Image: Surrey Budget graphic from Surrey County Council Youtube video

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Epsom and Ewell homeless costs set to overshoot by £900k

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Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is forecasting a substantial overspend on its homelessness budget this year, **as**

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reported to the BBC, with demand for help remaining “consistently high”.

According to figures provided by the council via the BBC, the number of people seeking assistance in the first quarter of the 2025/26 financial year rose by 19% compared with the same period last year. The authority has already overspent by £587,412 in the first six months and now expects the gap to widen to £895,000 by March 2026.

Local and national pressures

Councillor **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village), who chairs the Community and Wellbeing Committee, told the BBC the pressures facing the borough echoed those “found nationwide”, driven largely by the lack of affordable, permanent housing and the continuing cost-of-living crisis.

He added that Epsom and Ewell faces its own structural challenges, including a limited supply of affordable private rented homes, no council-owned housing stock, and a long-standing shortage of social housing.

The council’s budget for 2025/26 was set on the assumption that 70 families would be in nightly paid temporary accommodation. However, as of 24 October, the figure had climbed to 114.

Prevention schemes and charity support

Councillor Woodbridge said the council was concentrating on homelessness prevention, expanding private sector leasing arrangements and making greater use of rent deposit schemes. Local charities are also involved in reducing demand for emergency housing, notably YMCA East Surrey, which provides guidance and support for people at risk of losing their homes.

One woman from Redhill, who spoke to the BBC, said YMCA assistance stopped her falling into homelessness after a period of severe illness. She described how disability and post-traumatic stress disorder left her unable to work during and after the pandemic. With rent arrears mounting and her informal support network exhausted, she feared emergency accommodation was the next step. YMCA staff helped her with the paperwork and guided her into permanent housing.

A wider Surrey picture

Epsom and Ewell is not alone in facing escalating temporary accommodation bills. As reported by the BBC, Woking Borough Council expects to overspend by £350,000 this year, while Waverley Borough Council has forecast a £165,000 shortfall.

The national situation is equally stark. Government statistics published earlier this year showed the number of households in temporary accommodation in England at its highest level since records began in 1998, driven by rising private rents, the freeze on housing benefit Local Housing Allowance rates, and continued shortages of social housing. Councils across the South East report similar difficulties securing affordable lets for families, often at prices far above their budgets.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is expected to revisit its temporary accommodation strategy early in 2026 as financial pressures continue to mount.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Free exhibition train to steam into Tattenham Corner

A free exhibition train celebrating 200 years of the modern railway will arrive at Tattenham Corner station next March as part of a 60-stop national tour.

More than 40,000 people have already visited the touring train, named *Inspiration*, which forms a centrepiece of **Railway 200**, the nationwide programme marking two centuries since the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway in 1825. Nine in ten visitors say they would recommend it to a friend.

What visitors can expect

Co-curated with the National Railway Museum, *Inspiration* explores how rail reshaped Britain and the wider world. Displays chart key “railway firsts”, interactive engineering challenges and a rapid tour of lesser-known railway careers. The exhibition has been praised as “brilliant”, “fascinating” and suitable for all ages.

One visitor reported: “I loved that it was interactive. I visited with people from age 18 to 85 and there was something for everyone.” Another said even their five-year-old “absolutely loved it”.

The train will be hosted by Southern at **Tattenham Corner station from 9 to 11 March 2026**. Tickets are free but limited.

Tattenham Corner’s royal railway history

Tattenham Corner station itself has a long connection with major public events. Opened in 1901, the station was built to provide easier rail access to the Epsom Downs racecourse, particularly for the Derby. According to local historical accounts, the new station offered an alternative to the original Epsom Downs station, which at the time had nine platforms and could be overwhelmed by Derby-day crowds.

It is widely understood that the creation of Tattenham Corner station was encouraged so that **Queen Victoria**, in the final months of her reign, could travel to the racecourse with greater ease and avoid the congestion associated with the older, much busier station. The new alignment brought passengers directly to the famous turn on the Downs from which the station takes its name.

In the decades that followed, Tattenham Corner became a focal arrival point for racegoers, and extra services still run on major racing days.

A milestone for Britain’s railways

Railway 200 marks two centuries since Stephenson’s *Locomotion No. 1* steamed along the Stockton and Darlington line, an innovation that changed global travel, encouraged mass tourism, shaped timekeeping and sped up industrial development.

The anniversary year has already included a re-run of the original 1825 journey watched by around 100,000 people, commemorative stamps and coins, a global “whistle-up” of more than 200 locomotives, and what organisers describe as the world’s largest rail festival.

Angie Doll, Chief Executive of Govia Thameslink Railway, said: “Two hundred years ago the modern railway came into existence and utterly transformed our society. Working together, we hope to educate and inspire young people in rail’s past and future. The railway is great for the climate, and helps our local communities thrive.”

Emma Roberts, Programme Manager for Railway 200, added: “Inspiration is a fun, free and fascinating way to learn about the past, present and future of rail. There’s something for everyone.”

Rail Minister Lord Peter Hendy called Britain “the birthplace of the modern railway” and said the touring train aims to inspire a new generation of engineers, drivers, conductors and technicians.

The exhibition has been supported by a £250,000 National Lottery Heritage Fund grant, with Porterbrook providing the livery for the train.

Tickets

Tickets for the Tattenham Corner visit are free but must be booked in advance.

Sam Jones – Reporter

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