

# Richmond upon Thames

## 01

SINCE 2022 307

---

## 02

LOCAL LANDSCAPE 308

---

## 03

ELECTORAL PROSPECTS 310

---

↗	BARNES	311
↗	RICHMOND	312
↗	TWICKENHAM	313
↗	WHITTON	314
↗	HAMPTON AND TEDDINGTON	315

## 04

WHAT TO WATCH FOR 316

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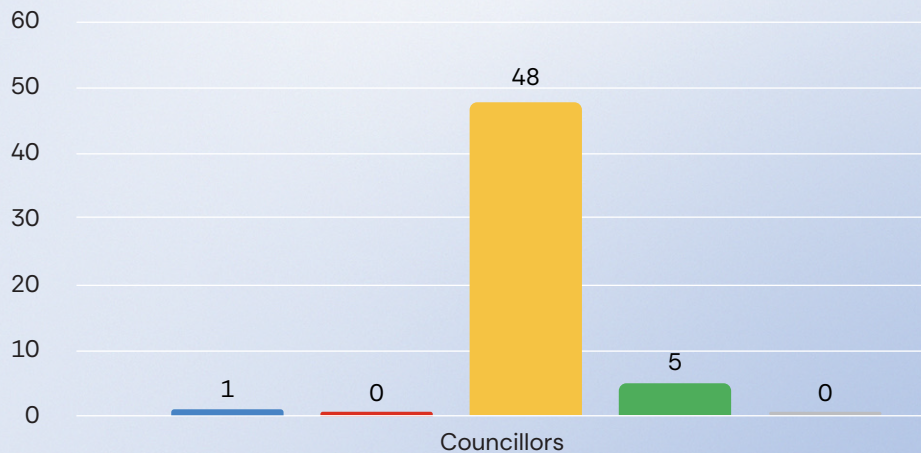
# Since 2022

## Liberal Democrat Defence

The removal of Conservatives from Richmond Council was completed in January 2024 when they lost a by-election caused by the passing of their one and only member. The Liberal Democrats prevailed by more than 1,000 votes, topping up the 48 seats they had won in May 2022.

That left the five-strong Green group, elected at the same time, as the sole opposition to a giant yellow wall. It was an opposition shaped and tempered by the fact that they owed their seats to some degree to electoral pacts with the Lib Dems in the six wards where they stood.

### Richmond upon Thames Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 54



### By-elections since May 2022

18 JANUARY 2024	HAMPTON NORTH	LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
18 JANUARY 2024	TEDDINGTON	LIB DEM HOLD

The council line-up has not changed over the past four years, aside from that Lib Dem by-election gain. There's been one other by-election, held on the same day, which saw the Lib Dem candidate easily hold the seat, with a small increase in vote share.

Much of the interest in 2026 arises from the non-renewal of the deal between the Lib Dems and the Greens, which was first struck in 2018. Designed to lock the Conservatives out in marginal wards, its undoing might let the Tories recover from their current circumstance of having no Richmond councillors for the only time in the borough's history.

# Local landscape

Sylvan, elegant, affluent and with the Thames at its most restful flowing through it, Richmond upon Thames is a borough with a prominent element of small-l liberal intellectuals and a civic-minded culture in which residents' groups, neighbourhood associations and the voluntary sector are all strong. Two-thirds of its population is White British, much higher than the London average. Almost as large a proportion have a degree (or better) and more than 70 per cent are in managerial, professional or technical occupations. According to Trust for London, Richmond has the second lowest poverty rate of any borough except, by a tiny margin, Bromley. Turnout for elections is always high.

The collapse of support for the Conservatives has coincided tellingly with the party's embrace of Brexit and an accompanying mindset that has seen it continue to adopt populist Right positions similar to those of Reform UK. The latter party and its fellow Nigel Farage-

led predecessors have made little impact in a borough where almost half of the non-British born population are from European countries according to the last Census and around ten per cent have European Union passports. Even in its best year, 2014, UKIP's candidates got less than four per cent of the total Richmond vote and came nowhere near winning in the wards they fought.

Labour, too, is marginal to these battlegrounds, finishing last in a string of wards in 2022. Their position seems unlikely to improve, raising the question of whether and how much that might assist the Greens and what the latter party's broader prospects are.

Although the Greens' pact with the Lib Dems applied to only six of Richmond's 18 electoral wards, it arguably extended to the Greens fielding no candidates in the others, thereby helping Lib Dem candidates to defeat Tories. The single Green candidates prevailed in five of

the six split slates, though in every case they finished third behind the Lib Dem pairs.

These outcomes suggest that without the pact they would have been less successful. Even if Labour supporters "go Green" in a big way this time, there aren't that many of them. Furthermore, the Greens' striking "eco-populist" shift to the Left seems unlikely to appeal as much in Richmond as it does in Hackney or Lambeth – the "Green surge" under Zack Polanski could work against them in these parts. That's paradoxical, perhaps, given that Richmond contains over 100 parks and open spaces, including three royal parks – Richmond, Bushy and Hampton Court – the London Wetland Centre and the Old Deer Park, as well as the world-famous Kew Gardens. Richmond is the only borough to have the Thames flowing through it rather than past it, and the river's presence has long been a defining influence on its character.

# Local landscape

Green group leader Andrée Frieze isn't defending her seat this time, which won't help her party's chances. Neither will it having somehow failed to get its party name printed next to those of its candidates on the ballot papers in 13 of the 18 Richmond wards.

The Lib Dems, meanwhile, have grounds for feeling confident. Council leader Gareth Roberts captured the South West London Assembly seat – which covers Hounslow and Kingston as well as Richmond – from the Conservatives in 2024, a result that underlined the aversion to today's Tories in much of this sub-region of Greater London. May 2022 saw a swing from the Tories to the Lib Dems of 8.2 per cent, the second biggest in any direction of any borough. It's hard to see any outcome other than a conclusive Lib Dem hold.

Richmond upon Thames Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	39	-	15	-	-	-
2006	18	-	36	-	-	-
2010	30	-	24	-	-	-
2014	39	-	15	-	-	-
2018	11	-	39	-	4	-
2022	1	-	48	-	5	-

 RICHMOND UPON THAMES

# Electoral prospects

Vote percentages in some wards in 2022 were misleading because of the Lib Dem-Green pact. The effect was to understate the Lib Dem share, as votes for the Green candidates were effectively votes for the Lib Dems. This made the figures for the Greens rather flattering. Note also that the demographic and electoral characters of a lot of Richmond wards are close to the borough average, meaning the contests in many areas will be similar.

# Barnes

9 seats

Barnes is the easternmost part of the borough, an attractive, villagey area between the Thames and parkland bordering Putney and – across a bridge still closed to cars – Hammersmith. East Sheen and Mortlake lie between it and Richmond town.

East Sheen and Barnes are traditionally the homes of senior civil servants and other higher professionals. Mortlake used to be a bit more working-class and the Mortlake & Barnes Common ward is 17 per cent social renting.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Barnes	LD	LD	LD	41.8	6.4	51.8	-	-
East Sheen	LD	LD	LD	31.7	7.1	61.3	-	-
Mortlake & Barnes Common	LD	LD	Green	20.0	10.9	32.6	23.4	13.2

They are also among the more Conservative wards most of the time, even when the Lib Dems are doing well. In 2018, seven Conservatives and only two Lib Dems were elected here, though the Lib Dems and their Green ally swept the board in 2022.

Barnes remains winnable for the Tories on local issues and there is not much scope for Reform UK. But the Lib Dems should pick up the third seat in Mortlake & Barnes Common this time.

# Richmond

12 seats

These four wards are on the right-hand, Surrey bank of the Thames as it flows through the borough. Ham and Petersham are separate villages on the road between Richmond and Kingston. Ham has a 1960s council estate which is in the process of redevelopment. The rest is a genteel sprawl around Richmond's town centre and Kew to the north.

The area between Richmond Park, Kew Gardens and the river is undeniably attractive, the locals are cultured and civically active, and it has long had an intellectual liberal cachet. Kew is 70 per cent graduate and, with a rate of 62 per cent, South Richmond the borough's most professional-managerial ward.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Ham, Petersham & Richmond Riverside	LD	LD	Green	13.2	6.5	41.8	38.5	-
Kew	LD	LD	LD	27.1	7.2	59.1	-	6.6
North Richmond	LD	LD	LD	22.7	12.9	64.5	-	-
South Richmond	LD	LD	Green	22.5	5.1	39.7	32.7	-

Kew was the first Richmond ward won by the Liberal Party, which took all three seats there in 1971. But in a good year for them the Tories can win everywhere here: they took 11 out of 12 seats in 2014, and even in 2018 they scored two out of three in South Richmond. In 2021, Tory London Mayor candidate Shaun Bailey did better than Sadiq Khan all the wards.

But the Lib Dems (the Lib Dem-Green pact in two of the four wards) swept the board in 2022 with large majorities. It would take a heavy and unexpected reverse swing for the Tories to come back, although competition between the Lib Dems and Greens this time might add an unpredictable element.

# Twickenham

12 seats

Twickenham town, on the Middlesex side of the Thames, is a mirror image of Richmond just across Twickenham bridge. It has many of the same affluent middle-class social characteristics, though it's perhaps a bit younger and more precarious. South Twickenham contains the St Mary's University campus and 14 per cent of its residents are full-time students.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
St Margaret's & North Twickenham	LD	LD	LD	15.2	9.6	66.0	-	9.1
South Twickenham	LD	LD	Green	14.8	7.7	41.3	36.2	-
Twickenham Riverside	LD	LD	LD	18.7	7.9	55.8	-	17.6
West Twickenham	LD	LD	LD	24.4	12.1	63.5	-	-

The Twickenham wards all returned enormous Lib Dem majorities in 2022, but they have marginal histories and went seven-five Conservative in 2014. In part, this reflects the history of Richmond elections sometimes involving large turnovers of seats, but also the Conservatives' abandonment of the sort of liberal

middle-class voter who traditionally supported them or would consider backing a David Cameron-era version of the party. Sadiq Khan carried all four central Twickenham wards in 2021, making an odd contrast with Richmond itself despite their general similarity.

# Whitton

6 seats

Whitton and Heathfield border the town of Hounslow (Whitton was moved into the Brentford & Isleworth constituency in 2024). They are a bit different from the rest of Richmond in that, rather than being partly rented terraces and Victorian housing among parks, they are inter-war suburbs of semi-detached (55 per cent Heathfield, 49 per cent Whitton) owner-occupied housing.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Heathfield	LD	LD	LD	26.0	26.6	47.4	-	-
Whitton	LD	LD	LD	26.3	10.4	63.3	-	-

The influence of next-door Hounslow is apparent in that they are the most ethnically mixed wards in Richmond: Heathfield was the only ward in the borough where (just under) 50 per cent of residents were White British in 2021 and it has the most social housing in the borough (22 per cent).

returning split delegations. This was the best area in Richmond for UKIP in 2014, but it didn't reach 20 per cent. The Lib Dems won easily in 2022. Heathfield was by far the best ward in the borough for Labour, but even with continued favourable demographic change the party is unlikely to break through.

These wards, like most in Richmond, are often close between Lib Dems and Conservatives, frequently

# Hampton and Teddington

15 seats

Hampton and Teddington are the southernmost areas of Twickenham. The village of Hampton is on the edge of London and Teddington and Hampton Wick are across the river from Kingston. Teddington Lock marks the limit of the tidal Thames and the jurisdiction of the Port of London Authority. Hampton North is an anomaly within the borough. Much of it was developed in the 1970s and 1980s, a mix of social and private housing, such as the Nurserylands estate.

In 2022, three of the five wards here conformed to the Richmond pattern of big Lib Dem majorities (taking the two Lib Dem candidates and one Green as a single slate, they polled 64 per cent in Fulwell & Hampton Hill). But there have been Conservative councillors and split wards in other years.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Fulwell & Hampton Hill	LD	LD	Green	12.9	8.1	41.1	37.9	-
Hampton	LD	LD	LD	28.5	7.5	64.0	-	-
Hampton North	LD	LD	Con	22.9	7.4	33.7	21.9	14.2
Hampton Wick & South Teddington	LD	LD	LD	22.6	9.8	67.6	-	-
Teddington	LD	LD	LD	21.7	10.8	67.6	-	-

Teddington has a more solid Lib Dem history, dating back to 1982. Hampton North elected Richmond's only Conservative in 2022, the long-serving Geoffrey Samuel, who first won a local election in 1957 to what was then the Twickenham Municipal Borough.

His death in November 2023, aged 92, brought about the January 2024 by-election won by the Lib Dems.

It put Richmond in the same group as Barking & Dagenham, Haringey, Lambeth, Lewisham, Newham and Southwark in having no Tory councillors at all. They could squeak back, although their vote share, unusually for Richmond, might be significantly damaged by Reform competition.



RICHMOND UPON THAMES

## What to watch for

The end of the Lib Dem–Green pact is probably bad news for the Greens, who will struggle to retain a presence on the council. It might enable the Conservatives to win a seat or two on a split progressive vote, though they will need to recover previous, higher-educated middle-class supporters or focus on motivational local issues to do much better than that. The Lib Dems might have no opposition at all for the next four-year term.