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

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Epsom aid hero returns from Ukraine

10 June 2022



In an exclusive for Epsom and Ewell Times, we report on Paul Matthews' (of Lewins Road Epsom) recent experience taking aid provided by Epsom based Surrey Stands With Ukraine [SSWU] to the bombed and neglected Ukrainian Black Sea city of Odessa.

What is it really like to be take humanitarian aid to Ukraine?

Many people have responded to the terrible situation of the war following the invasion by Russia, but what really happens to all that money and donations that are made in the UK?

Paul Matthews returned last week after travelling in a borrowed van packed with generators and medical supplies destined for Odessa on the Black Sea coast.



Paul in blue shirt with Ukrainian volunteers

Most aid is handed over at the western border between Poland and Ukraine, but for the 21st supported vehicle to travel for SSWU the plan was to try to take the aid to where it was most needed.

Paul left with with co-driver Alan Avis of The Greenway Epsom and volunteer coordinator of Surrey Stands With Ukraine, for the two days to Krakow and stopping off at a major hub for refugees from Ukraine. This was aid on an industrial scale with a large number of women and children quietly waiting their turn to collect a carrier bag of food and an opportunity to find a pair of shoes for a child or jacket. A phone call with the hosts in Odessa leads to urgent additional supplies filling the van and then the roof rack. The site is open each day, and each family can visit only once a week. Another completely different group will be here tomorrow. What we also learn is that what are the needs in Poland are different to those in the south and east of the country close to the war, and that transport is a key problem, but only one of many.

Poland was the last place to get fuel. Russia destroyed the only refinery in Ukraine, and then targeted the storage facilities, so if you go into Ukraine you need to take all your fuel needs. That meant next stop was finding fuel cans to buy

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and fill, so with a mixture of 10, 7 and 5 litres cans the day ends with a full tank of 90 litres, and another 192 litres in the back. Time to say goodbye to Alan who flys back from Krakow, and on to the border for Paul.

The plan was for a Ukrainian national to meet and co-drive at the border, and immediately that plan went wrong as he couldn't get to the border control. With helpful Polish and Ukrainian officials, and a Red Cross sign stuck on the windscreen to enable Paul to drive past miles of waiting traffic he was through in a couple of hours. Then eight hours of driving to Uman before the nighttime curfew started. Uman was the base for two nights with a daytime 3-hour dash to Odessa to drop the aid and leave, but that was just another plan that was not to happen.

On arrival the Odessa lawyers Bar Association gave a warm greeting mixed with a need to get down to the business of offloading and learning about the situation, along with the background wail of an air raid siren…something Paul would soon get used to. And that is when everything changed again. Fuel in Ukraine is difficult to find, and the further away from Poland the situation worsens. Now the group of volunteers who before the war spend their days in court were now feeding and caring for IDPs (Internally Displaced People), who had been forced from their homes or were damaged and now uninhabitable.

Without a working vehicle or fuel to put in it the aid would not be very helpful. So plans changed and Paul was to spend the next week in Odessa and towns to the east. His accommodation was a hotel, but not the one he was booked into on the seaside since missiles had recently destroyed one nearby. So with a change of accommodation, and the trying on of a bullet proof vest and a, "sorry, you can't keep that it's needed for someone else", it was off to find out more of the situation in Odessa.

Over the next week Paul spent time either making aid drops to towns and villages or meeting with other humanitarian aid groups and local volunteers. But there was a troubling question. Where is the international and European aid? Well, not much really. Once past Lviv in the west the presence of organisations from outside Ukraine seem to disappear. In Paul's time since going south and east he never found another UK or even west European number plate. Only one organisation he met had any external funding, from a charity in Germany.

Local NGO's (Non-Government Organisations) have sprung up in response to the war in Ukraine. Paul met only Ukrainians who in their previous life were teachers, builders, shop workers or IT engineers, who now were splitting litre bottles of vegetable oil between three families who had arrived from the east. I did eventually bump into an Australian who had arrived last week and was busy helping, and one German TV crew filming a well known shopping centre that had recently been destroyed (and no sign of any military there). For 500 metres all the blocks of flats had shattered windows and frames and were now also deserted and uninhabitable. Two missiles destroyed a shopping centre and made a couple of hundred people homeless. The destruction was in the centre of Odessa, but also in the east and west. Some looked targeted with cruise missiles, and others random. Paul visited a block of flats near the sea hit by a shell from the Russian navy. Just one shell, but as the husband went out to buy food his wife, her mother, and their 3 year old child stayed in, and three generations of a family killed together. Now the block stands empty as the shock wave also badly damaged the block, and even killed a man who was sitting in his van 50 metres in front of the block. Random, and deadly. The situation was best described when asking "if it's safe?" by the answer "No where is 100% safe."



Everywhere Paul went he was met with gratitude and appreciation and often someone wanting to offer a coffee or share whatever little they had. He found himself realising that everyone he met was deeply affected by the war. Either people were also receiving aid, or volunteering to help give aid, and often both. People who helped were scrupulous beyond his expectations at managing the aid received, and this usually was given by other Ukrainians. Whilst some dealt with IDPs others prepared and cooked food and gave it free from soup kitchens sometimes on the street or gave it to

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volunteers working all hours to help others. Nothing was wasted, and every piece of aid was recorded, listed, and only given after registration and proof that you were a refugee in your own country. No one got angry. No one took more than they could be given. Everything was in short supply and people also had to be turned away. Some NGO's will only help families with three or more children such is the scale of problem. Others try to help pensioners who can no longer get their medication and try to find donors and pharmacies locally who will donate the drugs.

People have lost jobs. Businesses have closed. Odessa is a vibrant lively summer beach resort. Odessans love their Black Sea and promenade and still go to the beach (especially as it costs nothing). Taking the kids to play in the sand is one of the few possibilities to help the kids forget the war for a few hours, but even that has issues. The main beaches where a sea borne invasion is possible are off limits now with minefields. Even where there are no mines (if the beach is too small), then no one is allowed in the water as it's heavily mined by both Ukraine and Russia. Mines just under the water regularly end up on the beach. In the meantime a few beach bars open behind the red and white tape to mark the minefield, and children play in the sand in the few feet left before the tape. That is life in Odessa, and then there is the air raid sirens, and occasionally the missiles.

If it is difficult in Odessa it's worse outside in the smaller towns and villages.

Arriving in Mykoliv, to more air raid sirens, but this time with the almost mechanical sound of thunder. It's incoming artillery. Landing far enough away that no one runs for the shelters. Those that can wear their body armour. There is an App for everything, and now one that tells you where is being hit, it's called Liveuamap. A must have for every smart phone here. However, phone and internet signal is not everywhere and in the area you need it most such as the "Grey" zone. Appropriately coloured on the Apps map is not clearly under Russian or Ukranian control. The next stop for the van was to mothers with babies and the elderly in villages that had not seen any aid and with all the men under 60 having left to fight as we were close to the front line. On arrival the village mayor had organised the waiting mothers and elderly, or it required a visit to take the aid to them.

Another place to get too was through a Grey zone corridor to Bashtanka where an Odessa NGO was supporting a church turned into a forward IDP hub. All known as "hubs", this one was known as the bunker. Paul was shown why. The basement had a large room with bare walls, and here, for three weeks, 120 women, children, babies, and elderly lived. Water was usually carried in buckets. Sanitary situation was bad, and there was not enough room for most people to lie down.

Above them the Russians arrived, and fighting did take place with locals with rifles and burning tyres to try to stop their "liberation". The area stretching from Donbas and the border with Russia to Odessa is all Russian speaking. Many who can now try to remember to speak only Ukrainian in this dual language country.

The people remained in the bunker of the church praying not to be discovered as the Russians used a tank to hit the village's main shops in a tiny central area. Where its not burnt out machine gun holes and shrapnel pepper the buildings around and again, glass is everywhere from broken windows and shattered homes, houses, and businesses. Paul was told most people left before the Russians arrived, and then Basktanka had many come from other attacked villages further east. The charity and church run high risk trips in minibuses to collect those wanting to leave from behind Russian lines passing through Ukranian and Russian checkpoints (though the latter usually require a "present"). The church building is quiet now as vehicles had just taken the last group to Odessa and now the kitchen starts preparing food again. Mattresses on floors are packed close together, are tidied and clean sheets put on ready for the next group. In a side room there is a pop-up pharmacy, the only one in the area after the Russians looted and destroyed the local hospital as they retreated a few weeks ago.

Paul and his Ukrainian guide/minder/bodyguard are offered some vegetable soup and coffee before leaving to return to Odessa with an empty van and leave these many locals to their fate. Not long after Paul sees on the App that Basktenka was shelled. The journey back passes lovely countryside, and they stop briefly in Mykolaiv as Andre (name changed) wants to show the city centre and where he used to enjoy summer days and evenings on the Parisian styled boulevards with cobbled streets and boarded up businesses. Around the corner they are stopped from entering and put away phones…this is where a Russian missile hit the high-rise municipal town hall killing 34 office workers and punching a huge hole through the centre of the building. Paul recognises it from the TV pictures back home. At checkpoints they are usually met with a friendly chat, mainly due to being the only UK registered number plate vehicle they have seen.

Paul started his return to Epsom after a week in Odessa and areas east. A near empty van is added to with donations given by his hosts keen for me to bring gifts for SSWU and a jar of Arcasia honey. It is a long way from home now and Paul is alone. The checkpoints thin out between Odessa and Kiev, but you need to be alert. One time Paul saw a small rise in the road and slowed, and found it was the edge of a crater caused by an airstrike on a fortified structure…a bus stop.

Paul's most memorable meeting was not planned. It happened in a tiny village outside Odessa on one of the aid drops. A young woman wanted to talk and she spoke English. Aged 20 and studying culture at university in Kherson was under attack. She left with student friends and fled to Odessa terrified before it fell to the Russians. Her parents were further east and caught behind the Russian lines and unable to leave. Why was she in this tiny village? Odessa was then attacked from the sea and an invasion expected and her friend asked her to come to stay with her family. Her life is disrupted and twice she has become homeless in two months. It is quiet, cut off, but it feels safe. Throughout she struggles to talk between tears, but wants her story told. She fears for her parents most of all. Every few days a phone call or internet works long enough to talk to them. They ask if she remembers a neighbour who is an elderly man with a small field next the family home. Yes, of course she answers. He was shot tending his vegetables by a Russian sniper. And another woman was walking on the street they live on with her shopping. Shot as well. Others are mentioned. She can not talk anymore.

On the way back from Mykolaiv, Odesa, Kiev, Urpin and everywhere else Paul is thanked for coming and for the aid brought from Surrey. Somehow it doesn't seem enough.

The aid to Odessa was made possible by donations to Surrey Stands With Ukraine

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Donations of money are needed most, to be directed to give immediate humanitarian aid to the oblast (region) of Odessa and it's villages. Support for this can be made to Surrey Stands With Ukraine

Long term support, in partnership with the UN and others using helicopters is planned, and this can be supported with donations to humanitaid.com

Paul is taking an ambulance to deliver further aid to be used in the Odessa Oblast. Donations for this can be made to Just Giving, Medical Life Lines Ukraine with the reference "Odesa".

Epsom & Ewell Health Walks are looking for volunteers

10 June 2022



Epsom & Ewell Health Walks is a small Charity registered with HMRC No. XT 37422. The objective is to provide walks for older people who are unable to walk long distances as they could in their youth. Many women understandably do not like walking alone so one benefit of our walks is that we provide company and security. All our walks start at 10:00 am and either last for 30 minutes or 1 hour. Each walk has a leader and a backmarker.

Our shorter walks are designed for people recovering from health issues and those who feel they would like to meet other people but don't want to walk far. These walks take place on a Monday.

The schedule for June and July is:
6 June Epsom Downs
13 June Poole Road
20 June Priest Hill
27 June Epsom Common
4 July Nork Park
11 July Nonsuch Park
18 July Ashtead Common
25 July Horton Country Park

Our longer walks take place on Sundays and Wednesdays. The schedule for June and July is:

Sunday
12 June Banstead Woods
19 June Horton Country Park
26 June Epsom Downs
3 July Ewell Court 29
10 July Chipstead Road
17 July Epsom Common
24 July Oxshott Heath
31 July Nonsuch Park

Wednesday
8 June Chipstead Road
15 June Bourne Hall
22 June Epsom Common
29 June Banstead Heath
6 July Nonsuch Park
13 July Oxshott Heath
20 July Headley Heath
27 July Ashstead Common

There is no charge to attend any of these walks. But to keep going we are looking for more volunteers to lead and back mark our walks. Full training will be provided for leaders and all volunteers will be given dayglow jackets. Details of how to get to our walks can be found on our website: www.epsomandewellhealthwalks.org.uk. We are holding our Annual General Meeting at Ewell Hall on Wednesday 15 June at 11-30am.

This is opposite St Mary the Virgin Ewell Parish Church. All walkers and those considering volunteering are welcome to attend.

READ MORE: The View from Westminster: Chris Grayling MP on Military aid to Ukraine, Energy levy and the

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Epsom & Ewell Foodbank – Items they’re short of this week

10 June 2022



Image: Epsom & Ewell Foodbank

Epsom & Ewell Foodbank is a vital public service for the borough, providing assistance to people and families who are in need of help. With the current cost of living crisis, Epsom is being hit as hard as the rest of the country, and our foodbanks are unfortunately more vital than ever. Many local residents take the time to donate items to Epsom & Ewell Foodbank, not just food, but toiletries and baby-related items.

According to Epsom & Ewell Foodbank, there has been an increase in demand this month, and they fed more than 550 people in April. The foodbank has released a list of things that they’re either running low on or have run out of on their website. If you find yourself with any of these items that you can spare, please make your way to one of their donation points, which are listed at the bottom of this article.

They have completely run out of:

Powdered milk
Washing-up liquid
Sweets and treats for children (freddo, buttons, mini cookies, hairdo etc.)
Chocolate treats for adults
Instant mash
Honey
Peanut butter

Long-life sponge puddings

Pump soap

Washing powder, pods & tablets (bio & non-bio)

They urgently need:

Packet soup
Tinned fish
Tinned fruit
Coffee Sugar (500g) Meat pies
Powdered milk
Long-life sponge puddings
Biscuits
Tinned vegetables
Squash
Long-life UHT milk (semi-skimmed and full fat only)
Long-life fruit juice

Spaghetti in sauce

Pasta sauce

Shaving foam
Deodorant – all kinds
Shampoo & conditioner Adult toothbrushes

They are fully stocked with:

Pulses, pasta, rice and beans.

Their donation points are located at:

Leeds Building Society, 13 High Street, Epsom, Surrey, KT19 8DA

Epsom Methodist Church, Ashley Road, Epsom, Surrey KT18 5AQ

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Budgens, 65 The Broadway Stoneleigh, Epsom KT17 2HP

Sainsbury's, Kiln Lane, Epsom, KT17 1EQ

Sainsbury's parking garage, Leatherhead

Tesco, Oxshott Road, Leatherhead, KT22 0EF

Asda – Burgh Heath

The donation drop-off times are: Monday to Friday 9 am – 2 pm. They are closed on Bank Holidays.

The Foodbank's contact details are:

Email – foodbank@generation.org.uk

Phone – 0208 786 8221

READ MORE: Is this Epsom Couple getting their heating for free?

Epsom to Ukraine and back in a black-cab

10 June 2022



Richard Gough, 60, an Epsom taxi-rank licence holder, organiser of Black Taxis for Ukraine and owner of Epsom taxi rental service Eclipse Rent-A-Taxi, is driving his magnificent black taxi from Epsom to Ukraine filled with humanitarian supplies provided by Epsom based Surrey Stands With Ukraine and our generous local citizens. The journey starting 14th May will cross several countries and take two days solid driving to complete. Richard will return to England with Ukrainian refugees in his taxi.



This hero taxi-driver has already driven a refugee family of four Ukrainians after holding out for 13 days at Dunkirk to get their visas, aided by the intervention of Epsom and Ewell M.P. Chris Grayling, battling with a slow and bureaucratic system.

Photo features Richard and a team of volunteers from Epsom based Surrey Stands With Ukraine.

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Meet the man cycling to Ukraine for charity

10 June 2022



When raising money for charity, some people do bake sales, others go on a sponsored run or maybe organise a benefit concert, but one Epsom resident is doing something a little different.

If you're in the town centre today, look out for Rob Carin who has popped himself on an exercise bike to cycle the whole distance from Epsom to Ukraine, in order to raise money for the Ukrainian people. Rob Carin is a volunteer for SSWU (Surrey Stands with Ukraine), a wonderful charity we've spoken about before, they're set up in the Ashley Centre, taking donations for much needed medical supplies to send to Ukraine, along with other essentials. SSWU has done amazing work, uniting local people and inspiring charitable spirit for a country in crisis.

Rob tells me that the volunteers take it turns on the bike, and that they average 100KM a day. Collectively, they're going to cycle the full distance of 2504KM from Epsom to Independence Square in Ukraine.

Go along and donate to him if you can, and support the fantastic work that he and SSWU are doing during this crisis.

To donate to Surrey Stands With Ukraine, please follow the link below:

surreystandswithukraine.org

Read more of our community and volunteer-based coverage here.

Council losing "the plot"?

10 June 2022



Is Horton Cemetery in Epsom about to be condemned for good by the Borough's own Burial Authority?

In a rushed special meeting of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Strategy and Resources Committee on 5th May, Councillors will be asked whether to impose a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) against the private property speculator owner who has totally neglected for 40 years this burial ground of 9000 patients of the former five psychiatric hospitals of Epsom.

In a Council Officers' Report, Councillors have been advised that the compensation payable to the owner will be in the region of £1/4 million. The valuation is based on the market value of "woodland". The Report advises the owner will mount legal challenges against a CPO, leading to more expense for Council taxpayers.

Sheila Berry and Honorary Alderman Alan Carlson, former Mayors of Epsom and Ewell and now trustees of the **Friends of Horton Cemetery**, a Charity requesting the CPO, in a joint statement said: "If the owner gets the correct compensation a high value does not make it more likely that he will challenge a CPO than a low value." On the valuation, they state: "We have expert advice from both a chartered surveyor and a lawyer that the comparison with "woodland" values is erroneous. The Cemetery is unique and is subject to a wide range of legal restrictions rendering it virtually worthless as a land asset. There is no development value and no possible income value due to these restrictions. We hope the Councillors on 5th May will not be discouraged by this misleading Report in pursuing a long-overdue intervention. A CPO is necessary to rescue the Cemetery from oblivion and belatedly show respect to 9000 souls who died in our Borough."

You can attend the Council committee meeting on Thursday 5th May at 7.30 pm in The Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom or online.

UPDATE 6th May 2022: Marked as 4th on the agenda for the Strategy and Resources Committee of the Council on 5th May 2022, the item was declared withdrawn by Chairman Cllr Colin Keane. We understand that the Council will revisit the matter later in the year.

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All's well that ends well for the Wells Centre

10 June 2022



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is to transfer the running of the long-mothballed Wells Community Centre, located at the end of Spa Drive, The Wells Estate in Epsom, to Epsom Wells Community Association (EWCA). EWCA is a charity newly registered in December 2021, whose stated aims are: "..... to reopen The Wells Community Centre. The centre will be available to the community for hire purposes. We also aim to run classes that fulfil our values of education, wellbeing, environment and community." The Charity has a nine-strong Board of Trustees chaired by Vanessa Marchant, all residents of the Borough.

The Strategy & Resources Committee of EEBC agreed at its meeting on 29 March 2022 that the community group would take responsibility for the building and put it back into use for hire, a café, and a range of community-led activities. The Council will grant a lease of the site with an initial two-year rent-free period after which the rent payable will reflect the community use of the building.

EWCA have produced a viable business case that sees the existing building renovated, and long-term managed by the Wells residents at no short or long-term costs to the Council and council taxpayers. The business case proposal is for a "reimagined centre" which will mix community group use, private hire, a business hub and hot desk space with a community café.



The Wells Centre – Image © Alan Becken

It plans to reinvigorate the offering on the premises to deliver a modern, forward-looking, multi-generational community centre. The centre will support Epsom & Ewell's "Future 40" plans, helping to make the Borough an even better, brighter place.

EWCA proposes to be responsible for the Wells site in its entirety and release the Council from any ongoing financial responsibility. In addition, the Council would receive rental income from the commencement of the third year of the lease.

Councillor Colin Keane, Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee said "We have listened to the local community and worked with EWCA to enable them to develop a business case to run the centre.

"The Council is committed to enabling and encouraging EWCA to succeed and a revived facility would support the principle that enhances the Cultural and Creative opportunities in the Borough where people work together for all the community.

"Crucially, this plan will also remove any financial call on the Council's resources to enable the Council's other key priorities for residents to be pursued".

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The decision of the Council was a culmination of a five-year campaign by local residents to re-open the centre.

The plan to close the Council owned and run Wells Centre first came to light during the November 2015 County Council bye-election when the Labour Party candidate Kate Chinn brought it to light.

The Council had decided the decision should be made in secret. The minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee for September 2015 indicate that an item was shielded from public scrutiny on the dubious ground of "*Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)*". It would be very odd if this right to exclude the public could be used to hide information about the Council's own finances.

The Council eventually called a consultation meeting at the Wells Centre when every suggestion that residents advanced was stonewalled.

When the Wells Centre originally closed, a small group of locals decided to find out exactly what local residents thought of the closure. It became clear that there was not just a desire for the centre to re-open, but also a desperate need.

The group found isolated lonely people, families with nowhere to go within walking distance, entrepreneurial returning-to-work mothers who now had no premises, young people no longer able to access youth groups, and many more.

This core group formed EWCA and was supported by like-minded residents from elsewhere in the Borough and after petitioning, marching, canvassing, and researching, they were satisfied that a reopened centre was a viable business idea.

Supported in particular by Borough Councillors Kate Chinn (Lab), David Gulland (Lib), Bernie Muir (Con) and Nigel Collin (RA) and helpfully advised by council officers the business plan was finally presented to the Council.

The business plan is over 80 pages long. In essence, the plan is for an integrated centre offering activities that fall into the following categories; wellbeing, education, fitness and environment. For a more in-depth overview visit https://indd.adobe.com/view/73d5b9e9-62ae-40ae-a457-282ada7246fa

Vanessa Marchant adds: "Post pandemic we are all more aware of what is on our doorstep, our communities rose to the fore and many don't want to return to the commuter corridor lives they were living previously. With approx 70% of commuters now having a flexible week, activities within a 20-minute neighbourhood are due to get a real boost according to multiple news stories. So our already strong business case has been made stronger by the turbulent times we are living through. We will create a shorter version of the plan to share with people in the coming months."

On funding, she said to the Epsom and Ewell Times – "We will not receive a subsidy from EEBC. We intend to apply to any and every fund we can, but primarily we are looking to YourFund, the National Lottery, CIL, local philanthropists and community fundraising initiatives." In conclusion, EWCA thanks and appeals – "We are extremely happy with the Council decision. This result is the culmination of many years of hard work on the part of the local community, the members of the charity Epsom Wells Community Association (EWCA) and our council member advocates from Labour, Liberal Democrats, Conservative and the RA. The hard work of fundraising now begins and we will need help from the local community to make this happen.

Vanessa Marchant said, "That we won the vote is still sinking in but the real work in bringing the Centre back to life is just beginning."

If you would like to be involved please get in touch via the EWCA website at https://epsomwellscommunityassociation.org/contact/ or via Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/groups/savethewellscentre

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Happy returns for Epsom's talking newspaper

10 June 2022



Photo above is Judy Sarssam, Chair of EETN.

A happy group of Volunteers has returned to their recording Studio at Swail House after an absence of two years, while the virus held its sway, to continue recording the Epsom and Ewell Talking Newspaper (EETN), a free local news and magazine service for Visually Impaired residents of the borough.

Since the end of the first lockdown, a local team of dedicated Volunteers have been producing the EETN from their homes. The complicated procedure required careful management and organised deadlines, to enable the free service and free postal distribution to continue.

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Every two weeks, Visually Impaired People (VIP) receive a wallet containing the Talking Newspaper on a memory stick, for which the charity can also provide an easy to use audio player.
People with a visual loss especially those who live alone, frequently feel and are, isolated as loss of vision results in loss of confidence to navigate the world outside their familiar home surroundings. The Pandemic has, of course, increased the isolation of everyone who lives alone and the restrictions have filled some elderly people with macular degeneration with so much anxiety that even now they remain imprisoned through fear of catching Covid.

Hence the good, kind efforts of the EETN Volunteers to bring the outside in by providing local news, magazine articles and Podcasts to entertain and absorb our many Listeners.
The team are hugely proud of the independent, volunteer-run, completely free service which has been available for nearly fifty years. Wallets are still sent to Listeners who have left the area but continue to take an interest in where they once lived and of course, they continue to enjoy the information and entertainment on offer.

Judy Sarssam, Chair of EETN and herself visually impaired said: “Being unable to read any longer is a huge loss and happily audiobooks are available but unless the VIP is computer literate the whole world of print is not accessible. The EETN reflects the different interests of those who choose the articles and thus there is always something of interest for every Listener. The youngsters so engrossed in the digital world cannot appreciate that even provided with a screen reader, one has to have not only skills, which many of the older population do not have, but a good amount of residual vision and time, to navigate that world. For the present elderly visually impaired VIPs it is wonderful to have instant access to such a rich pageant of material which the EETN offers.”
One Listener said “It is like welcoming old friends into their home regularly as the familiar voices are heard once again.”

If you have a family member, friend or neighbour whom you could tell about the EETN free service, please do so. Recipients of the EETN do not need to be officially registered as Blind or Partially sighted, they just need to have reached the point of sight deterioration when reading is no longer possible to do with ease. Bear in mind that they will not be able to read these words as you can.

If you know of anyone who would like to receive Epsom & Ewell Talking Newspaper please call 01372 721519 and leave a message and your call will be returned.
To learn more, visit https://eetn.org.uk

Age Concern Epsom and Ewell’s 75th

10 June 2022



Surrey Brass Friday 8th April entertained over 100 in the magnificent main hall of Epsom College in aid of local 75 years old this year charity Age Concern Epsom and Ewell. The charity’s mission statement is: “Empowering older people in Epsom & Ewell to live the most fulfilling lives they can.” The charity has an army of volunteers who befriend their clients with regular visits, help with DIY, drives to medical appointments, support for a foot clinic and a free hearing aid clinic, advice and information and other services. With demands on its services ever rising this Epsom and Ewell based charity can be proud of its year on year growth with income rising from £125,000 in 2017 to £258,000 year end March 2021. However, the Charity’s Chief Officer Dorah May explains that the challenges of the Co-Vid pandemic are placing a strain on finances with reserves being used up. “Public support is needed more than ever to keep current services going.”

As their 75th year continues Age Concern Epsom and Ewell will combine its celebration with the Platinum Jubilee and recycle old hats that will be part of their Jubilee themed stall appearing in the Epsom Market Square on Thursdays throughout the month of May. Marie Thackwell, the charity’s fundraising and marketing coordinator, said “I’m really looking forward to establishing some fun events and we already have a few great things lined up for the year ahead – after all it’s Age Concern Epsom and Ewell’s 75th anniversary – now that’s something worth celebrating.”

The Charity’s monthly Sunday teas at Stoneleigh Methodist Church continue…

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Epsom and Ewell gears up for Ukrainian refugees

10 June 2022



Tuesday 29th March over 160 local citizens converged on St Joseph's Church Hall for an information evening about hosting Ukrainian refugees. Half the hands in the room went up when asked who is willing to host refugees fleeing the war. There was overwhelming enthusiasm for the aid the community can bring to the urgent need for hosting Ukrainian refugees.

Joanna Sherring of the Epsom Refugee Network chaired the event and introduced local refugee supporters with experience of hosting and teaching English. Nina Kaye spoke about her experiences of opening her home to no less than 30 Syrian refugees since 2015. It is a big but rewarding commitment and friends for life are made. The important point was made that most refugees want to return home. Making them welcome here is a small way to meet the trauma of forced displacement.

The Government rules about hosting were explained including a requirement that hosts undergo a "Disclosure and Barring Check" (DBS). Basically this means a check about any criminal record. Apparently these rules are welcomed by Ukrainians especially as men are required to remain in Ukraine and the majority of guests will be women and children.

You can find out more information and guidance on the Epsom Refugee Network website here.

Epsom and Ewell stands with Ukraine

10 June 2022



Epsom accountant Nataliya Irvine is among 350 volunteers working tirelessly to collect essential items at the Ashley Centre in the town to send to Ukraine where her family are currently living in the war zone.

They operate under the name Surrey Stands With Ukraine

"It's good to be doing something", Nataliya tells me as we sit down in a coffee shop to speak with each other about the incredible work that she and others are doing on behalf of Ukraine. Nataliya, since Sunday, has been organising local

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people in Epsom to collect donations of essential items, for those suffering from the current conflict. The vital and impassioned work she's doing is supported by a network of amazing volunteers, whose numbers have swollen from 4 to 350, in one month.

Nataliya, who is Ukrainian, approaches the task with an almost sombre necessity. Her mother, sisters, brother and step-father, are all in Ukraine as we speak to each other, she worries about them day and night. I ask whether they're collecting as much as they expected and she tells me that it's more than they ever imagined. Nataliya emphasises just how supportive the local community has been, just how many locals have been willing to give up their possessions, and even their time, to help the people of Ukraine.

"It started independently", she says, when I ask about the genesis of the idea. Nataliya tells me that it was just her, speaking with her family on the phone and sending them money for vital medical supplies, that were then being given to hospitals in Lviv. Nataliya began to reach out to friends and organise couriers to deliver supplies directly to the Polish-Ukrainian border with assistance from her local gym, FitnessTheory, who provided a vital place to store the items before they were sent off. What started as 4 people looking to make a small difference to the humanitarian effort, has expanded to a 350-strong group, with a committee and community hub, generously given by the Ashley Centre in Epsom, organising donation efforts on a much larger scale. Locally based registered charity Harrop HR Missions Ltd was able to step up and provide the legal entity to facilitate the operation. To have achieved all this, while worrying about her family in Ukraine, all a person can do is admire the strength and bravery of Nataliya and the many other Ukrainians working with her.
The charity has raised over £80,000 and sent over £450,000 worth of supplies to Ukraine in 11 van runs.

At the Drop-Off point in the centre, boxes upon boxes of supplies are piled high, but the spirits of the volunteers are higher. I was lucky enough to be able to spend a little bit of time observing the operation during one of its few quiet moments, and I was blown away by the compassion, focus and drive that pushes these selfless volunteers to go above and beyond for a country that most of them have never been to. They're laughing together; they're supporting each other mentally, physically and spiritually, drawn together and emboldened by a shared sense of duty, to deliver the help that Ukrainians dearly need right now. The whole time I was there, one word kept going through my head: Community, and that's what I saw; a united community, together for a common purpose, selflessly working together to achieve it.

Many individuals have made what Nataliya and her fellow volunteers are doing possible. David Barnes, the lead volunteer, sits at the front desk all day greeting all those who wish to help with a smile. The volunteers I spoke with all told me that David's work is above and beyond, and his contributions are truly vital. David Meadows, the general manager of the Ashley Centre, has also enormously supported them, allowing the group to use an unused unit of the centre, as their operations hub and donation point. Other individuals that gave both resources and time to help this cause are numerous: Councillor Neil Dallen facilitated contacts, Steve Moore's guidance on marketing allowed them to tap into social media, James Brook, an architect also working out of the Ashley Centre, provided vital organisational support.

The team members I spoke to were full of appreciation for one another, people like Roy and Kim Deadman, Jess and Pinch Tarrant, Zoe, Ross and Luda, among many others. On top of each and every local Ukrainian who set aside time to help their country get the vital supplies it needs. This appreciation should also be applied to every single person who has donated food, money or any other item to this cause, their help is invaluable and is making a positive difference in the lives of people in need. Epsom should be truly proud of how it's come together in a time of great melancholy for Europe and the world, to provide hope and more crucially material aid, for the citizens of Ukraine who are unable, or unwilling, to leave their homes.

Support for Afghan Refugees

10 June 2022

Following the British and allies' humiliation in Afghanistan in August this year the UK Government has urged local Councils to participate in the Afghan Locally Employed Staff Relocation Scheme. The urgent need is to provide homes to those refugees who fled from the Taliban takeover and are currently in temporary accommodation in the UK. Funds are promised to local authorities willing to support the resettlement of Afghan interpreters and others (and their families), who worked for UK Forces, the UK Embassy and other official British interests.

The scheme supports rent and other housing costs, local authority support staff salaries and "integration support" (e.g., English language, education and health). The funds promised by the Government range over a three year period from £22,340 for one adult in a one bedroom property to £134,040 for a 2 adult 4 children family in a 4 bedroom property.

The Council Officers recommended that Epsom and Ewell Borough Council undertake support for 2 families but an amendment moved by Court Ward Councillor Kate Chinn (Labour) was accepted by all Councillors and 5 families will be supported. The greatest challenge to the programme will be identifying landlords willing to provide suitable properties.

Nina Kaye of the Epsom Refugee Network responded to the decision We are pleased to hear that the Council has voted to take up to five Afghan families being re-settled under the LES (Locally Employed Staff) scheme. These families have risked so much to support our troops in Afghanistan and as a result have had to flee their homes and their country. There are many highly skilled individuals in this group who will be a real asset to our Community. Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network will be working with the Council to support these families when they arrive, helping them to learn English and settle into life in the UK".

Joanna Sherring of Epsom Community Sponsorship stated: "Our Charity is applying to be a Community Sponsorship group in Epsom & Ewell and it's great to see such support for refugees in our community. Hopefully we will never know what it

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feels like to lose everything and have to start a new life in a different country. I am so proud to be part of a such a passionate group of people who want to offer the chance of a new life to a refugee family”

Epsom and Ewell is by no means alone in the County in supporting the scheme with all the other 10 District Councils supporting between 2 (Mole Valley) and 5 to 10 (Waverley).

Full details of the scheme and Government explanations are available HERE

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