Guildford theatre stage for a community cultural hub

Yvonne Arnaud Theatre marks 60th birthday with major transformation

On Wednesday 10 September, the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre in Guildford hosted a 60th Birthday Concert celebrating both a milestone anniversary and the completion of a major regeneration project made possible by substantial funding from Your Fund Surrey.

Landmark investment from Surrey County Council

In June 2023, Surrey County Council approved more than £2 million from its Your Fund Surrey Large Community Project scheme for the theatre's 'Play Your Part' capital campaign. It is the largest single award ever made under the fund, designed to secure the Yvonne Arnaud's future as a cultural community hub with theatre at its heart.

A theatre transformed

Over the past two years, the theatre has delivered radical improvements including a new accessible lift, modernised toilets on every floor, flexible multi-purpose rooms for community groups, a reconfigured front of house and a more welcoming ground floor foyer.

During the anniversary concert, VIP guests including His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh toured the new spaces and enjoyed performances spanning six decades of productions, with contributions from the volunteer choir and Young Company.

Six decades at the heart of the community

Since opening in 1965, the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre has been central to Guildford's cultural life and an important driver of the local economy. Its outreach programmes and community initiatives already play a significant role across Surrey. The new facilities, supported by Your Fund Surrey, are intended to ensure the theatre can meet the needs of residents and visitors for the next half century.

Voices of support

Denise Turner-Stewart, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Community, said the council was proud to back the project:

"We would like to congratulate the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre on the delivery of this flagship Your Fund Surrey project, thanks to over £2 million of Large Community Projects Funding, to develop Guildford's iconic and much-beloved building into a friendly, accessible community hub to serve the whole of Surrey.

"Your Fund Surrey is all about empowering our residents to Make It Happen, by significantly investing in projects that will make a real lasting impact for local communities.

"This long-anticipated renovation project at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre is a great example of how Your Fund Surrey investment has been used to create vibrant, resilient spaces where residents and community groups can come together for social and cultural enrichment, both now and in the future."

 $\label{thm:continuous} The atre \ Director \ and \ Chief \ Executive \ Joanna \ Read \ added:$

"We can't thank Surrey County Council's Your Fund Surrey enough for supporting our determination to make the theatre accessible and sustainable for the future. We are also hugely grateful to the many people who, early in our journey, wrote letters of support for our ambitions to refurbish the theatre, and those who donated to our campaign.

"We are delighted that our building is now able to welcome even more people to enjoy the fantastic benefits of theatre and arts participation."

About Your Fund Surrey

Your Fund Surrey was launched in 2020 to back projects that deliver lasting benefits across the county. Since then, it has enabled communities to improve their local environment, build new spaces, enhance cultural venues and develop green areas, creating a stronger sense of pride and belonging.

By investing in diverse initiatives, the scheme is helping to build vibrant, resilient communities and demonstrates what can be achieved when residents come together to make it happen.

The Duke of Edinburgh addresses the audience, in front of the assembled concert company, before unveiling a commemorative plague – credit: Craig Fuller

Sam Jones - Reporter



Bookham to get new community centre

After six years of waiting and false starts, Bookham is finally getting a new community centre.

The old Bookham Youth Centre on Lower Road shut its doors in 2019 after falling into disrepair, leaving the area without a dedicated youth and community hub.

Members agreed to spend £2.8m of existing capital funds to knock down the old building and replace it at a Surrey cabinet meeting on September 24. Councillors said they hope the new multi-purpose building will be ready by March 2027.

Cllr Clare Curran, Conservative member for Bookham and Fetcham West said: "There is real excitement in Bookham that a new centre is going to be delivered.

"This is not just a youth facility [...] The former centre was used by a huge range of community users from everything from the University of the Third Age to challenges with disabled children and an early years provider."

The new centre is set to take the place of three lost facilities – the former youth centre, The Bridge in Leatherhead (closed after RAAC was found in the roof) and the Bookham Family Centre. Day-to-day running of the centre is expected to be handed to a third-party provider, meaning no additional ongoing costs to the council or future unitary authority.

"It has taken some time to get to this point," said Cllr Clare Curran who represents Bookham. "We've had a few false dawns on the journey."

In 2021, councillors promised a shiny new building on the Lower Road Reception Ground, at the cost of £2.5m, with homes alongside to help pay for it. But that plan was scrapped after tougher planning rules on the Green Belt and new biodiversity requirements meant the recreation ground scheme was no longer possible.

Instead, Surrey County Council has shifted its focus back to the old youth centre site. But housing that was meant to come alongside the scheme has been kicked into the long grass, with any decision on new homes delayed until after 2027.

Public consultation and planning approvals are still to come so residents still have an opportunity to have their say.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Bookham Community Centre on 164 Lower Road. (Credit: Google Street View)

Surrey's "suffer the little children..." tested

Plans to turn a family house into a home for vulnerable children on a Surrey street have been given the green light despite strong opposition from its future neighbours.

A five-bed detached home on Crosby Hill Drive in Camberley will be transformed into a children's home for up to three kids aged 10-17. Staff would live in with them around the clock, with no changes made to the building itself.

Council officers state the home is sorely needed, with rising demand for secure, regulated accommodation for children in care.

But of 28 locals who wrote in about the scheme, 27 objected. Concerns ranged from traffic and road safety to fears the change could alter the "character" of the street. But councillors said many of the concerns were based on myths and misunderstandings about children's homes.

Members of a Surrey County Council planning committee approved the scheme at a meeting on September 24.

One resident, however, wrote in support, arguing the location is exactly the kind of quiet and supportive environment vulnerable children should be given: "Everyone deserves a safe place to live," they said.

Despite traffic concerns, highway officers said there will not be a material change in the use of the road or car parking spaces down the street.

Rebecca Hanifan, responsible for looking after children's homes within Surrey, told the committee: "Children's homes are heavily regulated. The children who live in them are risk assessed and those with higher needs are placed in secure settings, not in the community.

"These are children who can live in a family setting- they go to school, they sleep well at night, and do normal activities over the weekend. Our homes blend into communities, property values do not drop and our children are well-behaved."

Cllr Ernest Mallett MBE dismissed the claims the children's home would damage the character of Crosby Hill Drive. He said: "How is that any different to children living in other houses? This is a perfectly viable use for the property. It won't be any trouble to anyone and won't be any different to any other house on the street.

"We are a first-class western society and we take care of people."

Others noted practical issues- like the lack of a bus shelter nearby and concerns about parking during staff changeovers – but backed the need for more children's homes, given the national shortage of foster carers.

The thorny issue of restrictive covenants on the property was raised by Nigel James, speaking on behalf of one of the neighbours, who said the council risked "wasting tax payers' money" if due diligence was not done. But officers and councillors stressed covenants were not a planning matter for the committee, and Cllr Mallett said they were "virtually unenforceable".

Cllr Jeremy Webster expressed unease about "parachuting" a children's home into a quiet residential area and cited apparent estate agent warnings of a 10 per cent dip in house values. Meanwhile, Cllr Trefor Hogg said he sympathised with residents' concerns but stressed: "We need both foster homes and children's homes in Surrey."

Emily Dalton LDRS

View outside 18 Crosby Hill Drive, in Camberley. (Credit: Surrey County Council documents)

Surrey Uni finds gay vets face discrimination

A new study from the University of Surrey and the Royal Veterinary College has highlighted the ongoing presence of discrimination and its impact on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and other (LGBT+) veterinary professionals and students in the UK.

The research, published in Vet Record, analysed 130 survey responses and found that over half (55.4%) of the participants had either experienced or witnessed some form of discrimination, ranging from microaggressions to outright threats of violence. This number highlights a concerning problem for LGBT+ veterinary professionals and students and a call to action for profession to collectively work to ensure everyone can work free from discriminatory behaviour.

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The findings also reported that over half of the participants were not fully "out" to everyone at their workplace or place of study underlining that not all LGBT+ veterinary professionals and students feel safe or welcome to share who they are at work or study. However, in contrast, the positive findings from the study were that those who were "out" were more likely to report feeling supported at work and by the wider veterinary community.

Participants also cited a fear of negative repercussions on their career progression and educational attainment as a reason for not disclosing their identity. The study notes that such fear can lead to stress, anxiety and a sense of disconnection from colleagues.

Dr Charlotte S. McCarroll, Associate Head of School (Education) at the School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Surrey, said:

"For our LGBT+ family, friends and colleagues, discrimination remains a pressing issue within the UK veterinary profession. More needs to be done by our institutions for these individuals to feel supported, including increasing and promoting support networks, improving education and training on anti-discrimination laws, and firmly promoting equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives."

Dr Mat Hennessey, post-doctoral researcher in veterinary social science at the Royal Veterinary College, said:

"The findings of our study highlight the ongoing work which needs to occur, both in places of work and education, to foster inclusive environments which are supportive of all people. Creating such environments, where people can be their authentic selves without fear of discrimination, is a team effort requiring both institutional support for EDI initiatives and active engagement with the wider community."

Peter Heather MRCVS, President of BVLGBT+ said:

"Within our profession there are many employers and colleagues who remain committed allies, but as this study shows, discrimination against LGBTQ+ people in the veterinary profession persists. To combat this, leaders in our profession need to educate others and themselves about discriminatory behaviour and learn more about the benefits of open and inclusive work and study environments that allow people to just be themselves."

Surrey University



Epsom's potholes. We're not alone...

'Sink holes happen' was the blunt message from a Surrey highways officer when asked if the council had the budget to repair five crumbling suburban roads.

In fairness, council budgets are often in flux with authorities never knowing how much funding they will receive from the central government and whether they will get any extra pennies from grants.

But that has not softened the blow for Walton residents who say they are "disappointed" after finding out five battered neighbourhood roads might not be resurfaced until 2028.

Almost 300 people signed a petition calling for urgent repairs to Cottimore Avenue, Cromwell Close, Fairfax Crescent, Monks Close and Stuart Avenue. Residents claim the roads in Walton are riddled with cracks, potholes and uneven pavements that pose a danger to pedestrians, cyclists and drivers.

Residents say the situation has gone on for decades – with complaints about the roads dating back to the 1990s. But people say their calls for Surrey County Council to act have been repeatedly put aside and pushed back despite rat run traffic and speeding issues. One resident even claimed that it has been at least 40 years since the roads were last resurfaced.

Residents said they are worried the delays will only get worse once Surrey is broken into unitary councils in Local Government Reorganisation. "It seems the problem is simply being passed on to the next authority," said Paolo Orezzi, lead petitioner. "The

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road will simply deteriorate and it will increase the cost liability."

But highway bosses have said the streets will not be resurfaced any time soon at a Highways, Transport and Economic Growth meeting on September 23. Instead, they have been given a flatteringly modest 'medium priority' rating in the county's road maintenance list meaning it is unlikely the work will be complete before 2028/29.

Even then, the plan is not to fully resurface the roads but to 'fine mill' the concrete beneath the tarmac. This is a cheaper process but residents fear this will not go far enough.

Highway officers defended the decision pointing to the sheer scale of the challenge. "We manage 5,000km of roads across Surrey," an officer said. "There is no doubt the roads would benefit from work but we have to prioritise based on budgets, emergencies and needs. Unfortunately, we can't give firm timescales beyond next year-things change, sinkholes happen."

Cllr Rachael Lake, who said she has been backing the residents' calls for years, recalled: "I was standing next to a crack where the tarmac had totally worn away. You could actually get a child's foot stuck down it. It was dangerous."

The Conservative member for Walton said she was prepared to use her entire £120,000 allocated budget to fix the roads following residents accusing her of not looking after them. But Cllr Lake claimed highway officers would not even let her put the five worn out roads on a waiting list to be resurfaced.

Lead for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth, Cllr Matt Furniss relented and asked officers to reassess the five roads in question, speak to residents and see if anything can be done with Cllr Lake's allocated budget to get the roads on the list. Cllr Furniss added: "We can potentially do it next year but I am not promising anything."

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Pothole stock image. Credit Kathryn Anderson

Emily Dalton LDRS

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Epsom and Ewell's NESCOT plumbs the heights

Nescot's gas and plumbing apprenticeship provision has been awarded a City & Guilds End Point Assessment (EPA) plaque for excellence in apprenticeship delivery.

Elizabeth Akinlaja, City & Guilds Business Development Manager for London, Kent & Sussex, officially presented the award to Principal and CEO, Julie Kapsalis and the plumbing team at the college this week (Monday 22 September). She said: "Congratulations Nescot, it was a pleasure presenting the City & Guilds EPA Excellence plaque to the apprenticeship team. This award is for their dedication and commitment in supporting learners on their Building Services Engineering (BSE) apprenticeship provision, which has resulted in outstanding first-time pass rates, especially in plumbing, an area facing significant skills shortages. Well-done to everyone involved for making such a positive impact!"

Learners on the gas engineering apprenticeship, part of the plumbing apprenticeship department at Nescot achieved a 94% first time pass rate.

The award recognises excellence in Nescot's EPA delivery, which is the final stage of an apprenticeship designed to validate an apprentice's knowledge, skills, and behaviours against the required apprenticeship standard. It signifies the high quality and



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standard of the college's apprenticeship training, and celebrates the plumbing apprenticeship department's successful and impactful EPA achievements.

Liz Crawley, Head of School, Construction, Engineering & Automotive at Nescot, commented: "It's fantastic to receive such amazing feedback from City & Guilds. Our plumbing team work really hard to ensure the best possible outcomes for our apprentices and local employers."

Sarah Keith, Head of Apprenticeships at Nescot, added: "I am so proud of the teamwork at Nescot across all apprenticeships. This award is a testament to the benefits of working in a strong team that supports our apprentices, employers and each other. It means that our students are fully qualified and industry ready. Well-done to the plumbing team, and everyone involved in apprenticeships at Nescot."

The EPA Excellence award showcases Nescot's commitment to apprentice success and industry standards and reflects the wide range of apprenticeship training available at the college. At Nescot, we offer apprenticeships in carpentry and joinery, commercial catering, gas engineering, plumbing and heating, electrical installation, business administration, customer service, team leading and management, marketing executive, hairdressing, early years, health play specialists as well as laboratory scientists.

Explore the range of apprenticeship courses available on the Nescot website.

Photo: (centre left to right): Nescot Principal and CEO Julie Kapsalis receiving the City & Guilds EPA Award plaque from Elizabeth Akinlaja, City & Guilds Business Development Manager for London, Kent & Sussex along with the Nescot Plumbing team. Credit NESCOT

An EPA Plaque from City & Guilds is an award given to colleges and training providers to recognise their high-quality apprenticeship delivery and the success of their apprentices. The plaque highlights consistent excellence in End-Point Assessment (EPA) performance, based on factors like high pass rates and a large number of Distinction grades achieved by apprentices. It is also a recognition of staff dedication, guidance and support offered to learners.

NESCOT



Epsom & Ewell's French racing twin is a favourite

The Château de Chantilly has been selected as Monument Préféré des Français 2025 (France's Favourite Monument), surpassing 13 other iconic sites in a national vote. It succeeds the 24 Hours of Le Mans circuit, which won the honour in 2024.

This accolade was conferred through the popular France 3 television programme Le Monument Préféré des Français, presented by Stéphane Bern, which each year invites the public to vote for their favourite heritage site. Stéphane Bern is a well-known French journalist, television and radio presenter, writer and historian. He specialises in European history, royalty and cultural heritage, and is often described in France as the country's "Mr Heritage."

A heightened spotlight on Chantilly

Epsom and Ewell with Chantilly enjoy a twinning charter and both share a proud equestrian heritage. Chantilly is renowned for its racecourse and celebrated training grounds, Epsom is world-famous for the Derby, a race that has shaped the international thoroughbred calendar for over two centuries. This shared identity as centres of horseracing tradition provides a natural bond between the two towns and further enriches their twinning relationship.

The chateau victory not only amplifies the national and international profile of Chantilly but reinforces its status as an exceptional cultural treasure. The château, owned by the Institut de France, houses the Musée Condé, with the Duke of Aumale's art collection and library as its heart. It is also celebrated for its formal gardens, its expansive park and the remarkable Museum of the Horse, housed in the former great stables.

Since the château was designated "Monument préféré des Français," Stéphane Bern presented a commemorative plaque to Anne Miller, the château's administratrice générale. The French Ministry of Culture highlighted that this distinction honours not just architectural splendour, but the unique legacy bequeathed by the Duke of Aumale, reaffirming the château's role as a living site of art, memory and natural heritage.

The Duc d'Aumale: A link across the Channel

A key figure tying Chantilly to our locality is Henri, Duc d'Aumale (1822-1897), a French prince, military officer, scholar, bibliophile and art collector.

After the Revolution of 1848 forced the Orléans family into exile, the Duke of Aumale settled in Twickenham, just across the Thames from Epsom, in a notable residence known as Orleans House.

Although the main house was largely demolished in 1926, the Octagon Room and service wing survive as part of the Orleans House Gallery, now a Grade I listed building. During his stay, the Duke built an imposing library and picture gallery adjacent to Orleans House, housing many of his collections. These collections — including masterpieces by Raphael, Rubens and others — were later transferred back to Chantilly upon his death, forming a substantial part of the Musée Condé's holdings under his noloans rule.

The Duke also had local ties through the birth of his son, François d'Orléans, duc de Guise, born in Twickenham in 1854. Upon his death in 1897, the Duke bequeathed Chantilly, together with its art, library and collections, to the Institut de France, under the condition that it be preserved as a museum of French art and history.

Twinning, cultural bridges, and local opportunity

The success of Chantilly in this national competition is a proud moment for Epsom & Ewell, reinforcing the value and impact of town-twinning. Twinning is not merely ceremonial — it offers opportunities for cultural exchange, reciprocal visits, shared projects in art, education and heritage, and deeper understanding between communities.

Nigel Collin, Chairman of the Epsom & Ewell Town-Twinning Association, commented:

"We warmly congratulate our colleagues in Chantilly for this well-deserved achievement. Anyone who has visited the Château cannot fail to be amazed, not just by its external splendour, but by the staggering depth of works from the 15th to the 19th century — works you can only see in situ here, thanks to the Duke of Aumale's strict no-loans condition. It really is well worth a visit, and if any residents are interested in visiting via a Twinning Association group, we will be pleased to advise and assist."

This announcement may inspire renewed interest in twinning visits, themed excursions focusing on heritage, art or gardens, school exchanges, and collaborative cultural programmes. Epsom & Ewell welcomes ideas for reciprocal exchanges with Chantilly, whether joint exhibitions, lectures, or youth projects.

For further information or to register your interest in a Chantilly visit, please contact the Epsom & Ewell Twinning Association via contact@epsomtwinning.com.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Thousands of Young Muslims Gather in Surrey to Raise

the Union Flag

While London headlines were recently dominated by a divisive political rally, a very different gathering of young British Muslims took place quietly in the Surrey countryside.

From 19-21 September 2025, nearly 8,000 members of the **Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Association UK (AMYA)** came together in Puttenham, near Guildford, for their annual **National Ijtema** — a three-day programme dedicated to faith, education, and service to the community.

The Ahmadiyya community, which has its largest UK mosque in **Morden** (the Baitul Futuh Mosque, one of the biggest in Western Europe) and another at **Southfields, Wimbledon**, is well established across South London and Surrey including Epsom. Locally, members are often seen involved in charitable activities such as foodbank support, litter-picking drives, and tree-planting schemes

At the Surrey event, participants took part in academic and sporting competitions, discussions on civic responsibility, and practical workshops designed to encourage young Muslims to be active citizens. The highlight came when the Union Jack was raised and thousands pledged loyalty to the UK, echoing the teaching within Islam that "loyalty to one's nation is part of one's faith."

His Holiness **Mirza Masroor Ahmad**, worldwide head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, addressed the gathering via live broadcast. He urged the youth to reform themselves, to uphold honesty and respect, and to serve both God and humanity.

Abdul Ouddus Arif. President of AMYA UK, said:

"The National Ijtema is a powerful demonstration of how faith and civic duty can go hand in hand. Our young people show their love for Britain not through empty gestures but through practical service – from food drives and blood donation to supporting the most vulnerable in society."

For decades the AMYA has raised millions for British charities, donated tonnes of food to foodbanks, and clocked up tens of thousands of volunteer hours. The Puttenham gathering was intended not just as an internal conference but as a visible statement of what patriotism can look like when it is rooted in service rather than division.

As one local attendee remarked, "We're proud to be British, proud to be Muslim, and proud to show that the two go hand in hand."

The Ahmadiyya community has long been a part of Surrey's wider social fabric, opening its mosques for interfaith dialogue and local visits, and regularly organising peace walks. Against a backdrop of national debate about protest and identity, this year's Ijtema sent a simple message: thousands of young Muslims are committed to building bridges and serving their country with dignity.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Related reports:

Surrey County Council flags up the flag issue

From field to fight: Bramley camp faces enforcement



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questions

An unauthorised traveller camp has been built on land earmarked for inclusion in the Surrey Hills National Landscape – and now plans to make the site permanent have been submitted. Witnesses reported several caravans moving on to Unstead Lane in Bramley last week, sparking frustrations among residents over the lack of enforcement action. Since then a petition has been created calling on immediate action to be taken – with more than 600 people already signing.

It says: "Residents and taxpayers expect and deserve equal protection under planning law. The Surrey Hills National Landscape and Green Belt exist to safeguard our countryside for the benefit of all, not to be eroded by unlawful development. Allowing this encampment to remain would set a dangerous precedent that planning law can be ignored without consequence."

Guildford Borough Council has said it was aware of the work carried out and understood people's concerns. Officers visited the encampment and completed background work to gain a full understanding of the situation.

Councillor Jane Austin, leader of the Conservative opposition group in neighbouring Waverley Borough Council, represents the Bramley and Wonersh ward near the site. She said: "People went to bed on Friday looking out to a field and now they have this. Saturday the road was blocked and they were clearly doing something without planning permission, but nobody could get hold of anyone. That field was due to be national landscape land, deemed to be of that high quality. The land is on floodplain and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, they won't ever be legally built. People around here are reasonable and agree the GTL (Gypsy Traveller League) community need somewhere to live. Everybody should follow the law of the land without exception, planning is there to build sustainable communities and must be followed."

Councils must provide adequate land for housing – whether fixed homes or traveller pitches. If they cannot demonstrate enough provision, sustainable planning applications are difficult to reject as they are often won on appeal – with the council liable for costs. In 2024 Guildford Borough Council was only able to identify 2.59 years supply for traveller pitches, below the minimum five years. Elsewhere in Surrey, Runnymede Borough Council's decades-long failure to provide the legal minimum number of Gypsy and Traveller pitches has forced families to take matters into their own hands and build their own. Runnymede's planning committee recently felt obligated to approve 12 new pitches in Hardwick Lane, Chertsey, despite concerns the site would be overcrowded and the roads unsafe.

Guildford Borough Council said it could not be expected to predict or prevent this type of incident occurring, but would react and manage it as quickly as possible. A spokesperson said: "If a breach of planning control is confirmed on any site in the borough, we have several enforcement options including negotiation and formal action. However, the enforcement powers available to local authorities do not achieve an instant solution."

A planning application for the site was submitted on Saturday September 13. If it contains the correct paperwork, the council must validate it - with nearby residents contacted and given the opportunity to submit their views before any decision is made.

Surrey County Councillor Matt Furniss said he has been speaking with Guildford's planning team and that Surrey Highways Enforcement has also visited the site to assess the new unauthorised access onto the highway for safety and to determine next steps. He added: "It is always disappointing when some individuals choose to work outside the planning process and I will be pressing both councils for a quick resolution."

MP Jeremy Hunt said: "Residents all express the same sentiment – why is there so little action to address unauthorised encampments like this, which are appearing with increasing frequency. It is absolutely infuriating to see the law being ignored this way – and the people who do it getting away scot-free. This latest case is another rural field, recognised as being of such quality that it is earmarked for inclusion in the Surrey Hills National Landscape. Yet local people now face the prospect of potentially years of planning enforcement action – with no guarantee of success. The point is that such drawn-out processes risk consuming vast amounts of council time and money, while the local community continues to suffer the consequences. Early intervention and decisive action such as prompt issuance of a Stop Notice would help prevent situations like this from worsening."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Image of site in Unstead Lane, Bramley

Reigatian Hoodoo Broken: Sutton and Epsom Scale the Heights

Old Reigatian 14 Sutton and Epsom RFC 49. Saturday 20th September.

Sutton and Epsom may have enjoyed the better start to the campaign with two victories compared to their opponent's two defeats but Old Reigatian could be considered the Black and Whites' Kryptonite. Since resuming league hostilities in September 2023 the Old Boys have won all four encounters amassing 142 points and scoring 20 tries. So for Rugby Lane supporters the 49-14 win was a most welcome end to the historical hoodoo.

There was a welcome return to the ranks for Gareth O'Brien and Sam Lennie but hat-trick hero Rob Hegarty and Ben Tame were absentees from the Sutton and Epsom squad. There was also the reappearance of Eric Duey in the second row after an absence of biblical proportions of three seasons. Referee Pierce Young's whistle announced the next chapter in the Old Reigatian v Sutton and Epsom story. Sutton and Epsom were to enjoy the first half benefits of the slope and the wind. This was amply demonstrated when Tom Lennard seized a loose ball in his 22 and kicked over the OR line for a drop out in the early moments.

Sutton and Epsom's first chance came after five minutes with a 5-metre lineout. The ball was overthrown and devoured by the defence and the opportunity squandered. But Ewan McTaggart, wearing the temporary burden of captaincy lightly on his broad shoulders, charged down the clearance and with almost divine intervention it landed in Eric Duey's hands for the try. Tom Lennard added the extras for a 7-0 lead. The remainder of the first quarter was entertaining fare as expansive play was matched by dogged defence by all concerned. In the 20th minute Sutton and Epsom were held up over the line but Reigatian relief from the long clearance was fleeting. The ball was run back and Gareth O'Brien sidestepped his man near halfway and scorched home for a fine solo score. Tom Lennard extended the advantage to 14-0.

On the half hour the sizeable following support from Rugby Lane were applauding their third try. A 5-metre lineout appeared to have been superbly defended as the packs slid towards touch but Dan Jones erupted from the heaving masses to score. Tom Lennard maintained his kicking excellence for 21-0. Emboldened by their lead and with Lennard exploiting the slope with intelligent kicking Sutton and Epsom dominated territorially. The valiant home defence once more held up the Black and Whites over their line. Once more it was only a temporary respite. Kyren Ghumra ran the ball back and Sam Lennie saw a gap in a scrambling defence to touch down for the bonus point score. Lennard maintained his 100% record for 28-0.

There was still time for the visitors to add another score to their first period riches. It was arguably the best of the first half five. The forwards provided clean ball on the 22 and it was spun wide. Laurence Wise ran the perfect supporting line from Number 9 to collect an inside pass that opened up the defence and he sauntered home. The Lennard boot made it 35-0 and the referee concluded the half with Sutton and Epsom handsomely placed having made the most of the topography and meteorological assistance.

The hosts would enjoy the benefits of the slope and a strengthening wind. Even with their talented back division and their habitual winning of this fixture a 35-point deficit was considerable, perhaps not Everest but certainly Himalayan in proportions. Old Reigatian began the second half with great intent pegging back the visitors in their 22 and laying siege. It was one-way traffic with 5-metre penalties and lineouts accumulating as the Black and White line was put under the severest pressure. But courageous Sutton and Epsom defence repelled every attack.

Having survived the siege Sutton and Epsom scored on their first visit to their opponent's 22. The returning Sam Lennie brushed aside defenders in his usual imperious manner and passed to his fellow countryman Adam Bibby to score under the posts. Tom Lennard caressed over the conversion for 42-0. As the game entered the final quarter Sutton and Epsom faced disruption in their ranks. They lost Gareth O'Brien through injury and Adam Bibby through indiscretion. The former did not return but the latter reappeared after the mandatory 10-minute breather.

Finally, Old Reigatian scored a try that their efforts certainly warranted on an afternoon where the scoreboard did not reflect the nature of the contest. The score followed another period of sustained pressure. The ball was relayed to the left and Jonny Bridges manufactured the break and having been tackled stretched to the line to score. He celebrated his try with a finely struck conversion for 7-42. The weather deteriorated as the wind intensified. The Sutton and Epsom pack was now in the ascendancy but the Old Boys demonstrated immense character and were rewarded with a second try. Exploiting a retreating opposition the impressive Number 9 Max Nicol sniped with clinical efficiency to score. Bridges' kick made it 14-42 with five minutes left on the clock.

Sutton and Epsom had the final word with a magnificent seventh try. Steve Munford passed and looped near halfway to create an overlap. Agu Benson stormed down the touchline and passed to fellow flyer Kyren Ghumra who timed his pass to perfection for



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the ubiquitous Dan Jones to score triumphantly under the posts. The 100% Man, Tom Lennard, made it 49-14 and brought his personal tally to 14 points. In the dying moments a final Reigatian attack was thwarted by an interception near the Sutton and Epsom line to deny the hosts a consolation.

For the Black and Whites Tom Lennard had a first-rate afternoon, kicking superbly, whether tactically or bisecting the uprights, and marshalling a back division that impressed in defence and attack. The team defended superbly and the seven tries reflected their attacking intent in a strong overall display. Old Reigatian are in transition with the departure of familiar faces but they should take heart from their defence and resilience from the first to the last minute. Their backs were slick with ball in hand and will pose a threat to all teams. Max Nicol at 9 has the quality to get the best out of the backs and their collective passion and hard work in defence will provide a solid platform for improved results.

The league has a Saturday off whilst England play Canada for the World Cup. The competition returns on October 4th when Sutton and Epsom host Old Colfeians at Rugby Lane.

Sutton and Epsom: O'Brien, Benson, Scott, Bibby, Ghumra, Lennard, Wise, Johnson, Lennie, Mount, McTaggart (c), Duey, Rea, Jones and Finney. Reps: Boaden, Fitzgerald and Munford.

Old Reigatian: Woodford, Coyle, Parker, Allen (c), Bridges, Holder, Nicol, Garrec, Marshall, Collister, Grant, Jones, Blackburn, Brooks C. and Niven. Reps: Lee, Brooks O. and Flynn.

John Croysdill

Photo credit: Robin Kennedy