Mayor endorses Citizens Advice in Epsom & Ewell

As Citizens Advice Epsom & Ewell (CAEE) publishes its Annual Report 2022/23 today, Epsom & Ewell Mayor Cllr Rob Geleit expressed his support for the charity, having chosen it as one of his charities of the year. He said: "CAEE wants and needs to be here for another 85 years and this year I want to do my part in helping that to happen. I have chosen this charity as I greatly support the work that it does and the outcomes that it achieves for local people."

The Mayor attended CAEE's Annual General Meeting on 19 September where staff, volunteers, funders and local supporters gathered to celebrate the achievements over the last year. In 2022/23, CAEE helped 2,660 people in the borough, addressing 8,256 issues and gained £1,008,032 of income for their clients. Top issues that were addressed are benefits and tax, debt, housing, relationships and family, and charitable support.

CEO Lisa Davis, calls for more volunteers to help boost its face to face and outreach service. Lisa said: "A key unique selling point for us is our face to face and outreach services and our aim this year is to extend this part of our offering. Our focus going forward is the recruitment and retention of a diverse group of volunteers to help that happen."

"Currently, the people of Epsom and Ewell can access CAEE services by phone and email, and drop in to the office in Epsom on a Tuesday or Thursday. Increasing our capacity and extending this to four days a week would greatly help those in the borough who are affected by the rising costs of living, are vulnerable and often have nowhere to turn," said Lisa.

CAEE provides an outreach service, with regular sessions being held at the Epsom Refugee Hub, Methodist Church's Warm Hub last winter and has recently started at the Epsom Pantry for its members.

Sue, who's been volunteering with Citizens Advice in the local community for over 25 years in various roles, says: "I enjoy the comradeship, which because of the nature of the volunteers, creates a better than average office environment. I like the brainstorming nature of giving advice – seeing how one thing affects another. Our work provides a window into part of our community which is hidden to a lot of people living in what appears to be an affluent area."

Volunteering for CAEE is a rewarding experience with many having been helping their community for several years. For those interested in learning more, get in touch with CAEE to talk to a volunteer or read more on the website.

Photo of Yvette Ball (Chair of Trustees of CAEE), Epsom & Ewell Mayor Cllr Rob Geleit, Lisa Davis (CEO of CAEE)

You are invited to commemorate the 9000 souls in Epsom's forgotten cemetery

9000 patients of Epsom's cluster of now closed psychiatric hospitals were buried between 1899 and 1955 in a now abandoned Cemetery. The Friends of Horton Cemetery are writing their life stories and seeking to reclaim the five neglected acres from a property speculator.

The **Horton Cemetery** is located between Horton Lane and Hook Road, **Epsom**.

On **10th October 2023** from 1.00pm The **Mayor Cllr Robert Geleit** (Labour Court Ward) and Mayoress of **Epsom and Ewell** will lead councillors, Aldermen of the Borough and the public in commemorating the lives of the 9000.

Baroness Sheila Hollins, a Patron of the Friends of Horton Cemetery will be in attendance and Alderman **Alan Carlson** will address the gathering. **St Josephs Primary** School pupils will sing and others will recite poetry. A "committal prayer" will be spoken on behalf of faith leaders of Epsom and Ewell. The ceremony will end with a Scots Piper leading the gathering to the former Horton Chapel that is now the Horton Arts Centre in Haven Way.

This venue will be host to further performances and speeches and the opening of a **Memorial Garden** in tribute to the 9000.

900 ceramic flowers painted by many people across the Borough over the last year will be planted.

This is the culmination of a year long project of the Friends of Horton Cemetery known as "Out of Sight, Out of Mind", led by the charity's history consultant, **Dr Alana Harris**, local resident and Reader in Modern British Social, Cultural and Gender History at **Kings College**. The Project is supported by **Historic England**.

Lionel Blackman, founder and director of The Friends of Horton Cemetery, said "All are welcome to this significant event taking

place on **World Mental Health Day**. Demonstrating widespread public support for the return of the Horton Cemetery for the public and relatives of the deceased, is essential in correcting an unconscionable decision of the NHS in 1983 to sell the land to a property speculator".

If you intend to attend the event you are requested to complete this simple online RSVP form.

If you are attending you should read the advice of The Friends of Horton Cemetery on the ground conditions and lengths of walks involved. Click HERE.

Related reports:

Friends of Horton Cemetery workshop

Another Horton Cemetery Life Story

Grace Jones - Horton Cemetery Stories

Emily Elizabeth Campbell - Horton Cemetery Stories

Bringing to life the dead in Epsom's forgotten cemetery - Historic England awards local charity.

Council: Horton CPO debate shelved

Painting a rosy picture for recycling

A pioneering paint re-use shop at the Guildford community recycling centre (CRC), operated on behalf of **Surrey County Council**, launched in 2021 has successfully diverted over 15,500 litres of reusable paint from disposal, raising over £2,000 for **Macmillan Cancer Support** and supporting community projects through the **Surrey Probation Service**.

An estimated 55 million litres of paint are wasted in the UK annually, enough to fill 22 Olympic swimming pools. In autumn 2021, the team at SUEZ, who operate 15 community recycling centres (CRC) on behalf of Surrey County Council, set out to address this problem locally with a circular economy initiative to divert useable paint away from disposal.

To address this issue at the local level, the team at SUEZ opened a paint re-use shop in Guildford where tins of reusable, water-based paint brought to the recycling centre are set aside for residents to have for free, with a suggested donation to Macmillan Cancer Support. In 2023, the team was able to divert even more paint away from disposal by partnering with the Staines Probation Office, providing free paint for use in community projects – up to 200 litres at a time.

Now, nearly two years into operation, the paint shop has diverted over 15,500 litres of paint away from disposal, raised over £2000 for Macmillan and supported more than five community projects through the probation service.

The paint re-use shop offers an eco-friendly alternative to disposal, contributing to charitable causes and supporting meaningful rehabilitation for individuals on probation. The initiative also aligns economic efficiency with environmental responsibility by generating cost savings for Surrey County Council.

Natalie Bramhall, Cabinet Member for Property and Waste said: "This programme has been a huge success over the last two years and helped divert a significant amount of waste from landfill. To be recognised and shortlisted for a National Recycling Award is great to hear."

Gareth Swain, Regional Manager for SUEZ recycling and recovery UK said: "When we opened the paint re-use shop in late 2021, we set out to reduce the need for disposal and demand for new paint production by transforming waste paint into a community resource. We are incredibly proud of how the project has grown through the partnership with the probation service and we are honoured to be recognized by this year's National Recycling Awards."

Peter Nicholls, Placement Coordinator for the Staines Probation Office of HM Prison & Probation Service said: "The paint donations from SUEZ have made such a difference to all corners of our community, from Scouting to Schools, charities, and homes for vulnerable people in Surrey to name just a few. The projects that we have completed did not have funding for supplies. It is important work and important for our role in rehabilitating and educating people on probation."

Gove gives Tandridge a severe telling off

An "extremely vulnerable person" with poor mental health suffered "aggressive" and "intimidating" behaviour at the hands of **Tandridge District Counci**l staff.

The unacceptable behaviour has led to the secretary of state for communities, **Michael Gove**, to write to the council to formally warn that he be taking "a personal interest" in how it delivers for residents.

Levelling Up secretary Michael Gove wrote to the local authority after an investigation by the local government watchdog found the behaviour of a housing officer amounted to severe maladministration.

According to the **housing ombudsman**'s report, the resident as well as an independent mental health advocate said the housing officer's approach was "aggressive and intimidating" and that "she had never been spoken to in that manner in all her years in the role".

This carried on until the housing officer left three months later.

The ombudsman ordered the council to apologise to the resident in person, pay £1,000 in compensation and review its Vulnerabilities and Reasonable Adjustment policies.

Mr Gove, writing to Tandridge Council's chief executive David Ford in August 2023, said: "I write following a finding of severe maladministration by the Housing Ombudsman for your failure to abide by duties under the Equality Act 2010 or act in accordance with your own safeguarding policy. In this case you failed an extremely vulnerable resident.

"Her case was not referred immediately, as it should have been, to the relevant support services. The behaviour of a member of your staff towards both the resident and the mental health advocate supporting the resident was described as aggressive, intimidating and neither appropriate nor solution focused.

"This is not acceptable. Your residents should expect their concerns to be taken seriously, for reasonable adjustments to be made where appropriate, and that an investigation of any complaint should be fair. Residents, particularly those who are vulnerable, should expect that their needs are understood and acted upon."

He added: "I will take a personal interest in how you deliver your responsibilities to your residents."

Richard Blakeway, housing ombudsman, said: "At the heart of this case, there were three different officers involved, but none took appropriate action. Failure to appropriately respond to the resident's requests for reasonable adjustments or to act in accordance with its own safeguarding policy caused serious detriment.

"The failure by the landlord to demonstrate that it had taken steps to ensure it understood the needs of the resident also led to missed opportunities which adversely impacted the resident. On top of this, there was a complete absence of recognition, acknowledgement or apology from the landlord for its failings, or to take any action to put things right."

Responding to Mr Gove was Councillor **Catherine Sayer**, leader of Tandridge District Council. She said they recognised there were problems in how the council dealt with the long-running case, which stretched over several years, and that they failed to fully consider the resident's needs and vulnerabilities.

Cllr Sayer said: "We are sincerely sorry for the distress and inconvenience caused. Compensation was paid to the resident and we continue to work with and support them with their future needs.

"In January 2023, the Ombudsman did acknowledge several reasonable adjustments were made during the handling of the case." She said the council had also learned from its mistakes and will put all customer-facing staff into refresher training on safeguarding, vulnerability, equality and diversity and requirements for reasonable adjustments.

Among the changes the council has since made include a staffing structure review as part of a council-wide programme to ensure a dedicated housing officer is assigned to a case and that each case is reviewed monthly by senior officers.

Tandridge Council has also appointed a resident engagement manager to oversee supporting those with vulnerabilities. Cllr Sayer added: "In addition, we made a referral to the Regulator for Social Housing who was satisfied with the response and action we have taken and they did not require us to take any further action."

Ewell Primary school "raaced" with concrete problem

A primary school situated in **Ewell** has been confirmed to harbour hazardous concrete that presents a potential risk of structural failure. **Danetree Primary School** is among the 147 educational facilities across England that have been identified as having reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC), a lightweight construction material that was widely used between the 1950s and 1990s but is now regarded as being susceptible to collapse.

A GLF Schools spokesperson for Danetree Primary School told the Epsom and Ewell Times:

"Over the summer the Year 3 block was identified containing RAAC. On Thursday 31 August the Department for Education instructed the Trust to close this building immediately.

"The school then put a plan in place to relocate the Year 3 classes elsewhere within the school, so that the school opened as planned. Parents were advised of this.

"Further surveys have been arranged to clarify longer term plans for the school and we will provide updates to parents as more information is known."

The **Department for Education** has recently released a list that reveals all the educational establishments in England where necessary measures were required to address concerns related to concrete structural integrity. The government document affirms that Danetree Primary School has successfully maintained in-person education for all its students, whether on the school premises or in nearby locations. In response to the concrete structural issues, 19 schools in England had to postpone the commencement of the term, while an additional 24 schools implemented remote learning measures, with four schools making a complete shift to remote learning.

Gillian Keegan, the Education Secretary, expressed her regret over this situation and acknowledged that it was far from the ideal way for parents, teachers, and affected students to begin the new academic term. She reassured the public that the safety of students and staff remains the top priority. She also commended the collective efforts of schools, colleges, local councils, dioceses, and academy trusts in ensuring that the majority of the affected educational settings were able to open their doors to all students at the start of the term. The Education Secretary stated, "I know this is the last way parents, teachers and children affected by this wanted to begin the new term, but it will always be my priority to ensure the safety of pupils and staff."

Image: Danetree Primary School: Google

Surrey's smokescreen over Fire Service failings

Dear Editor.

Last week saw the publication of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Report of Surrey Fire and Rescue Service.

The accompanying press release from the Conservative Leaders of SCC headlined the fact that the "Inspectors praised our fire and rescue service's cultural improvements and the positive behaviours that were demonstrated during their visit". Residents might therefore be forgiven if they were to think that the Inspection Report itself was something to celebrate.

However, the HMICFRS Report makes 11 judgments on the Fire Service in Surrey and, of the 11 areas inspected, just one is good and the rest judged as adequate and below.

Under the watch of the Conservatives in Surrey, key factors relating to keeping our residents safe; preventing fire and risk, public safety through fire regulation, responding to fires and emergencies and the best use of resources, all require improvement. And seven of the 11 judgments show the service as less than adequate.

Crucially, our Fire Service Officers are also being failed, with the Inspectors reporting concerns over the lack of adequate training for incidents in tall buildings, failures to identify high-risk premises and delays to the upgrade of vehicles.

Worryingly, the Inspectors also say, "We were disappointed to find that the service hadn't made the progress we expected since our 2021 inspection".

The lack of openness regarding the Inspection outcomes is unacceptable. However, far more serious are those judgments themselves. In a letter to the Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety I have called for a plan to turn this

situation around, to be formulated as a matter of urgency. Our residents, our local businesses and our Fire Officers deserve much better than this.

Yours faithfully,

Eber Kington

Surrey County Councillor (Residents Association - Ewell Court, Auriol & Cuddington).

Related reports:

Surrey Fire service praised

Not such a rosy report on Surrey Fire Service

Image: Councillor Eber Kington

Another Surrey Borough with serious money problems

Epsom and Ewell Times has reported on the woes of Woking, the gaps in Guildford budgets and we have spelt out the thorny financial crisis of Spelthorne. Now Surrey Heath may move to asbestos lined offices to preserve its existence. These crises contrast with **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council** that consistently balances its books. **Chris Caulfield** reports:

Surrey Heath Borough Council could close its headquarters and move into the vacant, asbestos-lined House of Fraser site as it tries to get out from under its "existential crisis" of its "sheer levels of borrowing".

It comes as the council's leader **Shaun Macdonald** said the borough was as little as two years away from effective bankruptcy.

The council is seeking ways to cover its £176m debts and has launched a project to look into the relocation of civic offices – and papers published as part of its Thursday, September 14, performance and finance scrutiny committee suggest it is considering moving staff into the vacant House of Fraser building in Camberley.

Surrey Heath Borough Council bought the House of Fraser building in 2016 for £18m. The store closed its doors in May 2023 with the lease expiring in August 2023.

Today the building is said to be worth just £2.9m and requires "multiple millions of pounds" to refurbish. House of Fraser closed the branch in Park Street in May.

The council says it has been working on alternative plans for the building, "including complete modernisation and refurbishment, improved retail and hospitality areas, offices and community facilities such as health and civic uses".

According to council documents, it has been negotiating with commercial tenants for the entirety of the third floor, as well as the entirety of the ground floor, and half of the first floor.

"The second floor could be a potential location for Surrey Heath Borough Council's relocated office and the remaining half of the first floor for a relocation of Surrey Council's library."

It could make the move as early as 2026.

Commenting on the council's treasury management activity report during the same meeting, Councillor **Richard Wilson** (LD, Bagshot) said: "It seems pretty obvious that the council has effectively an existential challenge because of just the sheer level of borrowing we've got. "This all stems back to 2016 when those failures in decision making on oversight and scrutiny but I wonder if there has also been a failure in treasury management in the period after 2016 while interest rates were still low?"

He also asked whether the loans could have been handled in a "different" way the council could have avoided the "existential crisis" it has now.

Details of the potential move were published as part of the council's property and economic development service performance report.

A spokesperson for the council said: "In common with many buildings of this age, asbestos is contained in the fabric of the former

House of Fraser building, which is safe if not disturbed. "This would need to be removed by specialist contractors as part of any future plans."

House Of Fraser Camberley (Image: Google Street View)

Related reports:

The knives are out in Woking

Woking's debt crisis explained

Guildford Council to cut to the bone

Guildford contemplates financial "Armageddon".

Spelthorne's neediest lose out on housing

Spelthorne's thorny property problems spelt out

Local NHS Doctors and Consultants striking

As tensions mount within the UK healthcare sector, doctors across the country are gearing up for strike action. The looming industrial action has sent ripples of concern through the local Epsom healthcare system and the wider public, sparking a heated debate about the grievances motivating these medical professionals to take such measures.

In a week that promises to bring a fresh wave of challenges, hospitals across the UK brace themselves as a new round of strikes is set to commence. On Wednesday, consultants and junior doctors are set to unite in a day of industrial action, marking the first instance of such joint protest. The impact of this combined strike action is expected to weigh heavily on healthcare facilities, with St George's, **Epsom** and St Helier hospitals particularly vulnerable, having recently grappled with the added strain of a heatwave.

Amid this turbulence, healthcare authorities call upon the public to exercise discretion in their use of NHS services. It's emphasized that individuals should continue to seek medical care during emergencies or when they have scheduled appointments.

Dr. **Richard Jennings**, the Group Chief Medical Officer for St George's, **Epsom**, and St Helier University Hospitals and Health Group, acknowledges the upcoming challenges: "While we do everything we can to minimize the impact strikes have on our patients, there is no denying this week will be very challenging for us. There's been little respite this year, with several rounds of industrial action already taking place, not to mention our emergency departments becoming busier with the hotter weather. And with further industrial action planned for this autumn, and winter on the way, we would expect these extreme pressures to continue for some time."

The joint strike is scheduled for Wednesday, September 20, with consultants and junior doctors ensuring emergency care remains available. However, elective surgeries and non-emergency appointments will be rescheduled. On Tuesday, September 19, some consultants will also strike while providing Christmas Day cover, and junior doctors will stage a complete walkout on Thursday, September 21, and Friday, September 22.

During this period, the public is urged to use NHS services judiciously to ensure that the most critical cases receive timely attention. It's essential to bear in mind that visiting an emergency department for non-life-threatening issues may not result in quicker service.

Dr. Jennings advises, "We must prioritize our sickest and most seriously ill patients. That means if you attend our emergency departments and it's not life-threatening, you may be redirected to a more appropriate service. You can help us by using NHS 111 online, which is a 24/7 service and can direct you to where you need to go when your healthcare need is less urgent. But when it's an emergency or life-threatening, you should always call 999 or visit an emergency department."

Numerous inpatient and outpatient appointments have already been rescheduled due to this year's strike action, with more disruptions expected this time around. However, those with scheduled appointments are encouraged to attend unless notified otherwise. Alternative options, such as GP surgeries and pharmacies, remain largely unaffected by the strikes and can assist with common ailments like tonsillitis, coughs, colds, and earaches. Minor injuries like sprains and strains can be managed at home, or a pharmacist can provide guidance on the appropriate treatment.

For individuals in need of mental health support during a crisis in Kingston, Merton, Richmond, Sutton, or Wandsworth, the South

West London 24/7 Mental Health Crisis Line is available at 0800 028 8000. More information can be found at https://www.swlstg.nhs.uk/patients-carers/crisis-support/mental-health-support-line. Similarly, in Surrey and North East Hampshire, support is accessible 24/7 for adults, young people, and children by calling 0800 915 4644. Additional information can be found at https://www.sabp.nhs.uk/our-services.

The dates for strike action are as follows:

- Consultants: Christmas Day cover from 7 am on Tuesday. September 19, to 8 am on Thursday. September 21.
- Junior doctors: Christmas Day cover from 7 am on Wednesday, September 20; full walkout from 7 am on Thursday, September 21, to 7 am on Saturday, September 23.
- Both consultants and junior doctors will be striking on Monday, October 2, Tuesday, October 3, and Wednesday,
 October 4, providing Christmas Day cover.

To understand the situation better, The Epsom and Ewell Times has delved into the arguments put forth by UK doctors explaining their reasons for considering a strike.

- 1. Pay and Working Conditions: One of the primary concerns voiced by doctors is the state of their pay and working conditions. Many doctors argue that their wages have not kept pace with the cost of living, and they face long working hours that often stretch them to the limit. Some argue that these conditions not only affect their own well-being but also put patient safety at risk.
- 2. Staff Shortages: The shortage of medical staff, including doctors and nurses, is another major concern. Doctors are often working in understaffed hospitals and clinics, leading to burnout and suboptimal patient care. They argue that without adequate staffing levels, patient safety is compromised, and they are unable to provide the level of care they would like to deliver.
- 3. Patient Care: Doctors frequently emphasize their commitment to providing high-quality patient care. However, they argue that the current conditions make it increasingly challenging to maintain the level of care patients deserve. Overcrowded emergency rooms, lengthy waiting times, and limited resources all contribute to a deteriorating quality of care
- 4. Mental Health: The toll on doctors' mental health is a pressing issue. The immense stress and emotional burden of their work can lead to burnout, anxiety, and depression. Doctors argue that addressing these mental health challenges is essential to ensure they can continue to provide effective care to patients.
- 5. NHS Funding: Doctors are also concerned about the overall funding of the National Health Service (NHS). They argue that the NHS needs increased funding to address the aforementioned issues adequately. Insufficient funding, they claim, hampers efforts to improve working conditions and patient care.
- 6. Privatization Concerns: Some doctors express worries about the gradual privatization of healthcare services in the UK. They fear that privatization could lead to a two-tier healthcare system, where those who can afford private care receive better services, leaving the public healthcare system further strained.

The doctors' strike is viewed by many as a last resort, taken only after exhausting negotiations with government officials and healthcare administrators. While the potential strike has raised concerns about the impact on patients, it also serves as a stark reminder of the challenges faced by medical professionals in the UK.

As the situation continues to develop, the nation watches closely, hoping for a resolution that can address the doctors' concerns while safeguarding the healthcare needs of the population. The outcome of this ongoing debate will undoubtedly have significant implications for the future of healthcare in the United Kingdom.

Epsom fair for health and well-being

On Saturday, September 23rd, the local charity **Age Concern Epsom & Ewell** will be hosting a Health & Wellbeing Fair at **Rosebery Park** in **Epsom**. The event is scheduled to run from 10 am to 3 pm and is open to attendees of all ages.

This community event aims to provide a diverse range of informative talks and demonstrations by local groups, charities, and small businesses, all focused on promoting and encouraging a healthy and well-balanced lifestyle. Visitors can expect insights from health practitioners on topics such as maintaining good posture, enhancing flexibility, foot care, the benefits of deep breathing, and mindfulness, among others.

The Rainbow Leisure Centre will be showcasing their activities suitable for individuals of all ages, while children can engage in rhythmic fun with Drumz Epsom. A fascinating tree trail will also be a part of the day's offerings, providing an opportunity for attendees to learn intriguing facts about the local park's trees. A small entry fee of £3 is required for the tree trail, and participants are encouraged to uncover hidden clues to unveil a special surprise, with all entries receiving a unique prize.

Further details about the tree trail can be found at https://www.jumblebee.co.uk/roseberyparktreetrail.

Throughout the event, there will be informative displays and talks by organizations such as the Epsom & Ewell Countryside Team, Epsom Common Association, Sustainable Epsom, and Ewell, and the Surrey Wildflowering Trust. Attendees can also take advantage of free bike checks, courtesy of Dr. Bike, available from 10 am to 3 pm.

The fair will also feature acclaimed author **Sarah Tucker**, who will deliver talks on the art of storytelling and the benefits of writing. Those interested in reducing waste can bring their own containers to shop with The Floating Refillery, a vendor offering a variety of quality household goods, cereals, and spices. Paper bags will also be available for use.

For those looking to satisfy their taste buds, Bake 88 will be on hand with delicious and healthy light bites, including award-winning bagels. Attendees can even bring a jam jar to create a sourdough starter to take home and nurture.

Age Concern Epsom & Ewell will be sharing information about the services they offer for the older generation within the borough. They will also discuss the various volunteering opportunities available and how both clients and volunteers can benefit from giving a little of their time each week.

The organizers are excited to present this event, which promises a wide array of engaging activities and informative sessions. They hope that attendees will take a leisurely stroll to explore the offerings and show their support for this inaugural event. It is anticipated that attendees will leave with newfound knowledge and perhaps even be inspired to try something new.

Close result in match of fluctuating fortunes

The Black and White bandwagon descended Saturday 16th upon the Geoffrey Knight Fields for the third round of the Regional 2 South East season. Old Reigatian (OR) are one of three clubs, along with London Cornish and Old Alleynians, who crossed Sutton and Epsom's path during their brief dalliance with Level 7 in 2012-13. For Rugby Lane supporters of a certain vintage there was a link to the club's former glory. The OR captain was Reilly Franklin-Talbot the son of erstwhile Sutton Number 8 Sean who, amongst many Herculean deeds, scored the last gasp try in the 1990 Surrey Cup final to defeat Old Mid-Whitgiftians by 16-11. Now returning to the present from some rose-tinted nostalgia, the hosts had begun the year with impressive wins over Sidcup and London Cornish in sharp contrast to the suburbanites' start. The early form guide was just maintained as OR edged past the visitors 35-29 in a game of fluctuating fortunes.

On another glorious summer afternoon, that had a refreshing breeze that was more sympathetic to the travails of the participants than last weekend's cauldron, the crowd gathered to revel in an afternoon made for running rugby. Freddy Bunting's lofted kick off was superbly tapped back by Michael Davies to initiate an opening period of Sutton control. Following multiple phases and profitable probing by Sutton and Epsom they were awarded a penalty. Freddy Bunting did the necessary and Sutton led 3-0. The Black and Whites returned to the OR 22 looking to build on their early advantage but in a crowded midfield Reigatian centre Tom Allen made a timely intervention to intercept and race away to score under the posts. The unchallenging offering was accepted by Conor Woods as the home crowd applauded their 7-3 lead after an enthralling eight minutes.

An accidental, but avoidable, offside by Sutton and Epsom gave the Reigate team the opportunity to test the visitors' defence as they kicked into the 22. The defence stood firm and won a scrummage that enabled them to exit via Chris Ballard's boot. However, a kick is only as good as its chase. A pitiful challenge encouraged a wonderful counter and in the blink of an eye a try

looked to be a certainty until a crucial pass hit the deck with the line at the mercy of OR who compounded their misery by giving away a penalty. Their disappointment was assuaged within scrum they deservedly scored. The backs created the overlap for flanker Finlay Lock to apply the coup de grâce. A sweetly struck conversion by Conor Woods made it 14-3.

The Old Reigatian backs were in full swing and it was a thrilling sight to behold. The combination of pace, evasive footwork and wonderful passing was devastating. In addition, the ubiquitous flanker Finlay Lock linked play with deft touches and was supported ably by captain Reilly Franklin-Talbot's powerful carrying. Attacking once more this potent potion for success was denied on the line by a Will Lloyd tackle. This was only a temporary stay of execution as OR scored from the 5-metre scrum. Winger Max Coyle stood up the defence and stepped past would be tacklers to finish with aplomb. Conor Woods bisected the uprights and the unstoppable Old Reigatian XV had an impressive and deserved 21-3 lead.

Sutton and Epsom tinkered with their front row as Tom Boaden was replaced by Tariq Al Khaldi. Then five minutes later the Sutton pack was forced into another change when Number 8 Kean Orchard injured his knee and the visitors brought Dan Jones off the bench. The Black and Whites now employed the boot to great effect. Firstly, a Bunting kick forced a drop out then an O'Brien effort set up a lineout in the 22. A jinking run by Gareth O'Brien had the hosts in retreat. The Sutton pack recycled the ball and George London forced his way over. Captain Bunting added the extras to cut the lead to 21-10. The next opportunity to add to the score went to the home team.

However, the Rugby Lane men resolutely defended a 5-metre line and the timely intervention of centre Ross Parsons won the visitors a relieving penalty. At the other end the Black and Whites were awarded a penalty and, in a rare demonstration of fallibility, Freddy Bunting's kick drifted by on the crosswind. The kicking machine returned to working order when the Sutton skipper slotted over his next opportunity that concluded the first period with Old Reigatian 21-13 to the good.

Within five minutes of the restart Freddy Bunting had reduced the deficit to 5 points with his third penalty of the afternoon. Sutton were playing with control and with astute application of their kicking game. The key to their improving fortunes was the set scrum as Messrs Al Khaldi, Howes and Lloyd were utterly dominant. Indeed it was from a scrum that Sutton and Epsom took the lead.

The Black and White pack marched back their opponents by 10 metres in a ruthless demonstration of power and control. Michael Davies took advantage of the back-peddling defence and the visitors were halted on the line. Sutton were not to be denied and hooker Jack Howes was able to reach over to score. Bunting's conversion put Sutton ahead by 23-21. They had overturned the 18-point margin by starving the Reigatian team of possession.

Sutton and Epsom extended their lead when the scrum was awarded a penalty in front of the posts and Freddy Bunting chipped it over to stretch the lead to 26-21. OR awoke from their slumber in startling fashion. From the restart Chris Ballard cleared to the host's half and the ball was gathered by Max Coyle who set off on a scything run that exploited Sutton's poor cover. Scrum half Alex Skinner was on hand to finish off the sweeping move and Conor Woods added the simplest of conversions. Reinvigorated by regaining the lead at 28-26, with a bonus point in the bank, OR's struck again moments later. Skipper Reilly Franklin-Talbot marauded into the 22 and passed to winger Harrison Mitchell who dotted down. Conor Woods made it five conversions from five attempts as Old Reigatian led 35-26 as the game entered the final quarter.

Sutton and Epsom were soon gifted a way back into the game with a penalty in front of the posts. However, Chris Ballard took a quick tap penalty trying to exploit the defensive disarray. The gamble did not go to glory and the Reigate men survived. Soon after a wonderful chance to extend their lead was butchered when centre Tom Allen's passing let him down following his brilliant break that denied the home crowd a third try in a devastating ten minute spell. With the game in time added on Dan Jones was manhandled at the breakdown and Sutton and Epsom had a penalty. This time the points were taken to give the visitors a potential losing bonus point as the lead was reduced to 35-29. A minute later the Rugby Lane supporters were crestfallen when Old Reigatian were awarded a penalty in front of the posts. The previously perfect Conor Woods erred and the score remained the same. Despite frantic efforts from the Black and Whites there was no eleventh hour drama and the game concluded moments later with OR triumphant by 35-29.

Old Reigatian's backs played some thrilling rugby on a perfect day in the wonderful setting of the Geoffrey Knight Fields. In addition, the tireless Finlay Lock excelled on the flank as OR outscored Sutton and Epsom by five goals to two. In a game of contrasting styles the hosts certainly monopolised the highlights package but there are many ways to flay a feline. The Sutton pack with Tariq Al Khaldi making a most significant contribution off the bench made it an intriguing contest.

With 19 points from the bludgeoning Bunting boot the game could have gone either way. For the visitors there were improvements from the previous outing. Ross Parsons in the centres epitomised the improved work at the breakdown. Jack Howes at hooker had a 100% record with his lineout throwing. However, the garlands are reserved for the fabulous front row who created the platform from which all their success came.

Old Reigatian remain unbeaten, second in the table on points difference having garnered the maximum 15 from their three matches. Sutton have now lost to three of the four unbeaten XVs. Next Saturday they host the other unbeaten side, Battersea Ironsides, who top the table.

Sutton and Epsom:

Michael Davies, Jack Briggs, Ross Parsons, Freddy Bunting ©, Max Russell, Gareth O'Brien, Chris Ballard, Tom Boaden, Jack Howes, Will Lloyd, Ewan McTaggart, Josh Glanville, George London, Rob Hegarty and Kean Orchard.

Replacements: Tariq Al Khaldi, Dan Jones and Alfie Baker. XXX

Old Reigatian: Sam Turner, Harrison Mitchell, Gareth Stephens, Tom Allen, Max Coyle, Conor Woods, Alex Skinner, Ciaran Lee,

Ciaran Nestor, Toby Collister, Reilly Franklin-Talbot ©, Dan Grant, Seb Courteney-Walker, Finlay Lock and Oli Brooks.

Replacements: Ethan Monk, Sam Lenihan and Max Nichol.