



## An Epsom 17th century pub to become supermarket?

A 17th century pub could be transformed into a Sainsbury's Local. Plans have been submitted to refurbish the Grade II-listed drinking establishment, on Dorking Road in Epsom, to a convenience store.

If approved, a Sainsbury's convenience store would take over the ground floor of the historic building and install an ATM machine outside. Plans also include resurfacing and reducing the car park to just 13 spaces, four of which will be reserved for delivery vehicles.

The former White Horse Public House was converted into Lava Lounge, a restaurant and cocktail bar, in 2020. Lava Lounge closed in January 2024, having been on the market for at least two years according to planning documents.

Used for centuries for drinking, the former purpose of the pub is no longer viable according to Sainsbury's. "Given the wealth of drinking establishments in Epsom, not just in the town centre, it is unlikely that the loss of a facility which has already been closed for a year could be considered a detriment," the application said.

Serving a specific catchment area, the proposed Sainsbury's is said to be conveniently located for nearby residents, visitors and employees at Epsom hospital as well as passing trade. The development will also create around 20 new jobs, a mixture of full and part-time.

"Very little appears to have survived" from the 17th-18th century on the ground floor, planning documents state, perhaps only the thick walls around the chimney breasts. The timber framed structure at first floor level appears to be correctly placed for a historic building but, the report says, the timbers appear to be modern.

Sainsbury's heritage statement states the proposals would have a "neutral effect" on the special interest of a listed building. The report says the vast majority of the building's internal heritage value has been lost from modern adaptations.

Planning documents read: "The core of the building has a hipped slate roof and is of timber framed construction, some of which is evidently modern, but which may form the altered remains of the 17th or 18th century building referred to in the Listing description. The pub has a parapeted brick frontage which likely dates from the middle of the 19th century."

The scheme proposes removing the replacement of the Victorian-style sash window, as well as reconfiguring and refurbishing the insides of the former pub. Demolishing the covered yard at the back of the site, Sainsbury's plans to build an extension to form a 'back of house' for the convenience store.

Minor modifications to the historic part of the building are needed to use the original pub building for the back office part of the shop. The application clarifies the historic part of the building is not being used for a sales area.

Neighbours can comment on the application on Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's website. No decision date has been listed yet.

View outside the Lava Lounge, and former White Horse Pub, in Epsom. (Credit: Sainsbury's/ Epsom and Ewell Planning Documents)

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## What Epsom could do with Woking's £75 million bail out?

Critical front-line services will be spared after a huge government 'bail out' was agreed, bankrupt Woking Borough Council has said. Officially referred to as Exceptional Financial Support for local authorities, Woking Borough Council has been given £74.9 million for the 2025/26 financial year on top of the £96.5million agreed for 24/25.

Woking declared itself effectively bust in 2023 with debts of about £2 billion. It forced the council to cut new spending, axe non-statutory services and increase tax by 10 per cent.

It used the money to build up what it hoped would be a significant investment portfolio but instead saddled itself with huge debt repayments costing tens of millions of pounds every year that it simply can not afford.

It has left the council relying on the Government to cover the cost of its heavy borrowing, known as minimum debt repayment. And this week came the news that it would receive all the money it has asked for - including a further £ 2.8million to cover the



cost of providing services this year.

Had the Government refused completely the council would have ground to a halt. Councils also have to, by law, balance their books each year, and the £2.8m above and beyond debt repayment was agreed as it was viewed that Woking Borough Council has been doing what it can to reduce its spending.

This has included mass layoffs, the sale of assets, and finding partners to take over the running of others. Had any further cuts been made in such a short period of time, the results would have been 'catastrophic' to both the council and residents it had been said.

The government cash comes as part of 30 councils overall that have been given support to manage financial pressures – such is the widespread problem of local government finance.

Cllr Ann-Marie Barker, Leader of Woking Borough Council, said: "I welcome the Government's decision to provide exceptional financial support. Critically, this will ensure that the council can meet its financial obligations relating to its £2.1 billion legacy debt without impacting front-line services and will allow us to set a balanced budget at a meeting of Council on Monday 3 March.

"We continue to urgently address the council's legacy debt through work being undertaken as part of our Improvement and Recovery Plan on asset rationalisation, debt reduction and improved commercial governance.

"We remain committed to working alongside Commissions and Government to find a lasting resolution to our complex and challenging financial situation."

In January 2023, an external assurance review covering Woking Borough Council's governance, finance and commercial issues was carried out. It provided an external assessment of Woking Borough Council's governance arrangements, financial situation, commercial investments and its capacity and capability to manage these.

The Secretary of State was not satisfied that the pace or scale of the council's response was proportionate to the issues it faced and decided immediate urgent government action was required, – and On May 25, 2023, he decided to intervene and appointed the review team as commissioners.

By June that year the council declared itself bankrupt and by October, the Commissioners spoke of the gravity of the situation in Woking and the scale of the challenge the council faced.

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## Poundland saving itself pennies in Elmbridge

Poundland has been told to "show some local pride" and repair its broken shop front window and remove the graffiti from its East Molesey store.

The low-price chain, which serves up to seven million customers every week nationwide, has been issued with a community protection warning by Elmbridge Borough Council after ignoring multiple requests to address the eyesores.

Elmbridge Borough Council says it works with business groups and community volunteers to keep its high streets, villages and parades thriving and to bring that sense of civic pride.

One group, from Manor Road, takes care of the planters along Walton Road to "lift up the high street".

Initiatives in the last year have been designed to make a positive impact on the community, such as new bins, flower planters, deep cleans and pavement works.

It's part of a move to get businesses, volunteers and the council working together in support of the borough's high streets.

That work has been undermined for "almost a year" as Poundland left temporary wooden panelling and unsightly graffiti, in place.

A spokesman for Elmbridge Borough Council said: "Despite multiple requests to address the graffiti and damage at Poundland in East Molesey, sufficient action has not been taken.



"The store has tried to clean the windows professionally but could not get the graffiti removed.

"In support of local residents, we have issued this Community Protection Warning hoping that Poundland will now undertake the necessary repairs and support our high streets."

Under Community Protection Warnings, £100 fines can be issued in the first instance. If no action is taken, prosecutions can begin. If convicted the maximum penalty is a fine up to £20,000.

Councillor Steve Bax (Conservative: Molesey East) said: "Almost a year has gone by without action and they are giving the impression they are not bothered as long as the money continues to roll in.

"When we have got Manor Road residents caring for the planters so brilliantly and doing their best to lift up the high street, we need this retailer to show some local pride too.

"The council has issued a community protection warning against Poundland which gives the company 28 days to fix the shop front or face a fine.

"Hopefully this formal action will now mean the company move forward and deal with shopfront issues."

Poundland was approached for comment.

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## Epsom's Horton Cemetery gets attention of two kinds

Just as **The Epsom and Ewell Times** was about to publish a letter concerning Council efforts to tidy and make safer the boundaries of Horton Cemetery (Hook Road / Horton Lane) a motor car struck railings near the roundabout and knocked over the Memorial to the near 9000 patients buried and neglected in the privately owned 5 acre cemetery.

**Surrey Police** issued a statement: "We were called to Horton Lane, Ewell at around 7:10pm on Wednesday 19 February after reports of a single vehicle collision at the location. Officers responded and found that the collision had resulted in damage to a fence and cemetery stone. The driver was not arrested and did not require medical treatment."



It is understood that Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is responsible for the Memorial after former Labour Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, **Alan Carlson**, raised the money for its installation through a public appeal in 2004.

The charity The Friends of Horton Cemetery continues its campaign to restore the Cemetery to community ownership following the bizarre NHS transfer of the asset to a property speculator in 1983. **Michael Heighes** of Marque Securities has taken away the tombstones and all the crosses on each grave have gone. The cemetery is barely recognisable as a cemetery and relatives cannot enter without trespassing.

Recently, the Charity has made a submission to the Law Commission, which is considering reforms to cemetery law. It has submitted that the opportunity to update the laws should include a duty to maintain and allow access to cemeteries in private hands.

The charity has also sent a letter to Epsom and Ewell Borough Council in connection with the current Local Plan arguing any development of neighbouring **Horton Farm** for housing should seek developer's funds for the restoration of the Cemetery as an amenity of peace and remembrance open to the public.

Mr **Lionel Blackman**, Secretary of the Charity, said "The existence of the largest asylum cemetery in Europe is not going to disappear. With relatives coming forward every week and our research team publishing the lives of over 600 patients so far, it is only a matter of time and whichever local government takes over, that action will redress this historic outrage."

Sam Jones – Reporter

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Letter from Matthew Walters, Epsom.

**Dear Sir,**



I would like to draw attention to recent developments concerning Horton Cemetery in West Ewell, Epsom.

For many years, concerns have been raised about the lack of respect shown to the 9,000 individuals buried there, whose graves are no longer marked. More recently, attention has also turned to the safety risks for road users on the busy Hook Road.

Until yesterday, the grass verge alongside the cemetery was largely inaccessible due to overgrown brambles and tree branches extending from the cemetery, as well as significant fly-tipping, including building waste.

It is therefore welcome news that Surrey County Council and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council have worked together to clear the area, improving both its appearance and safety, as evidenced in the accompanying photographs.

While the decision to classify Horton Cemetery and its 9,000 graves as an “amenity woodland” remains a point of contention, the recent clearance has ensured that the surroundings are now more in keeping with a cemetery. However, the public should be aware that sections of the perimeter railings remain unsafe, with some sharp railings protruding towards Hook Road at dangerous angles, none of which are currently marked with hazard tape.

Falling branches from trees inside the cemetery continue to pose a risk to road users, and it is hoped that Surrey County Council will monitor this issue and take necessary action, as indicated in previous communications.

In the meantime, cyclists, motorcyclists, and motorists should exercise caution when travelling along Hook Road near the cemetery. Furthermore, steps should be taken to ensure that the cost of maintaining overgrown vegetation from within the cemetery does not fall upon Council Tax payers.

Horton Cemetery remains in private ownership by a property developer, and the recent clearance now allows for greater visibility into the site. This presents an opportunity for the public to assess whether greater care and respect should be afforded to those buried there.

Out of sight should not mean out of mind.

Yours faithfully,

Matthew Walters

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## Epsom Stands in Solidarity with Ukraine on War's Third Anniversary

Epsom's Market Place was a scene of unity and reflection today as residents, dignitaries, and members of the Ukrainian community gathered to mark the third anniversary (24th February) of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Organised by the Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network (EERN) and Epsom based Surrey Stands With Ukraine (SSWU), the event served as a powerful demonstration of the town's enduring support for those affected by the war.

The Worshipful The Mayor of Epsom & Ewell, Councillor **Steve Bridger**, (RA Stamford) and the Mayoress, Carol Bridger, attended the commemoration, reaffirming the borough's commitment to standing in solidarity with Ukraine.

### “Kindness Will Prevail”

The event opened with a speech from **Jo Sherring**, co-founder of EERN, who highlighted the strong bonds forged between the local and Ukrainian communities. “We are privileged to have met and worked with such wonderful people, and we will continue to support them as long as they need our help,” she said. EERN supports as many as 80 or more families from Ukraine. Mainly women and children.

**Roy Deadman**, Chair of SSWU, praised the tireless efforts of volunteers who have dedicated time and resources to aid Ukraine. “The support for Ukraine we have seen today from this wonderful community still shows us that kindness will prevail in a world that feels very dark right now,” he said. SSWU has sent a van of civilian aid nearly every week since the war began and thousands of pounds of aid for humanitarian projects in Ukraine.

The two charities work together in offices generously provided by the Ashley Centre and for which the Council has waived all business rates.





## MP's Message of Support

Epsom & Ewell's MP, **Helen Maguire**, who was unable to attend in person, sent a statement which was read aloud to the assembled crowd. She paid tribute to Ukraine's resilience and urged continued support for its fight against Russian aggression.

"Three years ago, the world watched in horror as Putin launched his brutal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. I am proud that Epsom's community has gathered here today to say what we have said from the very beginning: We stand with Ukraine. We stand with its people. And we will not waver," she said.

Ms Maguire described Ukraine's battle as one for "democracy, sovereignty, and the right of nations to choose their own future." She praised the courage of the Ukrainian people, whether on the battlefield or in communities enduring relentless attacks, displacement, and loss.

"To our Ukrainian friends here today: you are not alone. We have not forgotten you, and we will continue to support you, in both word and action, for as long as it takes," she added.

The MP also called for the UK to take a leadership role in supporting Ukraine's victory, advocating for military assistance and the seizure of Russian assets to aid in reconstruction. "The future of Ukraine must be decided by Ukrainians," she said.

## Emotional Tributes

The gathering featured a powerful performance by **Helin Konyar**, a third-year student at Laine Theatre Arts and a Ukrainian national, who sang Ukraine's spiritual anthem *God Save Ukraine*. Her performance deeply moved those in attendance.

A particularly poignant moment came from **Constantin Ryzhikov**, a blind Ukrainian refugee, who shared his heartfelt gratitude for Britain's support. He spoke about the difficulties faced by Ukrainians both in their homeland and those who have sought refuge abroad, moving many in the audience to tears.

The event also included a prayer led by Deacon **Gary Carter** of St Joseph's Church in Epsom, calling for peace and strength for those suffering in Ukraine.

## A Show of Unity

The commemoration ended with the Ukrainian national anthem, once again performed by Helin Konyar. The assembled crowd joined in a moment of solemn reflection, standing in solidarity with Ukraine.

As the war enters its fourth year, the event served as a poignant reminder of Epsom's unwavering support for Ukraine and the power of community in times of crisis.

## Ukrainian Culture

Since the war talented Ukrainian musicians and a local Ukraine Choir come together for the 11th Ukraine Music Evening since the war began. Held at 6pm on Saturday 22nd March in the Worship Area of the Epsom Methodist Church in Ashley Road. Entry is free and a leaving collection is dedicated to support the musicians whose livelihoods have been cut in their homeland.

For more information on how to support Ukraine locally, visit:

- **Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network:** [www.epsomrefugeenetwork.org](http://www.epsomrefugeenetwork.org)
- **Surrey Stands With Ukraine:** [www.surreystandswithukraine.org](http://www.surreystandswithukraine.org)

Image: Roy Deadman of SSWU addresses the crowd alongside Jo Sherring of EERN and Deacon Gary Carter (Credit Nina Kaye)

Related reports:

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2 years on Epsom to gather in solidarity with Ukraine



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# Epsom Man's 56-Mile Walk to Raise Mental Health Awareness

A local Epsom resident, Nicholas Mark Dulake, is set to complete an extraordinary challenge this Sunday, 23rd February 2025, as he concludes a 56-mile walk in aid of the mental health charity, Mind. Nicholas embarked on this challenge in January, aiming to raise funds and awareness about mental health issues and the stigma that surrounds them.

His journey is deeply personal. On 20th February 2024, Nicholas attempted to take his own life. His survival led to five weeks in a coma, multiple hospital transfers, and several life-saving operations, during which he was resuscitated four times. As a result of his ordeal, he now lives with a tracheostomy, which presents daily challenges with his breathing. However, rather than allowing his experience to define him negatively, he has chosen to channel his energy into raising awareness and supporting others struggling with their mental health.

To date, Nicholas has raised an incredible £3,705 in sponsorship for Mind. To mark the completion of his challenge, he has arranged a final walk around Epsom Downs and is inviting the local community to join him in showing solidarity for mental health awareness.

"I've had an overwhelming response from people who have read my story and reached out to tell me how much it has helped them," Nicholas shared. Through his personal blog, *Start Again Monday* ([www.startagainmonday.co.uk](http://www.startagainmonday.co.uk)), he continues to share his journey and offer support to others facing similar struggles.

His mission is clear: to break down the stigma surrounding mental health and ensure that those who are suffering know they are not alone.

Local residents are encouraged to take part in the walk on Sunday to show their support for this important cause. For those who wish to donate, details can be found on Nicholas's blog.

Nicholas is also keen to share his experiences in greater detail following the completion of his challenge. If you would like to learn more, follow his blog or reach out to him directly.

For those struggling with mental health issues, charities like Mind provide crucial support and resources. Nicholas's story serves as a powerful reminder that recovery is possible and that support is always available.

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# Surrey Uni Zebrafish Study Links Blood Pressure Drug to Potential ADHD Treatment

A commonly prescribed blood pressure medication could offer a safer alternative for treating ADHD symptoms, according to a new study involving the University of Surrey. The findings suggest that amlodipine, a well-established drug for managing hypertension, may help reduce hyperactivity and impulsivity, key characteristics of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

## From Fish to Humans: Genetic Links in ADHD Research

The study, published in *Neuropsychopharmacology*, tested five potential drugs in rats genetically bred to exhibit ADHD-like symptoms. Of these, only amlodipine significantly reduced hyperactivity. To validate the findings, researchers turned to zebrafish (*Danio rerio*), an important model organism in neurological studies, which shares approximately **70% of its genes** with humans. The zebrafish trials confirmed that amlodipine reduces hyperactivity and impulsivity, and for the first time, researchers confirmed that the drug crosses the blood-brain barrier, directly influencing brain function.

Further analysis of human genetic data reinforced the findings, showing that ADHD is linked to calcium channels in the brain—the same targets of amlodipine. A review of UK-wide patient records further strengthened the case, revealing that individuals taking amlodipine reported fewer mood swings and a lower tendency for risk-taking behaviour.



Dr Matthew Parker, co-author of the study from the University of Surrey, noted:

*"Repurposing amlodipine, a well-established blood pressure medication, offers a promising and swift pathway to address ADHD symptoms. Our research indicates that, due to its existing approval and safety profile, amlodipine could be rapidly redeployed as a treatment option for ADHD, potentially providing relief to patients sooner than developing new medications."*

## Why Zebrafish? The Genetic Overlap with Humans

Zebrafish have become an invaluable model in medical research due to their high genetic similarity with humans. In fact, they share a greater proportion of their genes with humans than many might expect. Some examples include:

- **Chimpanzees** (~98-99%) – our closest genetic relatives.
- **Mice** (~85%) – widely used in biomedical research.
- **Dogs** (~84%) – studied for genetic diseases and neurological conditions.
- **Zebrafish** (~70%) – a crucial model for studying brain function and drug effects.
- **Fruit flies** (~60%) – key for understanding genetics and neurobiology.

Because of this genetic overlap, zebrafish are often used in drug discovery, particularly for neurological disorders. Their transparent embryos and rapid development allow scientists to study the effects of medications in real-time.

## A Safer Alternative to Existing ADHD Medications?

Current ADHD treatments, such as stimulant medications, are effective but often come with significant side effects, including appetite loss, high blood pressure, headaches, and sleep disturbances. Additionally, stimulant medications carry a risk of misuse. Amlodipine, already widely prescribed and well-tolerated, could offer a new alternative with a safer profile.

With approximately **25% of ADHD patients not responding well to existing treatments**, the need for new options is urgent. If further clinical trials confirm these findings, amlodipine could be repurposed as an ADHD treatment much faster than developing a brand-new drug, providing relief for patients sooner.

The study highlights the importance of genetic research in understanding brain disorders and demonstrates how unlikely connections—such as a heart medication treating a neurodevelopmental condition—can lead to breakthroughs in medical science.

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## Surrey sink-hole major incident

A significant sinkhole has emerged on Godstone High Street in Surrey, leading to evacuations and widespread disruptions. The incident began on Monday night when a section of the road collapsed, revealing a hole filled with water. By Tuesday morning, the sinkhole had expanded to approximately 20 metres in length and 6 metres in width.

Surrey County Council has declared the situation a major incident, with the Surrey Local Resilience Forum overseeing the response. Assistant Director for Safer Communities, Carl Bussey, stated that efforts are underway in collaboration with emergency services, utility companies, and Tandridge District Council to ensure public safety and restore essential services.

The sinkhole's rapid expansion has led to the evacuation of around 30 properties within a 100-metre cordon. Residents have been advised to avoid the area while investigations and repairs are conducted. The incident has also resulted in the closure of Godstone High Street between Oxted Road and Bletchingley Road, with diversions in place for the foreseeable future.

The cause of the sinkhole is believed to be a burst water main. SES Water has confirmed that engineers are on-site working to repair the damaged pipe and restore water supplies to affected homes. In the interim, bottled water is being distributed to residents.

Local residents have expressed concerns over the incident. Some evacuees have reported hearing cracking sounds and witnessing the sinkhole's growth overnight. One resident described the scene as resembling the aftermath of an earthquake, with buckled roads and pavements.

Authorities are urging the public to follow updates from Surrey County Council, Surrey Highways, and Tandridge District Council on social media for the latest information regarding the situation.





## Councillor thinks new Ewell homes refusal is batty

Plans for four new homes in Ewell have been refused over bats potentially living in the two bungalows. Although one survey was done, councillors could not rule out there were definitely no bats in the buildings.

The scheme involved demolishing two semi-detached bungalows on Kirby Close, and erecting four, 3-bedroom homes in a residential Ewell suburb. The two-storey houses would have two car parking spaces per house with associated landscaping, according to the report.

However, the applicant had not carried out a phase 2 survey establishing if there were any bats in the bungalow. Officers "could not be satisfied" the demolition of the building did not pose a risk to protected species and its habitat. Members rejected the application at an Epsom and Ewell Borough Planning Committee meeting on February 13.

Cllr **Julian Freeman** (LibDem College) said: "This smacks of desperation to find some reason for turning down an application for housing that we desperately need in this borough." An increasingly frustrated Cllr Freeman reminded the committee that the borough has a "housing crisis".

The Liberal Democrat member argued that you would know if bats are on the site as "you would be sweeping up the mess on a fairly regular basis". He said: "If [the council] is going to refuse an application because there *might* be bats then, surely you need some evidence of that."

But Cllr **Steven McCormick**, (RA Woodcote and Langley) chairing the meeting, explained the plans have to be turned down because there is no evidence that bats are *not* in the two bungalows. Councils have a legal requirement for bat surveys to ensure the mammals are not harmed in the demolition or construction of buildings.

The potential harm to protected species is the only reason why the risks would outweigh the benefits of delivering two houses, planning officers told the committee as they recommended the application for refusal.

If the applicant was to appeal the decision, members asked whether the council would be "laughed at" for refusing on the grounds there was no evidence that bats are non-existent on the site. However, officers told the committee that an application on Reigate Road, which was refused for a lack of satisfactory bat survey, was dismissed at appeal by the Planning Inspector.

Councillors questioned whether they could approve the application with the condition of a further bat survey, but officers said National England guidance is it has to be known early on if bats are in the building before approval could go ahead. The bungalows cannot be demolished until the council knows whether or not bats are there.

Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) said he was happy to approve it once the second bat survey is done as he couldn't see "any significant or demonstrable harm that outweighs the benefit of two additional dwellings".

A previous similar application for the 'principle of development' was rejected in July 2024 on the basis the housing proposal was too dense to match the character of the street. This is currently at appeal.

Image: 9-10 Kirby Close in Ewell, where the proposed development would be built. (Credit: Google Street View)

## Sutton and Epsom Soar in Nine-Try Extravaganza

Sutton & Epsom RFC 59 Dartfordians 20. Saturday 15th February.

1988, the first league season, was when Dartfordians last visited Rugby Lane on the final day of the season. On that occasion, the visitors were safe in the knowledge that they had retained their league status, but this time around, the Kent club were looking for vital points in their struggle to avoid the drop. Considering that the Black & Whites had to come from 21-3 down to win the reverse fixture, having been aided by injuries that reduced Dartfordians to 14, the Bexley-based club arrived with realistic hopes of success. By the final whistle, the visitors had endured another afternoon blighted by injuries and, despite a spirited performance, were overwhelmed 59-20.

On a chill and overcast afternoon, Sutton welcomed back not only the Stag weekend adventurers but also Matt Whitaker in his 199th league appearance. Dartfordians kicked off attacking the clubhouse end. No doubt responding to the need for a strong start, the visitors dominated the first 15 minutes of this encounter. Gareth O'Brien was soon scurrying to gather a ball rolling into



the corner and was rewarded for his efforts by being bundled out of the in-goal area. Soon the Kent team were attacking from a 5-metre lineout. Though thwarted when held up in a maul, the visiting pack earned a reprieve as S&E fumbled at the first scrumage.

Under the baton of Jarlath Hetherington, the 10 orchestrated a telling attack from the subsequent set piece, switching the focus from the open side to the blindside. Resolute tackling was not enough to deny Dartfordians as lock William Tuffley did superbly to score in the corner. Hetherington's touchline conversion missed, but his side had a morale-boosting 5-0 advantage after ten minutes.

Moments later, a superb kick ahead by winger Elliot Soler-Gomez produced a 50/22 and had Dartfordians in prime position to extend their lead. Stoic defence denied Dartfordians as they were held up over the line. Sutton shunned the traditional drop-out option of clearing as far as possible for an attacking short ball they hoped would initiate a telling counter. It did not, and the packs were soon settling down for a Darts scrum in a most advantageous position.

With clinical efficiency, they exploited the blindside with a powerful carry from Number 8 Harry Wright that saw him touch down in the corner. The conversion from the flank failed, but the hosts trailed 10-0 and had yet to have the ball in the opposition half. The second try was not a moment to allude to Wildean wit as stentorian words urged Sutton to raise their game.

The response was instantaneous as Adam Bibby pursued the restart and charged down the clearance kick. He appeared to be second favourite to reach the ball, but the bounce favoured S&E, and the centre scored, putting Sutton 5-10 down.

The Bourne Road boys viewed this as an unfortunate and temporary aberration as their excellent defence neutered the Black & Whites, who attempted to spread the ball wide. Using the same successful formula as before, Dartfordians kicked for territory and were soon in the 22 looking for another score. The S&E defence matched each assault and, for the second time, held up the visitors over their line.

It was the hosts who scored next. A surging break by Freddy Bunting gained a penalty, and he advanced his side into the enemy half. The ball was carried into the 22, and Tom Lennard caught a pass aimed at his laces, straightened the line, and passed to Josh Glanville, and the lock gave Sam Lennie his first try of the afternoon. Lennie intelligently dummied the touchdown in the corner and sauntered round under the posts. An appreciative Freddy Bunting added the extras for the 12-10 lead on the half-hour.

Moments later, the Kiwi hooker scored a sublime solo effort. Collecting the ball in the middle of the field, he set off with not only 40 metres to go but numerous defenders to avoid or dismiss from his presence. Changing pace and direction, he relentlessly advanced until he reached out to score with two tacklers hanging off him. Captain Bunting made it 19-10, and Sutton were in the ascendancy.

Before the break, with echoes of the reverse fixture, Dartfordians suffered the cruellest of blows. Prop Stephen Garrett collided with lock Lewis Potter, and after a lengthy delay and excellent work from the physio teams, they were patched up. However, both had ended their afternoon's rugby and departed for A&E to tend to their wounds. The visitors had lost two of their pack, both players having over 100 appearances, and they were forced into significant changes.

Their cause was not aided when Sutton secured the bonus point before the break with their best rugby of the half. Excellent continuity and sweeping attacks resulted in winger Angus Findlay scoring in the corner, and the Bunting boot took the interval score to 26-10.

Dartfordians needed a reprise of their opening efforts of the match. To their great credit, they immediately put Sutton on the back foot. A wonderful break with beautifully timed passes saw the hosts desperately scrambling to cover in their 22. The initial thrust was parried, but eventually, sheer weight of numbers told, and the superb Jarlath Hetherington was rewarded for his efforts with a try. Though unable to add the conversion to his score, Dartfordians were back in the contest at 15-26.

Perhaps with Medway memories still resonating, the Black & Whites were in no mood to let a sizeable lead slip from their grasp again. Steve Munford took a quick tap penalty, and Rob Hegarty punished a retreating defence with a 30-metre break to the 22. The ball rapidly went to the flank, where Freddy Bunting stood his man up and strolled in for the try. The gluttonous points accumulator added the conversion for 33-15.

Hetherington tried to rally his troops with a wonderful kick and collect, but the visitors were superbly turned over in the Sutton 22. Replacement Matt Whitaker made a powerful break, ably supported by Adam Bibby, and yet again, Freddy Bunting was the man in the right place at the right time to collect his second try of the afternoon. The conversion failed, but the 38-15 lead appeared to be unassailable.

Approaching the final quarter, the Black & Whites cut loose, and Adam Bibby was at the centre of some of their best running rugby of the season so far. The NZ centre has won plaudits for his exceptional defensive qualities all campaign and has become an increasing attacking threat as each week goes by, but in this match, he was exceptional.



With a perfectly timed and angled run, he sliced through the defence, and a delightful dummy saw him cruise through to score his second. Freddy Bunting advanced his personal account, and Sutton led 45-15.

From the restart, Sutton attempted some champagne rugby from near their line. Sadly, the result was not a magnum of Dom Perignon White Gold but rather a flat spritzer. Some extremely speculative long passes culminated in an isolated Angus Findlay being put in a deep slurry pit of trouble. Ryan Chandler gratefully accepted the gift, and a joyous Dartfordians had scored their fourth try, equating to a vital bonus point.

Though the conversion slipped narrowly wide as referee Stronge blew the final whistle, the visitors had a much-deserved consolation as Sutton & Epsom won a highly entertaining match 59-20.

Once again, there is no league action next week, and the programme returns on 1st March with the Black & Whites heading to Thurrock. Meanwhile, Dartfordians will host Gravesend in a pivotal match in their fight for survival.

### **Sutton & Epsom:**

O'Brien, Scott, Bibby, Bunting (C), Lennard, Munford, Johnson, Lennie, Boaden, Glanville, McTaggart, Jones, Tame & Hegarty.

Replacements: Howes, Whitaker and Rea.

### **Dartfordians:**

Scott, Cappuccio, Taylor J, Nichols, Soler-Gomez, Hetherington, Chappell, Garrett, Sweeney, Chapman, Tuffley, Potter, Williams, Chandler & Wright.

Replacements: Hooban, Taylor M. & Ola.

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