Epsom Choral Society carols for cardiac charity

Epsom Choral Society presented its ever-popular annual Christmas Concert on Saturday 21st December at St Martin's Church in Epsom. Always a highlight of the festive season, this year's concert was a joyful celebration filled with music, readings, and plenty of audience participation. The concert was attended by the Worshipful, the Mayor of Epsom & Ewell, and the Lady Mayoress, Steve and Carol Bridger.

The choir welcomed back **Connaught Brass**, one of the UK's leading brass ensembles, known for their vibrant performances across the UK and Europe. They brought the true spirit of Christmas through their entertaining instrumental pieces and in their accompaniments to the traditional favourites.

This year's programme featured a variety of carols and Christmas songs performed by the choir, accompanied by Marion Lea on the piano and Ben Lewis-Smith on the organ as well as seasonal brass arrangements and uplifting Christmas readings. As always, the audience had the opportunity to join in singing much-loved traditional carols, and filled the church with the warmth and joy of the season.

In keeping with the Christmas spirit of giving, there was an exit collection in aid of the charity Cardiac Risk in the Young (CRY) where over £650 was raised. CRY works to reduce the frequency of young sudden cardiac deaths through vital awareness, screening, and research, making this a particularly meaningful way to support those in need during the holiday season.

Epsom business contact with the King warranted

Epsom based since 2013 **Cirrus**, the leading provider of contact centre software, is proud to announce it has been granted a Royal Warrant of Appointment by His Majesty **King Charles III**. The grants were made to 386 companies previously holding a Royal Warrant of Appointment from Queen Elizabeth II, as well as 7 companies with an established and ongoing trading relationship with HM Queen Camilla.

This prestigious recognition marks a reappointment for Cirrus, building on the acknowledgement previously granted by Her late Majesty The Queen for its outstanding service to the Royal Household.

Cirrus has built a strong reputation for providing innovative, cloud-based contact centre solutions that help organisations improve customer engagement and service delivery. This Royal Warrant recognises the company's continued excellence in supporting the Royal Collection Trust.

Jason Roos, Founder and CEO of Cirrus, shared: "It's an immense honour for Cirrus to receive this recognition with a Royal Warrant. This achievement reflects the hard work and dedication of our team. We've always focused on delivering solutions that make a real impact, and this recognition from His Majesty's Household validates that effort in the most meaningful way."

The Royal Warrant of Appointment is awarded to businesses that have supplied goods or services to the Royal Household for at least five years. This announcement also highlights Cirrus' ongoing commitment to supporting local communities, while maintaining the highest environmental standards. Cirrus joins the ranks of household names such as BT and Samsung.

"Looking back, it's incredible to see how far we've come. And looking ahead, we're more motivated than ever to keep pushing the boundaries of what we can achieve. This Royal Warrant is a recognition of our daily efforts, and we're excited to continue collaborating with fantastic partners and clients," Roos added.

In the past year, Cirrus has continued to thrive, securing new clients across sectors such as public services, healthcare, and retail. The company's solutions are trusted by organisations including Nisbets, Premium Credit, and Northern Ireland Water.

After 12 wins in a run Sutton & Epsom fall at the

thirteenth

Old Reigatian 21 Sutton & Epsom RFC 15. Saturday 21st December.

Midweek illnesses, at one stage, threatened to derail Sutton selection for the last league game in 2024. Ultimately the usual array of injuries, concussion protocols and Saturnalian celebrations led to only four changes from the squad that tamed Beckenham. In September the two sides thrilled Rugby Lane with Old Reigatian holding on to win 48-43. Since that day OR have only enjoyed two more wins and even more remarkably S&E have not indulged in the frippery of a solitary further bonus point. Entering Round 13 after six wins on the spin would it be 'Seventh Heaven' or 'A Game Too Far' for the Black & Whites? In another enthralling and entertaining encounter the hosts triumphed 21-15 completing the season double over Sutton.

Despite the recent meteorological travails the pitch was in pristine condition and full credit to all those people who work tirelessly to make Geoffrey Knight Fields such an excellent venue. Though pleasantly moist under foot, rather than muddy, there was a strong diagonal wind and the ominous prospect of impending rain. Almost at once the wind, favouring the hosts, demonstrated its venomous teeth by sweeping a Reigatian kick comfortably beyond the playing parameters and play resumed with a Sutton scrum in the hosts' half. Sutton opened their account after five minutes. A powerful scrum on halfway was followed by a Bibby break and a Rea run. Fleet-footed fly-half Freddy Bunting looped around and received the ball to dash into the corner. The captain, making light of the elements, added the conversion to his try for a 7-0 advantage.

From the restart the visitors were on the attack again with Ben Tame carrying out of the 22 to link with Josh Rea who fed Dan Jones who kicked ahead. Sutton stole the line out and were awarded a penalty. Freddy Bunting opted for the three points and extended the lead to 10-0. Perhaps Old Reigatian feeling the pressure of having the wind started to run from everywhere rather than exploiting the conditions with the boot. Errors mounted and Sutton were in the ascendancy and pressing for another try. Gareth O'Brien's angled run was met by a fabulous try-saving tackle on the quarter hour. At the end of the first quarter the fluent play from the Rugby Lane team was rewarded. The referee played advantage and the ball was flung out to the right touchline. Angus Findlay did well to take the high pass and then excelled himself with a perfect inside pass to Rob Hegarty who dived into the corner. Their followed a moment or three of confusion. Freddy Bunting's effort from the extremities split the jury if not the uprights. One flag was raised, the other remained disinterested and the scoreboard indicated 15-0. Then it became 17-0 before finally resting with 15 points to Sutton & Epsom.

Sutton's play in the first quarter bore all the hallmarks of a side buoyed by their winning streak and confident in their method. The visitors then gave the hosts a foothold in the match. S&E overthrew their lineout ball 10 metres from their line. Jude McRobbie accepted the festive offering and had the awareness to exploit the situation and strode home for the try. Tom Baldwin navigated the wind with aplomb to see the home XV trail 7-15. This was followed by a frenetic period of play. The reinvigorated Reigatian team launched an ominous attack only to be undone by an Adam Bibby interception. The centre was hauled down 35 metres out and the ball was run back with an impressive counter until it was turned over and returned with interest. It was breathless stuff for players and spectators alike. Despite the best endeavours of all concerned the half ended with no further additions, or reductions, to the scoreboard. Sutton, who had dominated the early exchanges, led 15-7 but Reigatian were right back in the contest as the sides retired to the warmth of the dressing rooms to contemplate their strategy for the second period.

Old Reigatian began the second half in splendid fashion creating two chances in as many minutes. The first was thwarted by an errant pass and the second by an interception. Sutton threatened to score with a wonderful 60-metre burst by Adam Bibby but he failed to connect with the lone support of Matt Symonds. OR stepped up the pressure and were aided by a flurry of S&E indiscretions that did not go unmissed by Mr Stewart. Following considerable pressure and multiple advantages Old Reigatian deservedly scored. With the addition of the Baldwin conversion the Black & Whites lead had shrunk to a single point as they held a 15-14 advantage. In addition to his exemplary place-kicking Tom Baldwin was becoming increasingly influential with ball in hand as he exploited the extra time and space he was finding with numerous jinking breaks that had Sutton scrambling in retreat.

Driving drizzle descended for the last half hour as conditions for players and spectators deteriorated rapidly. Scrum-half Ali Webb made a fine break as the hosts started to dominate proceedings. As the game entered the final quarter Sutton & Epsom received an additional burden when Mr Stewart correctly issued a yellow card to Dan Jones to reduce the visitors to 14 men when the flanker failed to avoid the airborne catcher. At once slick handling and ruthless efficiency saw winger Jonny Bridges cross the whitewash for his side's third try. Baldwin maintained his 100% record and the Geoffrey Knight Fields' fans rose as one to celebrate the 21-15 lead. The fifteen-point deficit was now a distant memory.

However, this was familiar territory for the Black & Whites who have become remarkably proficient in coming out on top in close encounters of the rugby kind. They looked poised to score through their pack as they advanced to the line only to concede a penalty. In the blink of an eye the visitors were back in their 22 and grateful that skipper Reilly Franklin-Talbot dropped the ball so denying his side the chance to increase their lead. Sutton's scrambling defence was being tested to the limits. As usual Steve

Munford was to the fore but perhaps the best tackle came from Angus Findlay swooping off his wing to thwart another opportunity. With five minutes left the visiting forwards looked like they were going to add a third try. Once more they were denied by the whistle. This time the Rugby Lane team could not edge out their opponent at the death. Old Reigatian held on for a 21-15 victory. It was a well-deserved success as Old Reigatian had created more opportunities and played the more eye-catching rugby in the second half.

Sutton & Epsom

O'Brien, Symonds, Rea, Bibby, Findlay, Bunting ©, Munford, Johnson, Lennie, Boaden, Glanville, McTaggart, Tame, Jones & Hegarty.

Replacements: Mount, Davies & Hilton.

Old Reigatian:

Woodford, Briggs, Allen, Baldwin, Parker, Holder, Webb, Marshall, Nestor, Lee, Grant, Franklin-Talbot ©, McRobbie, Goodwin & Travers

Replacements: Garrec, Cox & Overtoom.

Photo credit Robin Kennedy

Surrey prison failed IPP prisoner

Staff at a Surrey prison failed to get medical attention for a prisoner who was reportedly found "naked on all fours, and barking like a dog" before he took his own life. Haydar Jefferies, 51, died in hospital on March 5 2023, after trying to kill himself in his cell at HMP Coldingley, Woking, a few days earlier.

An inquest jury found scores of failures contributed to Mr Jefferies' death, amounting to neglect. Mr Jefferies' mental health drastically deteriorated while he was waiting for parole and this was left untreated by staff responsible for his care, according to his family's lawyers. The 51-year-old pub manager attempted suicide the day before his long-awaited parole hearing.

After being found guilty of an assault offence in 2006, Mr Jefferies served seven years of an Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentence, given to people considered 'dangerous' but the offence did not merit a life sentence.

Nearly ten years after his crime, Mr Jefferies was then recalled and sent back to prison in January 2022 on his IPP sentence. The allegation against Mr Jefferies was reportedly not backed up and the police decided no further action would be taken, within three months after being sent back to prison.

But due to the nature of the IPP sentence and the delays in the Parole Board decision-making, Mr Jefferies was forced to stay at the prison despite all charges being dropped nine months prior.

A Ministry of Justice spokesperson said: "Our thoughts remain with Haydar Jeffries' friends and family. As with all deaths in custody, the Prison and Probation Ombudsman are investigating and we will respond to their report in due course."

By the end of February 2023, Mr Jefferies was acutely psychotic, found by officers in his cell flushing his head down the toilet, naked on all fours, and barking like a dog.

Despite custodial staff noting major concerns over his mental health, they allegedly failed to seek any medical attention or even notify health care providers, according to the family's lawyers Hodge Jones & Allen. Custodial staff allegedly failed to place him on constant supervision and/or take him to an external place of safety.

The jury duly found that Mr Jefferies' IPP status and the delays in his parole hearing materially contributed to the development of his subsequent psychosis, Hodge Jones & Allen solicitors said.

Between his initial release and recall, Mr Jefferies had tried to rebuild his life, setting up his own pub and B&B with his husband, who sadly passed away in 2021.

Zhora Jefferies, Haydar's mother, said: "After creating a wonderful life in the community, it is devastating to have witnessed how Haydar's life was completely destroyed by the nature of his IPP sentence and the extensive delays he experienced when waiting to be released from prison.

"We had to watch our beloved son, brother and father succumb to the fear and paranoia that he was suffering with in the final weeks of his life. We, and Haydar himself, were all crying out for help and it was falling on deaf ears.

"Nothing can be done to bring Haydar back but our biggest hope is that lessons can be learned from his experience. Haydar brought so much love to our family and we will always be grateful for the time we had with him."

A few months into Mr Jefferies' recall to HMP Bullingdon, in early 2022, it was confirmed the allegations against him were no longer being pursued. But he remained in prison for another year, waiting for authorised release by the Parole Board. An application to determine his release on papers was declined, and various delays led to his parole hearing being rescheduled to March 2023.

Mr Jefferies was then transferred to HMP Coldingley on 28 December 2022. By 12 February 2023, he asked to be segregated for his own safety. The jury reportedly heard evidence from a consultant psychiatrist that after being segregated, Mr Jefferies' mental health steeply deteriorated.

By around 18 February 2023, he was suffering from a severe psychotic illness which required timely psychiatric assessment, treatment and transfer to a prison with a healthcare wing.

The jury heard that, during his subsequent 10 days in segregation, Haydar made multiple concerning comments to both prison officers and his family symptomatic of his deteriorating ill-health. This included his intensifying delusional beliefs that prison officers were colluding with prisoners to sexually abuse and kill him, and that they were pumping gas into his cell.

Mr Jefferies' family made numerous phone calls to the prison with serious concerns over his welfare. But none of the calls were appropriately documented in prison records or passed onto the Mental Health Team.

The jury concluded there was a "systematic failure on behalf of the Ministry of Justice" that there was no policy for recording and sharing information from concerned family members, according to Hodge Jones & Partners.

Cormac McDonough, a civil liberties solicitor at Hodge Jones & Allen, who represented the family at the inquest said: "It is extremely rare for a jury to reach a finding of neglect in this context, which demonstrates how fundamentally failed Haydar was while under the care of prison staff at HMP Coldingley.

"It was evident that Haydar was suffering due to the unjust circumstances of his IPP recall and that this contributed to his deteriorating mental state. Staff at the prison failed entirely to recognise his deterioration and to take appropriate steps to keep him safe. His family made repeated attempts to get Haydar the help he patently needed, after receiving multiple distressing phone calls, but no action was taken."

River Mole to attract visitors to Leatherhead?

Mole Valley District Council's dream of "improving" and "enhancing" Leatherhead has taken a step forward after plans to regenerate Claire House and James House were submitted.

The site is part of the council's vision for a new riverside area to attract visitors to spend time in the town centre.

The plans, submitted by McCarthy Stone the council's preferred partner for regeneration, is for 37 one and two-bed retirement homes, a ground floor café and community space.

Developers McCarthy Stone said: "While the development is built around people in their later years this is not a development that offers care as you would find in extra care developments or care homes.

"Retirement living creates safe and secure environments for homeowners to continue to live an active, independent life and caters for downsizers who are typically selling or vacating their former family home and moving to a smaller apartment.

"Homeowners are generally the more active elderly rather than those who are in need of care or have more significant issues around mobility."

McCarthy Stone also plans to improve the car park and landscaping the area to the front of the building. The work is part of the wider Transform Leatherhead project.

Councillor Keira Vyvyan-Robinson, Mole Valley District Council cabinet member for property and projects, said: "The Claire House and James House project aims to create a landmark mixed-use riverside development that will improve the western gateway to the town and enhance the area around the River Mole.

"The application marks the next step towards the regeneration of the area and enhancement of the riverside area, a key project of Transform Leatherhead.

According to Mole Valley District Council, Leatherhead town centre is being re-invented, expanded and transformed.

It says the overall project, which also includes work on the retail and leisure quarter and Bull Hill, will "fully realise its potential as a distinctive, enterprising and highly regarded market town" adding that the "town's character, history and environmental setting will be celebrated and complemented by new and revitalised uses."

Not every aspect of the council's vision has proven popular however. A petition calling on the authority to reconsider plans to build hundreds of homes in high rise blocks on the popular Bull Hill park gained 1500 signatures.

Some fear the plans will destroy the green gateway into the town, potentially turning it into another Croydon or Woking and causing people to leave.

Relared report:

Leatherhead town on the way up?

Tiers to be shed if Epsom and Ewell loses its Borough Council?

Surrey could be split in two as part of sweeping changes to how services are run. Downing Street is looking to reshape local government and has set out a white paper outlining its vision. It wants to do away with two-tier systems of boroughs and counties and instead create single unitary councils. It argues this would not only be more cost-effective but also shift power away from Westminster. If devolution plans for the county go through, Surrey and its 11 boroughs and districts would be no more. The big question is: what replaces it? The most likely answer at the moment appears to be two councils with a directly elected mayor overseeing county-wide issues – these could include policing, fire and rescue, and transport.

The English Devolution White Paper says that new unitary councils "must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks. For most areas, this will mean creating councils with a population of 500,000 or more, but there may be exceptions to ensure new structures make sense for an area, including for devolution, and decisions will be on a case-by-case basis." Surrey has a population of 1.2 million, and a single "mega-council" stretching from Farnham to Oxted, an area larger than Greater London, would simply be too vast, some have argued. This leaves the most likely option of merging the current boroughs of Tandridge, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead, and Epsom & Ewell into East Surrey Council, with Woking, Guildford, Spelthorne, Runnymede, Surrey Heath, Waverley, and Elmbridge forming West Surrey Council.

The white paper also argues: "Unitary councils can lead to better outcomes for residents, save significant money which can be reinvested in public services, and improve accountability with fewer politicians who are more able to focus on delivering for residents." However, opponents argue devolution could push residents further from the decision-making process and only delay funding reforms for local government.

Will Forster, newly elected MP for Woking, expressed his concerns: "I don't think that having a single mega council is a good idea. Camberley to Oxted is far too large, there are huge differences east to west. It's too large and remote. A single council would be too vast. That's not devolution, that's not empowering people." Even the idea of a West Surrey Council would create a single area stretching from Haslemere to Staines. He added: "It also ignores the elephant in the room, social care – this seems to be the Government's way of ignoring that. They want authorities of 500,000 or more. You look at a map, you do the sums. That's clearly an east and west split. They've never divided up a borough or district and you can't do north or south."

Other questions would need to be answered as well, such as how the directly elected mayors are held to account. At the county level, the council holds regular meetings to vote on decisions, with scrutiny committees playing a further role. How this would be replicated for a single mayor is yet to be made clear. Councils have been invited to submit proposals to the government in January.

Tim Oliver, leader of Surrey County Council, welcomed the devolution paper and its "bold ambition to empower local communities and councils." He said: "The government has set out an agenda for change, including potential reorganisation of local government, particularly in two-tier county areas like Surrey. I believe there is general consensus that the current structure – here and elsewhere in the country – is not the most effective. Therefore, we welcome a real examination and review of how local government is organised to make it more efficient and more effective for residents. We intend to work alongside government, and other partners locally, and ensure any change ultimately benefits the people of Surrey."

Announcing the paper's publication, Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner stated: "Our manifesto pledged to give everyone access to devolved power. So I will legislate for a new power of ministerial directive – which will allow central government to knock heads together and create strategic authorities when local leaders cannot agree. If we are going to build an economy that works for everyone, we need nothing less than a completely new way of governing – a generational project of determined devolution. Because the Westminster system is part of the problem. Whitehall is full of layers of governance and bureaucracy, controlled and micromanaged from the centre. To truly get growth in every corner of the country and put more money into people's pockets, we must rewire England and end the hoarding in Whitehall by devolving power and money from central government to those with skin in the game."

Surrey Uni Doing the maths on virus transmission

How prepared are we for another pandemic? Mathematical insights pinpoint lessons on airborne viral transmission

Half a decade on from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, a study by the **University of Surrey** highlights the significant impact of combined public health measures in reducing airborne viral transmission. High-quality face masks were shown to reduce transmission risk by ninefold, while doubling indoor air ventilation cut the risk by nearly a third, providing valuable insights to support future prevention strategies for respiratory diseases.

In 2020, the world came to a near standstill as rising COVID-19 cases prompted unprecedented lockdowns, travel restrictions and widespread public health measures. The World Health Organization estimates that more than three million deaths were directly attributed to the virus during the first year of the outbreak, underscoring the devastating toll of the pandemic on global health and economies.

To better understand the dynamics of airborne transmission and inform future preparations, **Dr Richard Sear**, Associate Professor at Surrey's School of Mathematics and Physics, explored how the virus spreads during contact and the role of protective measures in reducing risk.

Dr Sear said:

"I've tried to measure how effective strategies, such as mask-wearing, are for the transmission of airborne viruses. This is both for any future pandemic, and for seasonal flu. I combined modelling with data from the UK's NHS COVID-19 app. While these estimates are highly approximate, they provide guidance on the value of measures such as face masks, social distancing and improved indoor air quality, which could be tested in the future."

Factors such as viral load, ventilation and individual susceptibility are likely to influence a significant variability in COVID-19 transmission rates, with some contacts posing a much higher risk than others. These findings highlight the importance of addressing environmental and behavioural factors in public health strategies.

In terms of personal protective equipment (PPE), high-quality face masks, such as N95/FFP2, were found to be particularly effective in reducing transmission risk, decreasing the effective reproduction number for COVID-19 transmission by a factor of approximately nine when worn by the entire UK population. Even individual use of N95 masks can lower transmission risk by threefold, no matter the duration of contact, whereas surgical and cloth masks are much less effective.

Ventilation also plays a critical role in controlling airborne transmission, as viral particles linger in poorly ventilated spaces, compounded by individual behaviours, such as close-contact interactions, speaking or coughing. By doubling the air turnover rate indoors, whether that's through open windows and doors or increasing speed on air conditioning systems, transmission can be reduced by as much as 30%. Complementing good ventilation with physical distancing further minimises the risk.

Dr Sear added:

"The COVID-19 pandemic was terrible for many of us, which is why it's important that we learn from our experiences. It also demonstrated how quickly we can develop and roll out vaccines when faced with a global health crisis. Moving forward, both we as individuals and our leaders have an opportunity to apply these lessons to better control respiratory diseases – not only to head off any future pandemics, but to also manage seasonal diseases such as flu and RSV."

The study has been published in Physical Review E.

Epsom celebrates a new Ukrainian Christmas Day

The vibrant Ukrainian community in Epsom and Ewell and surrounding areas will celebrate Christmas Day for the second year on 25th December. This change was formalized when President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed a law on July 28, 2023, moving the official Christmas holiday from January 7 to December 25.

This decision aligned with earlier moves by major Ukrainian churches. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in February 2023 announced its plan to switch to the Revised Julian calendar followed by The Orthodox Church of Ukraine on May 24, 2023.

The shift to December 25 reflects Ukraine's efforts to distance itself from Russian traditions and strengthen its integration with Western practices. Previously, Ukraine observed Christmas on January 7, following the Julian calendar, a tradition shared with the Russian Orthodox Church. The move to December 25 aligns Ukraine's Christmas celebrations with those of most Western countries, symbolizing a step toward greater cultural independence.

The public are welcome to join Ukrainians, their hosts and supporters at Epsom Methodist Church on Ashley Road on **Saturday 21st December** for a special evening of music from wonderful Ukrainian musicians and singers. Entry is free and no reservations required.

A social event starts at 5pm and the music commences at 6pm concluding about 7.15. Entry is free and a leaving collection is devoted to the musicians whose livelihoods in Ukraine have been cut by Putin's war.

You will enjoy a pianist, a violinist, a soprano, poetry, a brass ensemble, a bandura player (a traditional Ukrainian instrument) and a local Ukraine refugee choir in a packed and varied programme.

The event is organised by the charity behind The Epsom Jazz Club and supported by Epsom based Surrey Stands With Ukraine and the Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network.

Lionel Blackman, the organiser said "In one way it is a sad event as it is the tenth Ukrainian Music evening held in Epsom since the Russian invasion in February 2022, which reminds us how long this horrible war has been going on. The music can help take minds away from the tragedies in their homeland."

All are welcome. If you do come you may if you wish bring and share a plate of some finger buffet food. There is no parking at the Church and you should leave plenty of time for travel as roads and rail will be busy.

There will also be time for you to get to Epsom Choral Society's Christmas Concert at St Martin's Church, Church Street, Epsom that starts at 7.30pm.

Full details of the Epsom Choral Society concert HERE

Going South from Epsom for Xmas? Check your trains

Epsom residents are being urged to check before travelling as South Western Railway (SWR) services to Guildford face significant disruption due to emergency engineering works. The works will take place from **Saturday 21 December to Tuesday 24 December**, affecting trains running via Cobham & Stoke D'Abernon and Epsom.

The disruption comes as Network Rail works to stabilise an embankment near Clandon following the detection of ground movement. Trains in the area have been operating at reduced speeds, and urgent repairs are required to ensure passenger safety.

Impact on Services

During the works, limited train services will operate between London Waterloo and Effingham Junction via both Cobham & Stoke D'Abernon and Epsom. To help passengers, replacement buses will run on the following routes:

- **Surbiton to Guildford**, every 30 to 60 minutes depending on the day.
- Effingham Junction to Guildford, every 30 minutes, with some extending to Epsom.

Passengers travelling between Epsom and Guildford will be served by either a train or replacement bus. Normal services are expected to resume from **Friday 27 December**, but journey planners will be updated daily, and travellers are advised to check before setting out.

A Safety Priority

Explaining the need for the emergency works, Tom McNamee, Network Rail's Wessex Route Infrastructure Director, said: "We detected ground movement at an embankment in the Clandon area, which has made it necessary to operate trains at slower speeds. Stabilising the embankment is critical to ensure the safety of passengers and staff. While we recognise this will be disruptive, it's essential to carry out these repairs to prevent further movement and restore full services as quickly as possible."

Passenger Advice

SWR is apologising to passengers for the inconvenience. Steve Tyler, Planning and Performance Director at SWR, added: "We are sorry for the disruption and are working hard to provide as many train services as possible during the works. Buses will operate to ensure passengers can still reach their destinations, and we encourage everyone to check journey planners before travelling. We appreciate your patience as these essential repairs are completed."

Key Information

- Trains will not stop at **Horsley, Clandon, or London Road Guildford** stations during the works. These will instead be served by replacement buses.
- No SWR services will operate on **Christmas Day or Boxing Day**, and an amended timetable will be in place from Friday 27 December.

For the latest updates, visit **southwesternrailway.com** or use journey planners to confirm service availability. Passengers are encouraged to allow extra time for their journeys during this period.

An Epsom and Ewell education in water shortage

The residents of Epsom, Ewell, Stoneleigh, and surrounding areas have been grappling with a significant water supply crisis over the past 48 hours, following a major failure in the infrastructure of SES Water. The disruption, which began on Monday afternoon, has left families struggling with basic necessities, businesses hampered, and schools forced to close early for the Christmas break.

What Happened?

SES Water has attributed the disruption to the failure of a critical valve in their network. Ian Cain, Chief Executive of SES Water, stated that the issue is being addressed by teams working around the clock. While efforts are being made to restore supplies, the company has warned that normal service may take another 24 hours as water quality tests are conducted to ensure safety.

Despite these reassurances, the community has expressed frustration with what many perceive as vague and inconsistent updates from the water provider. Bottled water stations have been set up at four locations, but long queues and limited access have left some residents resorting to supermarket purchases to meet their needs.

Impact on Residents

For many, the water outage has caused significant upheaval in their daily lives. Basic tasks such as showering, cooking, and cleaning have become a challenge.

Rebecca Johnson, a mother of two from Epsom, shared her experience:

"It's been incredibly difficult. We've had to rely on bottled water for everything, even brushing our teeth. My youngest has eczema, and not being able to bathe him properly has made it worse. This isn't just an inconvenience; it's affecting our health."

Local businesses have also been hit hard. A café owner in Sutton lamented the loss of customers:

"Without water, we can't wash dishes, cook, or even make coffee. We've had to shut our doors during what should be a busy pre-Christmas period."

School Closures

One of the most striking consequences of the outage has been the early closure of Nonsuch High School for Girls. Headteacher Mrs. Williamson-Jones described the decision as unavoidable:

"With no water for toilets, heating, or cooking, it was impossible to maintain a safe environment for our students and staff. This disruption will have a lasting impact on the education of 1,500 girls."

Parents have expressed concern about the loss of learning days and the difficulties of last-minute childcare arrangements.

Political Response

Local MP Helen Maguire has taken a firm stance, labelling the situation "completely unacceptable." In her press release, she detailed her ongoing communication with SES Water, including discussions with Ian Cain, and criticised the company's lack of transparency.

"Families deserve clear and timely updates, and this has been sorely lacking," she stated. Maguire has also raised broader concerns about the resilience of the local water infrastructure and called for an investigation to prevent future crises.

A Global Perspective

While the situation in Epsom has highlighted the vulnerabilities of local water infrastructure, it also serves as a stark reminder of the global water crisis. According to the United Nations, 26% of the world's population—around 2 billion people—lack access to safe drinking water in their homes.

In countries such as Yemen, Ethiopia, and India, millions face daily struggles to secure clean water for drinking, cooking, and washing. Prolonged droughts, overextraction of groundwater, and pollution exacerbate these challenges. The World Health Organization estimates that 829,000 people die annually from diseases caused by unsafe water, sanitation, and hygiene.

The water shortage in Epsom and Ewell, while temporary, offers a glimpse into the hardships endured by billions worldwide. It underscores the importance of robust infrastructure and efficient resource management to ensure equitable water access.

Calls for Accountability

For Epsom and Ewell residents, the immediate concern is the restoration of their water supply. However, the crisis has also raised questions about SES Water's preparedness and reliability. Recent increases in water bills have further fuelled dissatisfaction, with many questioning whether they are getting value for money.

Local resident Mark Stevens voiced the concerns of many:

"We're paying more, but the service keeps getting worse. This outage has shown just how fragile our water system is. SES Water needs to be held accountable."

Helen Maguire MP has pledged to continue pressing the company for answers and solutions. She has also urged SES Water to prioritise vulnerable residents and ensure that support reaches those most in need.

Moving Forward

As the community waits for normal service to resume, there is a growing demand for action. Residents and businesses alike are calling for a thorough review of SES Water's operations, improved communication during emergencies, and long-term investments in infrastructure.

The local water crisis has been a sobering experience for many, highlighting both local vulnerabilities and global inequalities in water access. While the immediate challenge is to restore supply, it is clear that the lessons learned must inform future planning and policy to prevent similar disruptions and ensure water security for all.