## Redhill theatre gone to rack and ruin?

There are currently no plans to reopen a much loved Surrey town centre theatre according to a new report.

The Harlequin Theatre in Redhill closed its doors in September 2023 after the discovery of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC). Nearly one year on, surveys to establish the extent of the issue have not been completed and there is no indication of when any work may start, or the venue re-open.

Reigate and Banstead Council (RBC) will discuss the future of the theatre at a Strategies Meeting on Thursday (August 15).

RBC said: "We hoped it would be a temporary closure, but due to the extent of the RAAC identified so far and the complex structure of the building, we do not expect to be able to re-open the theatre in the foreseeable future."

In a report by council officers, it has been recommended to stop current Harlequin arts and cultural activities, including the December show and the pop-up in The Belfry shopping centre. The report also warned that "many loyal, hardworking staff" could face redundancy if the recommendation was adopted.

"I'm outraged," Cllr **Andrew Proudfoot** told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS). He said: "This is an absolutely essential hub for local arts and schools. This is the suggestion of a Conservative attack on community life."

Cllr Proudfoot put forward a motion at last month's council meeting to reaffirm RBC's commitment to the arts, secure an interim facility and develop a reopening plan for the theatre. The Green Party member said at the meeting that the theatre is home to many local organisations, providing cultural identity and nurturing young talent. They added there are no other similar facilities for large cultural events in the borough.

Locals have expressed their disappointment at the recommended decision and the ongoing uncertainty for the provision of arts and culture in the area. Some said they were "heartbroken" as the Harlequin Theatre gave them opportunities to develop in the creative arts.

RBC said it was "keen to keep access to the arts alive" while the building has been closed by delivering the successful Big Top Panto in Memorial Park and its regular 'Harlequin Outdoors' summer programme in Reigate's Castle Grounds.

Options tabled in the report include putting on the Christmas 2024 show and then making all Harlequin staff redundant in 2025, and working on a renewed opening in April next year. Costing the council an estimated overspend of £250-300k, it is the cheapest proposed option other than to stop all activity of the Harlequin theatre.

In a press statement, Cllr **Nadean Moses**, Executive Member for Sustainability and Leisure, said: "Our commitment to providing an arts and cultural offer in the medium and long-term remains strong." With no more events scheduled after the Outdoor Theatre closing on September 7, Cllr Moses said it can review the costs and benefits of the theatre as well as developing future options for the arts.

The council is looking at new venues such as a school or a cabaret-style performance space. Work is being done for a full business plan of the council's offering of creative arts to its residents for 2025.

# 'Don't put your national trust in Barclays' climate protestors urge.

On Saturday, 3rd August, visitors to Box Hill from Epsom, Ewell, and surrounding areas held a peaceful demonstration, urging The National Trust to cease banking with Barclays.

The group organised a picnic protest at the iconic Box Hill viewpoint, displaying banners and placards to appeal to the charity to drop Barclays, which is Europe's largest financier of fossil fuels.

Box Hill, renowned for its stunning views across Surrey, is one of the hundreds of sites owned by the National Trust. The organisation is a guardian of nature reserves, national parks, coastlines, historic buildings, and estates across the country.

The demonstrators carried banners and placards with messages such as 'Love National Trust, Not Barclays'. They engaged with families, distributing leaflets and collecting signatures for a petition that calls on the charity to switch to a bank that does not

#### fund fossil fuels.

Kristine, an NHS doctor from Epsom and mother of four, expressed her concerns: "I have been visiting Box Hill and other National Trust sites with my four boys since they were babies. Exploring nature as a family is invaluable, and I am very disappointed that an organisation like the National Trust does not prioritise the natural world we are leaving for our children in its banking choices.

"Barclays is destroying nature with its horrific lending and investments in unethical industries. Knowing that I am indirectly supporting Barclays spoils my visits to National Trust sites. Since realising the impact our choice of bank can have on the climate, I switched to an ethical bank last year. I see no reason why the National Trust cannot do the same."

The demonstration was part of a week of vibrant actions by campaigners across the country, aimed at urging the National Trust to cut ties with Barclays, which has invested \$235.2 billion in fossil fuels over the past seven years.

Despite publishing a new energy policy earlier this year, which it hailed as a step towards a "science-based" approach to "financing the transition", Barclays continues to finance notorious fossil fuel companies such as ExxonMobil and Royal Dutch Shell. In 2023 alone, Barclays provided \$24.221 billion in financing to fossil fuel companies.

The bank's new energy policy has faced widespread criticism for loopholes that allow it to continue supporting carbon-intensive industries such as fracking. Meanwhile, investigative journalists have revealed that Barclays' "sustainable finance" is being used to fund pipelines and oil expansion projects.

Recently, other institutions have announced their intentions to sever ties with Barclays for ethical reasons. Christian Aid and Oxfam have already withdrawn their funds from Barclays.

Cambridge University is also in the process of withdrawing its support for Barclays and is leading a group of universities and colleges that are investigating more sustainable financial products. Despite its commitment to natural conservation, the National Trust is lagging behind other charities and thought leaders within its sector.

Alice, a mother of one from Sutton, who participated in the demonstration, said: "I have been donating to the National Trust for years and even used to work in the tea shop at another local property.

"But I never realised that all this time my money was going directly to Barclays Bank, a bank that funds fossil fuels and arms—both of which I am completely opposed to. I don't want my money to support such a horrific business, and I wish the National Trust would make much more of an effort to cut ties with Barclays.

"They have been aware of their members' ethical concerns for years now, yet they seem to be doing very little about it."

Euronews reported in February: "Addressing climate change is a critical and complex challenge," said Laura Barlow, group head of sustainability at Barclays. "We continue to work with our energy clients as they decarbonise and support their efforts to transition in a manner that is just, orderly and addresses energy security."

Barclays announced that it will no longer provide direct financing for new oil and gas projects, starting in 2024. This policy change is part of a broader strategy where the bank has committed to mobilizing \$1 trillion in sustainable and transition finance by 2030 to help facilitate the energy transition. Additionally, Barclays has introduced a Transition Finance Framework and placed restrictions on financing for companies heavily involved in oil and gas expansion.

Barclays' representatives have defended their approach by stating that the bank's role is to support an energy sector in transition, focusing on companies that are actively investing in low-carbon technologies. They argue that their large-scale operations enable them to be instrumental in financing the global shift towards more sustainable energy sources. The bank has also set stringent expectations for its energy clients, requiring them to have decarbonization plans in place by 2025, along with specific emission reduction targets.

This approach has been described by Barclays as a balanced effort to meet the dual challenges of addressing climate change while ensuring energy security and affordability. However, this stance has received mixed reactions, with some campaigners arguing that the bank's policies do not go far enough in curbing support for the fossil fuel industry.

#### **Our Health Deserves Better**

I want to take this opportunity to thank those who voted for me at the general election. There is much to do to improve our situation in Epsom & Ewell and I am committed to help achieve this for all the residents of Epsom, Ewell, Ashtead and

#### Leatherhead.

Having visited Epsom Hospital only this week I reflect on the recent statement by Chancellor Rachel Reeves and find it impossible not to feel a deep concern for the future of our local healthcare infrastructure.

The Chancellor's announcement, which hinted at potential cuts to various infrastructure projects, including the ambitious plan to deliver 40 new hospitals, has left many of us in a state of unease. Among the projects at risk is the new emergency care hospital at Sutton, a critical facility that promises to alleviate the pressures on Epsom and St Helier hospitals. As the newly elected Liberal Democrat MP for Epsom & Ewell, I find this prospect deeply troubling.

Our community has been waiting far too long for this vital investment. The new hospital at Sutton is not just another building; it's a beacon of hope for many. It's designed to be a centre of excellence, equipped with state-of-the-art facilities for the most serious emergency cases. Without it, our local healthcare services will continue to struggle with sub-standard conditions at Epsom and St Helier. These facilities, already stretched beyond their limits, cannot continue to bear the brunt of our community's healthcare needs without significant improvements.

The situation is dire. The buildings at Epsom and St Helier are overdeveloped and outdated. They desperately need the relief that the new Sutton hospital would provide. This isn't just about buildings; it's about the quality of care and the well-being of our staff and patients. Our community deserves better, and we cannot afford to wait any longer.

The Chancellor has offered a meeting with the Health Secretary for MPs representing affected constituencies. I eagerly anticipate this opportunity to voice the concerns of Epsom, Ewell, Ashtead, and Leatherhead residents. Our message must be clear and resolute: the Conservative party's economic mismanagement has left our public services in disarray, and we cannot allow their broken promises to cost us our much-needed hospital.

For years, the Conservatives have failed to deliver on their promises, leaving our local health services to languish. The proposed hospital at Sutton represents a crucial lifeline, not just for today but for the future of healthcare in our region. It is a promise of better days, of healthcare services that our community can rely on.

As your MP, I am committed to fighting for this project. We must ensure that the funding for the new Emergency Care Hospital at Sutton is protected. The people of Epsom, Ewell, Ashtead, and Leatherhead deserve nothing less than a healthcare system that meets their needs and supports their well-being. The time for waiting is over. It's time for action, and I will not rest until our community gets the healthcare investment it has been promised and so desperately needs.

 $Image:\ Maternity\ Unit\ at\ Epsom\ Hospital.\ Left\ to\ right;\ James\ Blythe\ CEO;\ Liz\ Cullen,\ Head\ of\ Midwifery;\ Helen\ Maguire\ MPSP and MPSP an$ 

## **Epsom Hospital upgrade at risk?**

A "crumbling" Surrey hospital trust says it is "cracking on" with plans for a new hospital and upgrades despite concerns the government could scrap a funding plan

**Epsom General Hospital** and St Helier Hospital had been marked for redevelopment under the previous Conservative governments' £20bn New Hospital Programme. Regeneration of the health trust included a new emergency hospital in Sutton, South London, as well as much-needed facility upgrades.

But Labour's Chancellor **Rachel Reeves** announced last week she would review big hospital and road projects to fix a £22bn black hole in public finances. Although details are yet to be confirmed, the review will look into the previous government's plan to build 40 new hospitals by 2030.

**Helen Maguire**, Liberal Democrat MP for Epsom and Ewell, said her constituents "cannot wait any longer" for the investment. Described as "crumbling", "dilapidated" and "not fit for 21st century healthcare" in previous national reporting, the buildings at both the St Helier complex in Carshalton and the Epsom site are in dire need of repair.

If the funding is not forthcoming, Mrs Maguire said she is concerned about the impact on the local staff and patients. "My constituents have been crying out for improvements at Epsom and St Helier and so it is vital that this project must go ahead," she said.

The new Lib Dem MP said without the upgrade, staff and patients in Epsom, Ewell, Ashtead and Leatherhead would continue having to put up with substandard buildings.

Healthwatch Surrey, a non-profit advocating for locals to get the best of their NHS, claims wellbeing "does not solely lie in the

hands of doctors and other frontline staff" but the built environment can also affect patient safety. According to NHS data from 2022/23, estate and infrastructure failures in England disrupted the care of more than 2,600 patients.

Calling on the government to "protect funding for the new Emergency Care Hospital at Sutton", Mrs Maguire said the new emergency hospital would relieve pressure on the current sites. She added she was "looking forward" to meeting the Health Secretary to relay the concerns of people in Epsom, Ewell, Ashtead and Leatherhead.

The news comes as another let down for locals after the £219m redevelopment of St Helier hospital promised by the 2010 Conservative-Lib Dem government also came off the rails. Budget cuts and a difficult 'financial context' were cited as the reasons at the time.

Most of the buildings at Epsom and St Helier are older than the NHS itself. Staff are reportedly working in areas with damp mould, leaking roofs, and floods. Trying to patch up failing infrastructure and out-of-date facilities is unsustainable for any hospital.

"Our ageing buildings are not fit for purpose," said a spokesperson for Epsom and St Helier Hospital NHS Trust. They said: "We're cracking on with plans for a new hospital and upgrades to our existing sites while this review takes place."

Plans include building a new Specialist Emergency Care Hospital in Sutton, where the sicker patients would have access to high quality care in state-of-the-art facilities. The Trust also plans to invest in Epsom and St Helier hospitals, where 85 per cent of patients will continue to receive care.

The spokesperson added: "We continue to make significant progress, from detailed pre-planning application discussions, to refining designs of the new hospital, bringing us closer to a state-of-the-art facility that our patients and staff deserve."

A Department of Health and Social Care spokesperson said the previous government's commitment to build 40 new hospitals by 2030 is "undeliverable and unaffordable". The funding allocated by the previous government runs out in March.

They said: "We must reset the New Hospital Programme to put it on a sustainable footing, following persistent delays and cost overruns." The Department of Health and Social Care is launching a full review of the programme to provide a "thorough, costed and realistic timeline for delivery".

The spokesperson added: "We can replace the crumbling hospital estate in England. This government is determined to be honest with people about what can be delivered, and not let them down again."

#### **Epsom rose from the ashes of Phoenix defeat**

Phoenix Sports 1-3 Epsom and Ewell FC. Emirates F.A. Cup Extra-Preliminary Round Replay - Tuesday 6th August 2024.

Well this was a strange one! With just fifteen minutes remaining, we trailed Isthmian League Phoenix Sports and the match appeared to be petering out into a 1-0 defeat, but a Carl Oblitey flick on put Will Kendall through to equalise in the 77th minute and within eight minutes he had a hat trick as our opponents fell apart in the closing stages of our 3-1 F.A. Cup win!

On a warm summer's evening in front of just over 150 spectators, even though Phoenix advised it as a suspiciously low 108, we made two changes from the eleven that had started Saturday's goalless encounter, with Oblitey coming in up front for the absent Carlos Polo-Infante and Fabio Nunes taking the place of Kenny Antony who was on the bench. This required a slight change of formation with the two strikers up front, which personally, I am a fan of.

Despite this, the match started in similar circumstances to our first meeting, with the home side edging possession in the opening ten minutes before we grew into the match. Toby Young made an excellent early block, before Ethan Nelson-Roberts crossed in a low ball to Kendall, but his shot was straight at Rob Budd in the Phoenix goal. Then we probably should have taken the lead in the 15th minute when another great cross from Nelson-Roberts was met by the unmarked Kendall at the far post, but his header back across goal was inches wide of the far post!

The home side, who had a change of Management over the close season and had given eleven debuts on Saturday were forced into an early substitution, yet somewhat against the run of play they opened the scoring in the 23rd minute when a Jack Marney corner to the far post was met by an unmarked header from Marcus Travers into the top corner of the net from close range, giving Faebian Witter no chance. This was a little harsh on our boys, but the lead was nearly extended minutes later as a free kick just missed our far post. We then had a strange incident when Witter saved a low shot, only to get up and collide with Marney in the penalty area. Both players appeared unhappy with the collision, as was the referee who chose to book the pair of them.

Witter was out again to clear smartly, while at the other end Kendall's header was on target, but was penalised for pushing. At the half, it had been a fairly even match to this stage. Clearly though our Manager Warren Burton wasn't happy and you could hear him tearing into our players at the break even from outside the dressing room!

Whether this had any effect on the players is hard to say though, as the pattern of the game didn't really change in the second half. Young set Luke Miller off down the right and his cut in and low shot was gathered by Budd at the second attempt, while Oblitey's strike from twenty yards didn't trouble him either. Maybe it was because we were behind, but it was clear that we were doing a bit more of the work as the ball started to spend more time in the Phoenix half. On the hour Kendall went up for a floated cross from Miller, although a subsequent clash of heads appeared to be accidental, and the foul awarded against Kendall seemed harsh from where I was standing.

In the 69th minute we withdrew Craig Dundas and brought Reece Tierney on at the back, which enabled Adam Green to move into the hole vacated by the former Sutton legend, but time was beginning to run out on our cup adventure. Then out of nowhere, it all changed. Kendall drilled the ball past Budd as described above and we were level out of nowhere. Within six minutes Miller cut in from the right and went down under a defender's challenge. Our winger had gone down theatrically in the first half in similar circumstances, so I wasn't expecting anything here but after a little thought, the referee awarded the penalty. It was a soft one, but we've had them awarded against us often enough before! Kendall put the ball into the top corner in the 83rd minute to give us the lead.

Whilst Budd might not have had a chance with the penalty, he will be the first to admit that our third goal was his fault as a long ball was sent forward and maybe distracted by both Kendall and a defender, he missed his clearance completely, leaving Kendall the empty net from eighteen yards in the 85th minute. It might take me some time to find out whether a hat trick in just eight minutes sets any sort of club record, but in that short time the result changed completely and we saw the game out with no further alarms.

So what actually happened here? I can only think of one similar turnaround like this in recent years, which was our very late 3-2 win over Larkfield & New Hythe back in 2021. Maybe we were fitter than the opposition and it told in the closing stages? Certainly this was something Burton was very keen on focusing on when he took over back in January, although there were no signs of a lack of fitness from Phoenix on Saturday. Maybe it was the substitution of Tierney for Dundas, but sometimes it's hard to put your finger on why we suddenly took over. Either way, we knocked out an Isthmian League club for the second successive year and won £1,125 as a result. It is now Isthmian League Hayes and Yeading United who stand in our way of a further £1,444 in prize money and we will host them at King George's Field on Saturday 17th August.

Epsom & Ewell: Faebian Witter, Toby Young, Callum Wilson, Adam Green ©, Craig Dundas, Fabio Nunes, Luke Miller, Thompson Adevemi, Will Kendall, Carl Oblitev, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Reece Tierney for Dundas (69)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Fire image: Credit: Janne Karaste License details

## A question of Chalk Pit noise and dust

Noise and dust pollution from the Chalk Pit waste recycling centre in Epsom continues to exacerbate the Council as residents' complaints continue unabated.

On 26th March 2024 Epsom and Ewell Council decided to allocate funds to address the issue. £40,000 was reserved for independent noise investigation, and £100,000 was allocated for potential enforcement and litigation work. The Environment Committee was directed to identify equivalent savings or income to replenish the reserve by the end of the financial year 2025-2026.

Questions were raised at the Full Council 30th July on progress.

Cllr **Steve McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley) asked his fellow RA ward Councillor **Liz Frost** (Chair of the Environment Committee) "The Chalk Pit site is still causing many of our residents noise and dust nuisance with several complaints being logged daily to this council, Surrey County Council and the Environment Agency. There are planning applications in process with Surrey County Council but in the meantime, residents are experiencing regular disturbance to the unencumbered enjoyment of their homes and gardens. What actions are this council taking to address these statutory issues that this council is responsible

#### for?"

Cllr Frost responded: "The Council has proceeded in line with its statutory duties to take such steps as are reasonably practicable to investigate complaints of nuisance. This has included an early morning visit to characterise and witness the noise at that time. Further, and as a consequence of a temporary diversion of resource away from a separate statutory service, the council intends to deploy a dedicated officer for Chalk Pit work alone for a limited number of hours per week over the summer period."

Cllr McCormick pressed the matter: "Can Councillor Frost confirm details for the dedicated officer mentioned, specifically how many hours per week, confirmation on the role of the officer resource, i.e., additional monitoring, for example? And why is the summer period only in scope? Why not a longer period until statutory nuisance is resolved?"

Cllr Frost replied: "The number of hours is not yet known. We are working with somebody who we are hoping to engage, who has a lot of experience in this type of work. So we will be having an expert who is used to investigating noise nuisance and knows what they're looking for. We're hoping that the work will start in August. I can't really tell you how long it will go on for or exactly how many hours; it depends on how much is needed, and the contract has yet to be signed, so it's difficult to answer that."

Cllr **James Lawrence** (LibDem College) pursued the matter further: "It's very useful to hear that we've got some form of plan for a dedicated officer time and resource to focus on the Chalk Pit. Would the Chair agree that it is unacceptable for residents to be woken up at 5:40 a.m. due to the repeated banging and experience repeated disruption throughout the day? Has this experience influenced your decision to give this dedicated officer resource?"

Councillor Frost responded: "I do agree this is not a good situation with people being woken up at this time. I think we would all agree with that. The difficulty comes with finding the actual evidence and identifying exactly who is responsible. That is something we are hoping to get more information on, but yes, it is not a good situation."

Meanwhile local residents complain they are suffering and the Council and other agencies are not doing enough quickly enough.

Related reports:

Chalk Pit action - a tale of two committees

"Heat and Dust" epic in Epsom

Chalk Pit debate deferred by late abatement

Will the dust ever settle on Chalk Pit conflict?

#### **Epsom and Ewell Mayor's busy year**

The Mayor of Epsom and Ewell Cllr. **Steve Bridger** (RA Stamford) addressed the full council 30th July and told the meeting about his business.

"My Mayoral year has started well, with almost 40—well, over 40 now—duties attended so far and many more lined up. Almost first was the Founder's Day at Epsom College. I'm probably the only mayor that has been fortunate enough to attend two of these fantastic days. I'm also probably the only mayor that was called for jury service in June, which unfortunately clashed with Armed Forces Day. Two firsts in the first month is not bad going, really, so let's see what the rest of the year holds.

Derby Day was an unforgettable time, with grapefruit and sampling the Royal Melon, which was a gift from the Japanese Racing Association. I managed to hand over my £50 to Betfred, where all my horses went unplaced. One highlight that I felt humbled to be part of was the 80th-anniversary events of the D-Day Landings. The service at the Clock Tower in the morning and then the fantastic event organized by the officers on the Downs, ending with the lighting of the beacon in the evening, was a very moving experience. Despite a somber atmosphere, there was a feeling of celebration, with a traditional British fish and chip meal served at the Grandstand. It became a complete day honoring those who sacrificed their lives to make a better world for everyone.

I've also celebrated the 75 years that 135 Squadron has had the freedom of the borough, followed by the well-oiled and organized Village Day. I ended up judging the best or worst faces pulled with the Morris men and women. Other events that have been attended include the opening of two nurseries—and no, they're not the flowering type. These are the starting posts to welcome the next generation into our borough. Everything has changed dramatically since my wife and I were parents to young children, and it's amazing what facilities are available to the youngsters nowadays.

Handing out many trophies and prizes to students around the borough while celebrating their success stories emphasizes the great facilities we have to offer as they transition into the wider world. These people are our future, and they need to be recognized. Apart from the luxuries of being Mayor, it's been humbling to see the other side of life, where an army of volunteers is beavering away in the background in all areas of our lives. Without much recognition, they do the important work of looking after the vital parts of our lives in the borough. These efforts we do not fully appreciate, so I thank them unreservedly for their work.

My charity committee has been working hard organizing events to raise money for my worthwhile charities. The first event earlier this month was a cream tea at the Horton with the Mayor and the Mayoress. This was very well attended, and unfortunately, we had to turn people away as it was overbooked. We had 84 attendees in all, which is fantastic. I would like to thank the Deputy Mayor for his great piano playing during the tea and the Horton for the superb venue.

We've got a beer festival planned for the four days of the August bank holiday in conjunction with the Jolly Coopers. They're producing a specially brewed beer named "The Charitable Mayor" for the event, and the special beer mats being produced will become collector's items in years to come. Proceeds from this event will be going to my charity fund. I expect to see a lot of inebriated councillors over the bank holiday staggering around Stamford and Goose Green—or I hope so.

Please put my Civic Service on the 8th of September in your diaries. It is being held at Christ Church by Stamford Green. Another big event in your diary will be the Charity Ball with a Twist. This will be held at Epsom College in their Big School on Saturday, the 5th of April next year. Many other events have been planned for the rest of my year. These will be publicized as the details are finalized."

## Council pay tribute to Epsom tree hero

Councillors of Epsom and Ewell stood in silence in memory of local tree hero **Mike Ford**. The full council meeting held in the Town Hall chamber on 30th July heard a tribute from Councillor **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley Vale).

"It is with great sadness that we share the news of the passing of Mike Ford on June 27, 2024. Mike was a pivotal figure in the creation of the Epsom Tree Advisory Board nearly three decades ago. He moved to Epsom in February 1981 and worked as a skilled carpenter for over 50 years, retiring in 2009. He is survived by his loving wife, Leslie, and their son, Darren, and daughter, Emma.

For many years, Mike dedicated himself to planting, nurturing, and caring for countless trees within our community and beyond. His passion for trees is evident in every project he undertook. I first met Mike in Rosebery Park around 2010 when the Friends group was developing a tree trail for park visitors. Thanks to Mike's vast knowledge, the tree trail was published and is available to this day on the Friends of Rosebery Park website.

Mike's deep understanding of the park's trees was astounding, reflecting his unwavering commitment to the natural world. Mike could recount the origins of many trees in Rosebery Park and across the borough, often mentioning if they'd come from his own garden. I vividly remember finishing a walk with him, standing by the pond in Rosebery Park, gazing at willow trees, and he remarked, "We don't plant trees to enjoy in our lifetime; we plant for future generations to enjoy." This profound statement underscores the enduring impact of his work.

As our friendship grew, I became more involved with the Tree Advisory Board. Mike's tireless efforts helped secure the planting and preservation of trees across the borough. His enthusiasm inspired a dedicated group of volunteers, embodying his can-do, will-do spirit. Mike's passing leaves a significant void, and I will miss our conversations dearly. However, I am comforted by the memory of the successful replanting of the Mike Ford Copse in the Alexander Recreation Ground by board members last December. Mike was there to witness it.

Mike Ford's legacy will endure through the Epsom Tree Advisory Board and the many trees he planted, which will continue to offer hope, shade, and beauty to future generations. He will be deeply missed by all who knew him."

Related report:

Dedicated Epsom tree-man

Image: Dedication event at Alexandra Recreation Ground honours local hero Mike Ford Epsom & Ewell, 3rd December 2023

#### Local football feel the blues from Chelsea FC

The **Epsom and Ewell Colts**, a longstanding community-led grassroots football club, are facing a crisis after the abrupt cancellation of their primary training venue at Blenheim High School. The school's decision to make way for the Chelsea FC Foundation has impacted 170 girls from the under-8s team and upwards, leaving them without a place to train or play.

Founded in 1971, the Epsom and Ewell Colts have been a cornerstone of the local community, providing young people with opportunities to develop teamwork skills and forge lifelong friendships. Community football offers far more than the possibility of turning professional or enhancing physical fitness and skills. It strengthens community bonds, offering young people a productive outlet that teaches important life lessons and steers them away from negative influences. Players, coaches, volunteers, and supporters collaborate towards common goals, fostering mutual respect and understanding. This inclusive environment breaks down social barriers and contributes to the community as a more welcoming and integrated place for all.

With the Epsom and Ewell Colts now displaced from their core training ground at Blenheim High School, both players and parents are left feeling disappointed and concerned for the future of their club. Elsie, the vice-captain of the U18 girls' team, voiced her frustration, stating, "So much for encouraging girls football. How disappointing." The disappointment was echoed by the manager of the team, **Steve Luff**, who stated: "It's a grave mistake to prioritise commercial interests or go for the cachet of a professional club over the development of local athletes, who represent the true future of football."

**Pauline Russell**, the Chairwoman of Epsom & Ewell Colts, claims that Blenheim School's decision to displace the team in favour of a professional club "goes against the objectives and aims of the school listed in their last annual report." This refers to Blenheim School's objective 'to promote for the benefit of the inhabitants of Epsom and the surrounding area the provision of facilities and recreation'.

**Rob Williams**, Director of Finance and Operations at Blenheim School responded "Blenheim made the decision to offer their 3G pitch to Chelsea FC on Tuesdays and Thursdays to further develop their existing relationship with Chelsea FC and in support of the work they are doing to develop grassroots youth football opportunities in the local community, particularly with girls. This change was not the fault of Chelsea FC or Chelsea Foundation.

"Blenheim have offered several alternative days and times for Epsom and Ewell Colts to move their Thursday booking to and are delighted that they have made additional bookings on Mondays, Saturdays and Sundays to use the newly installed 3G pitch which has seen unprecedented demand.

In the face of a possible crisis at the club, Pauline Russell is making an attempt to rally the community, stating: "We are calling on the community, local authorities, and Chelsea FC to recognise the importance of grassroots sports and to work with us to find a solution that allows these 170 girls to continue their training on Thursdays without disruption."

While the club searches for alternative venues and potential collaborations with other local organisations, they have put forward an online petition for the public to show their support.

## Surrey Police's response to national disorder

Following the tragic events in Southport last week and the subsequent violent disorder we have seen across the country, we are providing our communities with an update on our policing approach.

While at this stage, in Surrey, we have not seen the levels of disorder, protests, or reports of hate crime that have been seen across other parts of the country, this has understandably caused concerns within our communities.

Since we first saw the increase in violent disorder across the country and where specific communities have been targeted, local officers have increased their visibility and engagement where we know that residents, businesses, and faith leaders are feeling vulnerable. Patrols have been increased in key areas across the county so that our communities have a visible presence from us. We recognise that this is a challenging time for all our communities, and we are committed to providing reassurances to those who may be concerned for their safety.

We are already seeing an increase in reports of misinformation and disinformation, which we know can be extremely concerning for our communities. Our officers have a vital role to play in reassuring those who feel concerned, vulnerable or unsafe in our

county, and the spreading of this misinformation and disinformation can cause further alarm. We would encourage the public to not only challenge what they read online and consider whether it could be misinformation, but also not to share this further on social media.

If you do see information circulating online about possible disorder, please report these to us so that we can investigate and respond. You can also approach local officers when they are in the area to raise any concerns or ask any questions that you may have. If you would prefer to report information anonymously, you can contact independent charity Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111. In an emergency, always dial 999.

We are continually reviewing the information we receive around reports of potential disorder or crime. Our policing response will always work alongside our priority of ensuring our communities feel safe and supported by us.

Chief Superintendent Graham Barnett said: "We would like to reassure all our communities that we are prepared should there be disorder in Surrey. We have specialist teams and resources in place to make sure we can continue to protect our communities while we respond to reports of disorder. We will continue to facilitate peaceful protest, but violent disorder will not be tolerated, and we will respond to this robustly. Arrests will be made, and charges will be brought to those responsible.

"I would like to thank our communities for their continued support as we work together to protect the public, provide reassurances around our policing approach, and robustly tackle any disorder we may see in our county."

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