

Two years on - Epsom stilled by Ukrainian voices

24 February 2024



Saturday morning the Epsom community gathered at the Epsom Market Place to mark the solemn occasion of the second anniversary of the start of the war in Ukraine. Organized by the **Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network** (EERN) and **Surrey Stands with Ukraine** (SSWU), the event aimed to show solidarity and support for the people of Ukraine during these challenging times.

The atmosphere was one of unity and reflection as locals joined together to honour the resilience of the Ukrainian people. The local Ukrainian choir, **Renaissance**, delivered a moving rendition of the Ukrainian National Anthem, followed by a heartfelt prayer for Ukraine, touching the hearts of all those in attendance.

Jo Sherring, founder of the Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network, welcomed the crowd, emphasizing the importance of standing in solidarity with Ukraine during this difficult period. "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 stated.

Roy Deadman, Chair of Surrey Stands With Ukraine thanked all the volunteers who have devoted countless unpaid hours to raising funds, collecting donations and sorting and packing aid for Ukraine.

A member of the choir, **Konstantyn**, a Ukrainian resident of Epsom, stepped forward and gave a poignant speech expressing his gratitude for Britain for its unwavering support to the Ukrainian community. "It is with a profound sense of appreciation that we extend our gratitude to everyone who has supported our country, whether in word or deed," he remarked.

The presence of The Worshipful the Mayor of Epsom & Ewell, Councillor **Rob Geleit**, and the Lady Mayor, added a sense of official recognition to the event, further underscoring the community's commitment to standing with Ukraine.

Although unable to attend in person, **Chris Grayling**, MP for Epsom & Ewell, conveyed his heartfelt message of solidarity to the Ukrainian community. "I am sorry not to be with you this year, but wanted to take this opportunity to extend my hand of friendship to all of our friends in Ukraine, both those of you who are here, and to your families who are back there.

I am very grateful to all of those locally who rose to the occasion, providing homes and other support for those escaping the War, to the teams of volunteers who continue to work with the Ukrainians who are here, and also the team in Surrey Stands For Ukraine who continue to provide direct aid to those back in Ukraine.

I know that this is a sombre occasion, but it is one which is really important as a signal of our determination to stand with Ukraine. That determination will not waver here in Epsom and Ewell."

The event served as a reminder of the ongoing struggle faced by the people of Ukraine and reaffirmed the commitment of the Epsom community to support them in their quest for peace and stability.

This week SSWU sent its 100th van packed with aid to Ukraine and the day's event raised over £1000. The charity is sending a long-laddered fire engine to Zaporizhzhia. Being near the front line the city's tower blocks can be struck by Russian missiles before the siren warns.



Alan Avis (SSWU), Cllr Neil Dallen (Residents Association), Mhairi Fraser (Conservative PPC), Cllr Bernie Muir (Conservative Borough and County), Lady Mayoress, Cllr Robert Geleit (Mayor and Labour Councillor), Helen Maguire (Liberal Democrat PPC), Roy Deadman (SSWU) joined together at the offices of SSWU and EERN in Global House. Offices generously donated by the **Ashley Centre** and generously exempted from business rates by **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council**.

Politicians from all parties suspended differences in supporting the event.

Lionel Blackman director of the charity for SSWU observed: "After the disunity and chaos in Parliament this week over the war in Gaza it was heartening to see local politicians from all sides demonstrate their united support for the humanitarian work being done in the Borough and Surrey for Ukrainians here and at home."

If you wish to hear the Ukrainian Choir Renaissance and other professional Ukrainian musicians come to the social and music evening free of charge (leaving collection at discretion) on Saturday 30th March at the Epsom Methodist Church Ashley Road. Bring and share nibbles appreciated from 6pm and music starts at 7pm. No booking necessary.

Top Image- Ukraine Choir Renaissance with supporters from EERN and SSWU