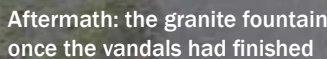


The first January market in the three-year history of the Maple Road event coincided with the start of the snow, reducing stall numbers to 16 as some far-flung regulars were unable to reach Surbiton. But hardy shoppers still flocked, with the Giggly Pig hot sausage samples being devoured by the handful.

The eight acres of the Victoria rec were opened in 1891 by the Duchess of Albany. Originally named Surbiton Recreation Ground, it cost £800 to create, and was built on part of the site of the town's old penny farthing racetrack. The pavilion was added two years later, on the precise central point of the ground.



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Full stories on pages 3, 4 and 5.

It's a Total change



Surbiton's two Total petrol stations have been snapped up by Esso and Shell, giving both oil giants an even bigger local market share.

Garages at Brighton Road (above, opposite the Lamb) and Portsmouth Road (below, opposite Winters Road) have been sold by the French petroleum firm as part of a long-term strategy to abandon the UK pump market.

Nearly 500 filling stations are being rebranded after a 50-year Gallic love affair with British motorists.

It means smaller petrol retailers are finding it harder to get a look-in. Two years ago Murco sold its 475-strong petrol station network.

Esso has bought the Brighton Road forecourt, while Shell has added Portsmouth Road to its

portfolio, making it the largest fuel seller in Surbiton.

The Brighton Road and Portsmouth Road forecourts generate around £100,000 in earnings each year – a figure bolstered by selling air (50p a puff), drooping flowers, Mars bars and kindling, but reduced by the growth in electric cars, and the rise of supermarket stations such as Tesco, Shannon Corner.



Gardening tips by Janice Cripps



Armchair gardening

Looking out at the recent snow, you might think there is little the gardener can do. Not so. A little effort now can reap benefits, and I don't even need to step outside to plan for spring and summer. Sitting in a comfy chair, browsing through glossy catalogues and preparing a wish list of plants to buy, I ask myself what worked well last year.

Were there any significant gaps or are there any overgrown shrubs that need drastic pruning? While reviewing the planting, I can also review the overall design. A garden not only needs to look good, it also needs to be practical. If the kids have grown and no longer use the trampoline, the space could become a vegetable patch or herb garden.

Gardening in snowy weather is definitely an armchair activity. However, after the thaw, and providing the ground isn't waterlogged, there are plenty of jobs to do.

Planting is fine as long as the soil isn't frozen, and now is a good time to plant bare root hedges and roses.

A mild winter day is also perfect for pruning shrubs, wisteria, roses and fruit trees.

Thin out branches to increase light and the air that flows through the tree or shrub. Remove old or damaged branches and make a clean angled cut just above a bud in the same direction as the bud so that rain runs off easily. Remove twisted branches and branches that cross or rub together. Stand back and make the final cuts to achieve the shape you want.

In the borders, cut back dying perennials and ornamental grasses and fork over the soil as you go, removing weeds. If you have bare patches of soil, dig it over roughly, leaving the large clods of earth to break down naturally in the winter weather, so improving the overall structure of the soil.

It is a good idea to apply a 5cm layer of mulch from the local garden centre to planted areas to seal in moisture, insulate delicate plants and create a barrier against weeds. If you buy animal manure from a farm, make sure it is well composted. Never use raw manure directly on a border. Its high nutrient content will burn plants, destroy seedlings

and inhibit plant growth, while pathogens in manure spread weed seeds and may make you feel ill. If manure has an offensive odour, don't use it.

Other jobs? Tidy the shed, clean and disinfect pots and seed trays, clean and oil garden tools, sharpen shears, service the lawn mower and power tools, repair fences and check climber supports.

Avoid pruning or planting in frosty conditions as you risk dieback. Walking too much on borders will compact the soil and harm its structure. Walking too much on lawns is also a no no. If frozen grass blades snap and blacken, the lawn may take several seasons to fully recover.

So stay indoors and stick to armchair gardening!

Janice Cripps is a professional garden designer based in Surbiton. For advice, planting plans, or taking projects from concept to completion, visit www.janicecripps.co.uk

Good Life Pumpwatch

Surbiton's petrol prices on January 30. Unleaded (green) and diesel (red) with comparative prices from Dec 28 2012.

Esso, 90 Brighton Road
135.9 143.9 Jan 30
133.9 140.9 Dec 28

Shell, Ace of Spades
133.9 140.9 Jan 30
132.9 139.9 Dec 28

Pace, 65 The Avenue
136.9 142.9 Jan 30
133.9 142.9 Dec 28

Shell, Manor Rd Sth, Hinchley Wood
133.9 140.9 Jan 30
133.9 140.9 Dec 28

Esso, Tolworth Broadway
133.9 141.9 Jan 30
133.9 140.9 Dec 28

Jet, 248 Hook Road
133.9 140.9 Jan 30
132.9 139.9 Dec 28

Shell, 122 Portsmouth Road
133.9 141.9 Jan 30
133.9 141.9 Dec 28

Premature sale target

A nearly-new sale at Surbiton YMCA will raise money for Born Too Soon, the charity set up at Kingston Hospital in 1985 to support parents of premature babies.

The sale is being organised by Clare Shelley, whose son Jack was cared for at Kingston's neonatal unit after he arrived 15 weeks early, weighing just 1lb 10oz.

"All the staff throughout Jack's stay at Kingston neonatal unit and Born Too Soon were just fantastic," she said. "They are all so friendly and easy to talk to, as well as being professional."

"They do an amazing job helping so many babies grow bigger, stronger and get well so they can go home, while creating an atmosphere on the unit, which is warm, friendly and homely."

"Jack's journey had its challenges,

but he grew big and strong and finally came home after three months."

Clare's aim is to give something back by passing on the profits from the nearly-new sale on Saturday February 16, from 2.30-4.30pm, at the YMCA at 49 Victoria Road.

The sale is of items for mums-to-be, babies and children, and people can take a table to sell their own nearly new items for £20. Alternatively you can donate nearly-new items. Entry to the sale is £2.

The neonatal unit at Kingston Hospital cares for around 500 babies a year. Born Too Soon provides information and support to parents and raises funds to buy specialist equipment.

If you can help with the sale, email Clare at clare.shelley@blueyonder.co.uk

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A five-way fight

There is a five-way fight to represent Berrylands ward in a by-election on February 28 following the death of Lib Dem councillor Frances Moseley in December. Candidates are solicitor Sushila Abraham of Elgar Avenue (Lib Dems), football writer Tony Banks of Chiltern Drive (Labour), Ryan Coley of Park Road, Kingston (Green Party), ex-bank manager Mike Head of Raeburn Avenue (Conservatives) and Michael Watson of South Lane, New Malden (UKIP).

Nursery visit

Staff at the Sutherland day nursery in Ewell Road celebrated their fifth birthday last week with a visit by MP Ed Davey and the mayor, Mary Heathcote. The nursery, open 7.30am-6.30pm, has places for 72 children, with a sheltered outdoor garden. Ofsted grades it 'good', and a full-time chef prepares fresh meals.

Romantic offer

You can order a small, romantic quantity of Vanilla Jo cake pops from Surbiton's cupcake queen, Joanne Lee, with free Valentine's Day delivery to local addresses. Click on the red heart at www.vanillajo.co.uk

History meeting

The agm of Surbiton and District Historical Society takes place at 7.45pm on March 5 at the Surbiton Library hall, Ewell Road. After the formal business, Good Life editor Tim Harrison will give a short talk about setting up the newspaper. The meeting on April 2 at 7.45pm sees Ian Bevan give an illustrated talk on Georgian London.

Run out of steam

ExCellar, the coffee shop/off licence at the corner of Victoria Road and Brighton Road, went into administration at the end of January after six months of trading. Opened by Simon Baile in the former Moben/Dolphin showroom, the company had previously traded in the station forecourt, in what is destined to be a Sainsbury's Local. As well as the Surbiton branch, there were outlets in Claygate, Fulham and Sheen.

Treasurer sought

Surbiton's Landirani Trust charity, helping orphans in Malawi for nearly a decade, needs a treasurer. Founder Heather Palmer said the part-time voluntary post would suit a local person with an eye for figures. "If you feel you are qualified, have time and want to make a difference to vulnerable people, get in touch," she said. Email info@landirani.org

Magical music

Surbiton Recorded Music Society holds its agm and party at Raeburn Hall, the United Reformed Church, Elgar Avenue, on February 22. Entertainment is promised. On March 8, Derek Iley hosts Black Magic at 7.45pm. The society, which stages 20 events a year, is nearing its 40th birthday. Details of the programme are at www.surbitonrms.co.uk

Kayleigh at the Duke

Jazz singer Kayleigh Marie will belt out some of her favourite classic love songs at two upcoming gigs at Surbiton's Duke of York pub. Her smooth, sultry voice will conjure up a romantic mood on Valentine's night, and she follows that up with a second concert at the Victoria Road pub on February 23 where songs including Summertime and What A Difference A Day Makes are likely to feature. Both gigs begin at 8pm, entry is free, but you can reserve tables.

Jennings marks 50 years of service

His first day at work - Boxing Day 1962 - saw some of the heaviest blizzards the UK had ever known. Thirteen-year-old Alan Jennings skidded along icy Ewell Road to make his deliveries on his butcher's bike, the wicker pannier filled with packages of sausages and chops.

Half a century later, Alan, brother Brian and son Kevin, are still serving the Surbiton community. Sadly bicycle deliveries are a thing of the past, but the shop is still at 146 Ewell Road, and had already been a butcher's for 25 years when the black and white photo was taken in 1935. It shows former owner Mr AE Thomas alongside Kevin's grandmother. Look in the window reflection and you can just make out trolleybus lines and street gaslights! The Victorian tiling survives, as does the dinky cash window inside the shop where customers paid.

The grand wrought iron sign above the shop was melted down for the war effort, but otherwise CD Jennings carries on in the traditional way - the CD, incidentally, standing for Cyril Douglas.

"He was my grandfather," said Kevin, 35, who switched from an IT career to join the family firm. "My grandmother, Freda, had joined the shop in 1935 as bookkeeper.

"We sell all the traditional cuts; all our beef and lamb comes from Scotland, and we hang all beef for three weeks, and do all the cutting ourselves."

Kevin learnt his trade from father Alan, 63, and Alan's younger brother Brian. "We had two bicycle delivery rounds in those days," said Alan, recalling that bleak first winter of 1962/63.

Now the shop sells to second and third



Brian (left), Alan and Kevin Jennings and, right, AE Thomas with Freda, Kevin's gran, in 1935

generations of those early customers, and has built up a tremendous reservoir of loyalty and goodwill.

All burgers and bangers are made in the shop, with 30 different sausage recipes used in rotation. At least 10 are available every week, including spicy Spanish, pork and apple, and pork and mustard. There are also Stornoway black puddings and haggis, while venison comes

from the Queen's Balmoral estate.

"Surbiton is well-educated about its food," said Kevin. "People are prepared to pay for quality. We don't compete with supermarkets. If you want cheap and cheerful and don't want to know where it comes from, use them!"

But if you do want traceability, friendly service and meat cut the way you want it, Jennings is the name to remember.



The butchers are, from left, Alan, Kevin and Brian

Overheard at the Saucy Kettle

A man sees a sign outside a house in Surbiton. Talking Dog For Sale. He rings the bell. The owner appears and says the dog is in the back garden. A small brown dog is sitting there. 'Do you really talk?' he asks. 'Yes,' the dog replies. After recovering from his surprise, the man asks: 'So, tell me your story.' The dog looks up and says: 'Well, I discovered I could talk when I was pretty young. I wanted to help the government, so I joined the SAS. In no time I was jetting from country to country, sitting in rooms with world leaders, as no one imagined a dog would be eavesdropping. I was one of their most valuable spies for eight years. But I wasn't getting any younger, so I decided to settle down. I got a job at Heathrow, doing undercover security work. I was awarded several medals. I got married, had a few puppies, and now I've retired.' The man is amazed. He goes back into the house and asks the owner how much he wants for the dog. 'Ten quid,' the owner says. '£10? But this dog is amazing! Why are you selling him so cheaply?' 'Because he's a lying bastard. He's never been out of the garden.'

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Brighter future for Surbiton's streets

Plans have been approved for spending £240,000 on new, energy-efficient street lights. The existing lampposts are 20 years old... and look it. Refurbishing would cost more than replacing, so new-generation lights will soon be installed, with the aim of reducing night-sky light pollution. Almost half the 550 people who responded to a public consultation chose the Legend design (pictured) for Victoria Road, parts of Brighton Road, Claremont Road, St James Road and St Mark's Hill. Cllr Malcolm Self, who chairs Surbiton neighbourhood committee, said: "The design not only fits in with the character of the town centre, but will be more energy-efficient and need less maintenance. The white light from the new lamps will give a really welcoming feel to Surbiton town centre in the evenings and help make people feel safer at night."

Bob Noble, chairman of Surbiton Festival, welcomed the news. "We had a very long, cold morning traipsing the streets with councillors, planning officers and engineers when we were planning this, so it's great to know Surbiton has a bright future."



Stonking start to the weekend

Surbiton's boutique hotel, Bosco, offers New York-style lazy brunches on Saturdays and Sundays, with the centrepiece being the Full Bosco – a heaped plateful of bacon, sausage, eggs, beans, tomato, mushrooms and brunch potatoes.

Manager Gavin Newton told The Good Life that brunch begins as early as 9am and rolls through until 4pm, although the peak times for arrivals are noon-1pm.

Shrewsbury House alumnus and international businessman John Chudleigh tucked into a Bosco brunch last weekend, and concluded: "Excellent tea, top-grade food and relaxed atmosphere, with professional service and views overlooking Surbiton's bustle. A great way to start the weekend."

Refitted and refurbished with new wall art and new sofas, the cocktail lounge at the St Mark's Hill hotel, just up from the station, has dozens of mini zones for family groups and gaggles of chums to lollop in.

Coffee is supplied by Surbiton's own roaster, Traders, while achingly trendy music plays in the lounge and, on crisp sunny mornings, in the outdoor patio area.

"We're primarily a cocktail lounge and hotel, but coffee and brunch is a big thing too," said Gavin, a Surbitonian through and through. "We really want to shout about the food we do."

As well as hearty breakfasts and more restrained options (eggs benedict with smoked ham for £6.45, eggs Florentine served on spinach for £6.25), Bosco does different styles of hangover-cure bloody marys, including one with fiery wasabi. If you really want to push the boat out you can even order Dom Perignon.



Book a table on 020 8339 5720 or just turn up with the newspaper and settle in for a relaxed morning or afternoon.

Surbiton's Blockbusters will vanish

The two Blockbuster DVD rental shops in Tolworth Broadway and Brighton Road will have disappeared by next month.

It will leave big gaps in two of the town's main trading streets, particularly in Tolworth where the huge store occupies a space the size of half a dozen small shops.

The Surbiton Blockbusters are among 129 to close across the UK after the firm went into administration. Locally, a dozen staff will be made redundant, with the company pledging to help them find alternative work.

One staff member told The Good Life that he only found out his shop was closing and he was losing his job when he saw it on the news.

Blockbuster launched in the UK in 1989, cashing in on the video boom, but recent growth in online rental, internet streaming and services such as LoveFilm has made trading difficult.

HMV and camera shop Jessops – both with branches in Kingston – have also gone into administration.



Coffee's over as art starts

A poignant note was stuck to the window of Foodie, the independent coffee shop in Victoria Road, by Justin and Jo McIntyre, and their daughter Erin.

The past five years have seen people come and go, and stay. Each person has added so much to the rich tapestry of our lives, and we are so blessed to have built such wonderful friendships.

Foodie's closure came as a shock to regulars who had viewed the shoebox-sized espresso and cake haven as a home from home since 2007.

In mid-December, with its lease at an end, Justin and Jo packed up, ending an association with cuppas which stretched back to the shop's days as Traders, a coffee shop and bean wholesaler which had upped sticks and moved to its current home in Ewell Road.

"We put all our skills and efforts into creating a quality product and a welcoming, caring environment, but sadly our lease has ended and at the moment we have no plans to move to other premises," said Jo, who met Justin in a Surbiton coffee shop. "The power of the coffee shop chains makes it too hard to compete."

Photographer David Jacobson, who took this portrait of Jo, said: "It leaves me feeling very sad. Of



framing business in Surbiton in 1988, ironically in what is now Starbucks, but which had once been a handbag shop run by an old dear called Mrs Rogers.

The Frame Shop rebranded as Arthouse in 2003, offering a mix of framing and limited-edition art and sculpture, much by local artists. In 2008 he moved to the back counter of Woodhouse.

Originally framing was done behind the Victoria Road parade, but Adrian outsourced to a Sussex firm, and now everything arrives and departs via a collection service.

A hearty welcome

Stuck for the perfect gift for the one you love? Hoi Polloi, just off Victoria Road at the top of St Andrew's Road, has umpteen options, including this heart-shaped memo and photo rack at around a tenner.

After 15 years in the town, Marie Hennessy has a pretty good idea of what lovestruck Surbitonians crave, with partner Gary State – secretary of the Surbiton Business Community – admitting that the shop (and its sister branch in Claygate) can resemble 'Hearts R Us' at this time of year.

Prices for Valentine's Day gifts start from 75p. There are heart-shaped hot water bottles, Balinese mosaic mirrors, little tin hearts, coasters, cards, trinket pots, wooden frames and tealight holders.

"There are a lot of things at the £5 end of the market, but the best bet is to come in and have a browse," said Marie.

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Community history gets go-ahead

Residents know there's more to Surbiton than its fictional portrayal in this newspaper's namesake, the 70s sitcom *The Good Life*. Now a project funded by a £44,500 Heritage Lottery Fund grant will set the record straight. Run by staff and students at Hillcroft College, with support from Kingston Council and the local NHS, the aim is to recruit community volunteers to piece together a history of Surbiton centred on the Oakhill neighbourhood. Readers of *The Good Life* are invited to get involved.

The project will emphasise the fact that the town was the first major suburb (in 1838) to be linked by rail directly to central London, shaping the area's growth from a few grand dwellings to today's 40,000-population town.

One of the original mansions today houses Hillcroft College. Originally built for the owner of the Bryant and May match company, it became, in 1926, the site of the first college in the UK for working women.

The project will also trace the history of healthcare as the nearby site of the former Surbiton Hospital is being redeveloped to provide a community health centre and the Lime Tree primary school that opened last September.

Both school and health centre will be involved in the history project, helping find people to interview older residents about their recollections. The information will feature in a new Oakhill Community Heritage website, and will be included in permanent local

exhibitions, part of which will be displayed in the college, the primary school and the new health centre.

Artist Rana Begum will work with volunteers and children to create a permanent timeline along the new pedestrian and cycle path that will follow a route through the new development from Ewell Road towards the station; a timeline which will be seen by many of the eight million commuters who use Surbiton station each year.

Michael Wheeler, Hillcroft principal, said: "We are thrilled that this project bid has been successful and see it as an excellent way to celebrate the wonderful local history



Hillcroft College

and bring key partners and the community together."

To volunteer, or share your memories, email OCHP@hillcroft.ac.uk

Phil Cooper

'Mr Surbiton' is made an MBE



The man many regard as 'Mr Surbiton' has been made an MBE in the New Year honours.

Douglas Reynolds, of St Mark's Hill, will go to Buckingham Palace later in the year to receive his award from The Queen.

Born in (and named after) Douglas Road, Tolworth, the 92-year-old followed his father into local politics.

In 1950 he won a seat for Labour in Tolworth West ward, and served on Surbiton and Kingston councils for 30 years.

He started the Kingston Police and

We're losing Focus

The wedding and evening hire shop in Claremont Road is knotting its last bow tie and buttoning its final waistcoat.

Stephen and Sarah Holt, who set up Focus Formal Wear – opposite Waitrose – in 1988, are calling it a day after a quarter of a century, with a grand sale of dinner jackets, kilts, dandy weskits and tuxes to clear the shop.

"I hit 60 in November," confessed Stephen, "and realised I'd been 45 years in retailing."

It will be a big wrench for the man with the long silvery hair – an image which led one fellow Surbiton trader to say: "What? Richard Branson's leaving Surbiton?"

The Chessington couple's children practically grew up in the shop, often doing their homework in the back room. When son Philip was about 11, he famously helped a customer who was inquiring about the Prince of Wales check suits on a 'reduced' rack. "Why are they in the sale?" the man asked. "Cos no one wants to buy them," replied Philip, with such disarming honesty that he clinched a sale!

Initially Stephen and Sarah occupied both the current shop at 8 Claremont Road, and what is now the Chinese herbalist next door, but eventually reduced to the present-sized premises.

"We've been very lucky, with lots of repeat business," said Stephen. "Yes," added Sarah. "We'll miss our lovely customers; we've done the weddings of children of the customers who hired wedding outfits years ago!"

There are plenty of retailing anecdotes. One old fellow used to turn up at the shop just before closing time to have his bow tie tied ahead of a reunion dinner... and then would sit at home in his finery for three hours before the evening do!

Looking back on the changing face of Surbiton, Stephen said it had been a bit in the doldrums when Focus Formal Wear



opened in the late 80s, with "lots of tatty charity shops".

"It's got better, but the sad thing is so many of the independents have gone. There used to be two fruiterers in the high street, and a baker."

The shop's closing down sale lasts throughout February.

Community Forum, chairing the body for several years.

A past deputy mayor of Kingston (1968/69) and mayor (1974/75), he was invited, six years ago, to be the chairman of the Kingston Pensioners' Forum.

"I have enjoyed helping organisations, and the award of MBE for services to the community is greatly appreciated," he said.

Douglas's wife, Doris, died 18 months ago. "She was a great support and would have been pleased I have received this honour," he added.

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Wear your heart on a sleeve

HMV's recent calamities highlight how music buying has changed, writes Steve Burniston.

It evoked memories for me of an era when the concept of downloading would have been straight out of a sci-fi film.

What was buying music like in Surbiton in the 70s? It was a vintage time zone, with an alien retail landscape. There was a record shop in Victoria Road where I spent endless hours poring over racks of albums and singles. One pleasure was chatting to other people about music, or stumbling across an album you'd heard about. It was a social – not just shopping – experience.

Record shops wielded a special



magic with new music. Pre-internet music fans were reliant on weekly music papers to learn of upcoming releases. In May 1976, I read an exultant review of Steely Dan's *The Royal Scam* album in *Sounds*, but release wasn't scheduled for a couple of weeks. I shot down to Victoria Road to flick through the racks like a manic croupier, in case it had arrived via some benevolent glitch in the delivery roster. No luck.

Eventually, it arrived. After shamelessly milking the nods of approval from the bloke behind the counter, I triumphantly carried my prized trophy up Victoria Road without a carrier bag.

Other options included Tolworth Broadway's branch of MJM records, where 70s purchases included a limited

edition single of Led Zeppelin's *Trampled Underfoot*.

Tolworth also had a more staid record shop called, er, The Record Shop, notable for its bargain bin of singles, and a small record shop in Ewell Road, near Surbiton Hospital.

As tactical back-up, Woolworths and Boots sold new music, but lacked that vital hanging-about-and-chatting component.

Thankfully a few record shops still provide the 'proper' experience. Apart from the music, it's the discussions, the shared enthusiasms that provide enjoyment face-to-face. Checking an online order before a cardboard packet hisses through the letterbox hasn't the same anticipatory magic or final pay-off of proudly strutting up Victoria Road clutching that Steely Dan album. Oh, the album? Brilliant.

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Waitrose manager hits sell-by date

He'll turn 60 next month, and that means retirement for the man whose 'firm but fair' management style is credited with making Surbiton's Waitrose one of the UK's most efficient.

David Lower, described by one colleague as 'a man with an old-fashioned retailer streak', has been a familiar figure on the shop floor for five years; guiding customers, cajoling staff and generally running a tight ship.

Looking back on his tenure, he cites 2010's refurbishment as a key point, broadening the fresh food range, to meet changing customer demands.

"I'll miss it, and I'll miss the people," he said. "We've got a great team. Each time I come here I meet 100 people, and that's without the customers!"

Now David will work on improving his golf, do a bit of travelling with the missus and take to the air more regularly, having gained his pilot's licence a decade ago in Redhill.

A father of two, David began his Waitrose career 40 years ago as

a trainee in Epsom. His daughter has followed him into the firm as a Waitrose personnel manager.

He takes pride in the way Waitrose has weathered the downturn. "You wouldn't have thought Waitrose would emerge from the recession so well, but we have, by consistently delivering good products and the service to go with that," he said. The new manager is Mark Stevens, who has run Richmond's Waitrose for 12 years.



Making a beauty spot more beautiful

One of the most popular areas of green space in Surbiton has been given an environmental facelift by volunteers, to encourage wider diversity and help tree growth.

A team of conservationists has been working at Fishponds, the 13-acre park, woodland and birdlife paradise off Ewell Road.

The workers are part of a growing army of local enthusiasts from the six-year-old Kingston Greenspace Volunteers group, run by the Environment Trust.

A new drainage pipe has been laid to allow the rather stagnant ponds – beloved of swans – to come to life again.

Sycamore saplings which overshadow the upper pond, and drop their leaves in, were trimmed back, bulbs were planted and a swath of brambles has been cleared.

As a result of the volunteers' efforts, there is now a proper footpath from which to admire the view across the upper pond. Two bagfuls of rubbish were also removed.

Project officer Chris Cockel explained: "People come out with us to gain experience of practical conservation work and enjoy some healthy outdoor activity in a friendly social setting, and get a sense of satisfaction at giving something back to their community.

We would dearly love to see more local people joining us; everyone is welcome."

In a separate project at Tolworth Brook (or Surbiton Stream, depending on which map you look at), the Raeburn Avenue car park – an area with a reputation

for antisocial drinking – was opened up, to give young oak trees more light.

The car park covers part of the site of Surbiton's late lamented outdoor lagoon. The hazel trees, oaks and hawthorn planted on the fringes of the car park have been in need of woodland management for some time.

The uncoppiced hazel overshadows the young oaks, which means the leaves sprout from the top of the trees, rather than evenly on all sides. Coppicing lets wild flowers germinate, benefiting insects and, therefore, birds. To help things along, a few wood anemone rhizomes were planted. Rubbish was removed, including an inflatable mattress and an old, very heavy, dumped boiler, and woodchip was laid on muddy paths.

Bluebell shoots were spotted, although it's still too early to tell whether they're English or Spanish bluebells.

The trust trains anyone who would like to learn about nature conservation, and is always receptive to suggestions for new green space projects. Tools, gloves and biscuits are provided.

A grant from the City Bridge Trust has made the latest work in Surbiton possible.

To join in, visit www.environmenttrust.co.uk and click the brown panel marked 'volunteering'.



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Filter bed scheme refused

The controversial scheme to build a futuristic 92-berth marina and floating pontoon of 16 townhouses and 48 flats on former filter beds in Portsmouth Road, Surbiton, has been rejected by Kingston's planning councillors.

After three hours of submissions at the Guildhall in front of 300 people (opponents outnumbering supporters by roughly four to one), the vote was eight against, none for.

An appeal is being lodged by Hydro Properties, which sees the plan as a blueprint for similar floating-home-and-marina projects elsewhere. The developer believes it can win on appeal as Kingston Council's planning officers recommended approval, while bodies such as Natural England, tasked with protecting the environment, made no formal objection.

But there was no disguising the disappointment on the face of Hydro founder Phillip Wallis as the councillors' unanimously rejected the scheme.

The Sanctuary – the name for the pontoon and marina plan – aims to preserve part of the site as a mini nature reserve with bird hide, open up riverside access to all during daylight hours and create an education centre to celebrate the area's water filtration history. The floating pontoon containing 64 homes would be capable of rising and falling an astonishing 22 feet in the event of an extreme flood.

However, letters of objection numbered more than 900. Most opposed the plan on ecological grounds, with particular fears for a roost of Daubenton bats in the old barge tunnels (a colony Hydro says it will protect). There are said to be only

four Daubenton colonies in London.

Many had river-related concerns for an area popular with rowers and sailors, and nearly 200 cited car parking issues.

One objector told the committee that a no-go zone would be created for river users, and said leisure potential was being sacrificed in favour of development.

Hydro insisted the plan would increase the navigable channel, remove eyesores, open up a decaying site and bring economic benefits. It invited opponents to join a management board, to ensure concerns were addressed, and declared it would allow many more Surbiton residents to enjoy the river.

Simon Tyrrell of the Friends of Seething Wells accused the developer of making misleading claims. "Hydro would destroy the form and fabric of the site, destroying everything significant and replacing it with an elite residential area," he said.

When planning officers were challenged about the lack of affordable housing on the site, in apparent contradiction of deals usually hammered out with developers, they stated that the nature reserve, education provision, heritage preservation and public walkways counted in the scheme's favour, and that expected hefty annual management costs for pontoon dwellers made it inappropriate for mixed housing.

Duncan Hawkins, an archaeologist who spoke for the scheme, said the project was a way of gaining access to the heritage on the site, and of celebrating the work of the great Victorian engineers who had built it.



Cedric the swan wins painting contest

A swan called Cedric is the unlikely hero of a Surbiton painting competition. Cedric regularly visits artist Elaine Kimber Mole's houseboat, the Connie Louise, moored at the marina near the City Arms pub, Portsmouth Road.

Inspired by his cute trick of tapping on the deck to scrounge crusts, Elaine took up her brushes and created a wonderful painting in acrylics of Cedric's 'please feed me' expression.

It was the picture which received the most votes in the adult section of the cornerHOUSE's annual art show, and is now displayed in the foyer of the Douglas Road arts centre throughout 2013.

"I feel really chuffed to win it," said Elaine, 47. "Cedric comes to visit me every time I open the back hatch; he taps on the deck with his beak to ask for bread!"

"Once, when I didn't have any bread to

give him, he tapped me on my leg!"

Painting competition organiser Stella Greenslade praised the standard of entries in this year's contest. "There were some fabulous entries, as always, but Elaine's portrait of the swan was truly inspired."

Cedric is a mature male swan, or cob. Two years ago, he lost his mate. "I remember finding him wandering along the bank late at night, looking very sad and trying to find her," recalled Elaine. "Then he turned up last summer with a new young partner. Cedric remarried! He's a great character, and takes bread out of my hand. He's very playful. When the man on the boat next to mine was trying to put the awning on his boat, Cedric kept pulling it off again."

Elaine's boat has an interesting history. It used to belong to the actor Glynn Edwards – now in his 80s – beloved by TV viewers in the 1980s and 90s as the barman at the

Winchester Club in the series Minder, a grumpy fellow who was forever having to take messages for actor George Cole's dodgy wheeler-dealer character Arthur Daley. From 1956 to 1968, Glynn was married to the actress Yootha Joyce, best known for playing Mildred in the 70s sitcoms Man About The House and George and Mildred. She died in 1980 of liver failure brought on by a fondness for the bottle.

"Apparently Glynn used to pace up and down the deck of the boat learning his lines when he lived on the Connie Louise," said Elaine.

The winner of the children's section of the cornerHOUSE art competition was eight-year-old Catherine Kuit, whose work I Want To Be A Tulip was described as being "a beautiful painting with an inspired title". It, too, is on display throughout 2013 in the arts centre foyer.



Elaine Kimber Mole with the winning painting



Mozart in Surbiton

Rehearsals are in full swing for Kingston Choral Society's evening concert at St Andrew's church next month.

Mozart's Exsultate Jubilate opens, featuring soprano Anna Devin. It was first performed in Milan in January 1773, when Mozart was nearly 17. Stravinsky's Mass is followed by Mozart's C Minor Mass. Andrew Griffiths conducts. The concert is at 7.30pm on March 23. Book at www.kingstonchoralsociety.org.uk, on the door or by calling 020 8977 4801.



Surbiton rock band Eddie and the Redheads play the Royal Oak, 261 Ewell Road, on March 15 at 9pm, with tracks from their new EP, Weirdfreakylovething. "Four songs, £3 – a bargain," says guitarist Chris Page, proving a career in sales hasn't been wasted. The band also play Kingston's Grey Horse on February 21 at 8.45pm.

Panto's quarter century

Pantomime performers from a quarter of a century of shows gathered for a gala evening at the cornerHOUSE in Douglas Road to chat about their favourite productions.

The panto – a firm fixture in the calendar of the arts centre – was launched at the old Ellerton Hall in Ellerton Road in 1987 to raise money for urgent African famine relief.

When that building was demolished to make way for housing two decades ago, the show transferred to nearby Douglas Road, where it has been packing in audiences at the end of January ever since.

The latest show, No Strings Attached, a version of Pinocchio written by panto dame Tim Harrison, played to nearly 800 people at six performances, finishing on Saturday February 2.

Among those returning to celebrate the formal opening of an exhibition of old

programmes, photographs, scripts, costumes and props were musician Eleanor Gamper, who wrote more than 70 original songs for past shows, and actress Katy Feeney, a West End professional who appeared in some of the earliest productions.

"The evening was a great success, with 70 past and present cast, musicians and backstage crew returning to celebrate 25 years of charity pantos," said organiser Lucy Harrison.

As well as reminiscing and retelling tales of past pantomimes, the gala evening also gave old troupers a chance to sing some of the most memorable songs from the shows, including the anthem Tol'orth D'arcy, written by Eleanor Gamper, which celebrated, among other things, the 281 bus route, the roundabout on the A3, Tolworth's gleaming glass tower and the distinctive summer aroma wafting across Berrylands from the Hogsmill works.



Behnam is pictured in The Fircroft Trust garden, Ditton Road. Picture by Alistair Lark

Peaceful pictures

Calligraphy artist Behnam Al-Agzeer, 60, has a show on at Surbiton's cornerHOUSE this month, and has presented a picture to the Fircroft Trust, which supports adults with mental health problems in the community.

The picture, part of a peace-promoting series, will be displayed in the charity's new residential care home, Firs Court.

The show closes on February 28. The cornerHOUSE is at 116 Douglas Road.

Spending Valentine's between the sheets

On Valentine's Day, don't forget the most important gift... a comfy bed. If yours is a squeaky relic with lumpy, musty mattress and deflated pillows, you need a change.

The Bed Post in Surbiton aims to improve your love life... from mattress, bed and pillows to linens, throws and cushions.

A good night's sleep can boost your emotional well-being. As we age, the amount and type of sleep we have changes, and many people are not getting enough deep sleep. This can be caused by fretting, stress, sleep apnoea, physical pain, urinary issues, caffeine, alcohol...

A vicious circle of poor sleep and stress can persist long after original problems have gone.

So, ensure your bed is comfortable and not too hot. Even small body temperature fluctuations can lead to sleep disturbance. Your mattress should be comfortable and give the correct level of support.

Your bedroom should be dark, cool and unstimulating... and control the morning light.

Reduce noise in the night, even if you think you're used to it. Try ear plugs, or adding fabrics, upholstery and carpets to your room.

Read the blogs at www.bed-post.co.uk, visit the showroom at 43 Brighton Road, or call 020 8399 3293. Have a wonderful Valentine's Day, and remember: never go to bed angry with your partner. Stay up and fight!



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If you don't read the newspaper you are uninformed, if you do read the newspaper you are misinformed. *Mark Twain*

Be my love bunny

Valentine's Day brings decisions. Do you stay in for a cheap and cheerful supermarket meal deal from adverts that show a couple gazing into each other's eyes over coq au vin and lemon mousse (the bonus being you get to keep the ramekin)? Or do you venture to a restaurant for a carefully devised 'special' Valentine's menu? Expect such romantic dishes as beef carpaccio (delicate slivers of meat being so much more seductive than a boorish slab of steak), lobster thermidor (because to splash out on lobster shows you care, right?) and chocolate fondants (everyone knows molten chocolate dribbling from the middle of a small sponge is the height of eroticism). Don't worry that you pay twice as much as you normally would because you get a 'complimentary' glass of sparkling wine and a couple of chocolate hearts with the bill. What more could you wish for?

You must also decide what wondrous gift

best portrays your undying love. Will a heart-shaped balloon do the trick, so you can both get a bit silly after the prosecco and squeak 'I love you' in helium voices? Or what about a cuter-than-cute teddy bear, its fluffy head tilted to the side in a way that says 'You really are top notch'? Or a bunch of roses that screams I MASSIVELY AND EXTREMELY LOVE YOU because they've got plastic sprigs of sparkly hearts shooting out from between the stems? Or do you take the not-totally-selfless option of buying a huge box of chocolates that you can both pig out on in front of a cheesy film, or, if feeling adventurous, chuck at each other's open mouths?

Perhaps the hardest decision of all: which card? A cutely fun picture of a rabbit with



the words Be my love bunny? Or a cartoon of a middle-aged couple in bed and a caption that reads 'As the years went by, Marge was sure that the point of Valentine's Day got smaller and smaller'? Or do you throw caution to the wind and go for the gold swirling font, rich parchment paper, and lines of sentiment such as 'If my love were a bird, let me send a flock; if my love were a tree, let me grow a forest; if my love were a Ford Galaxy, let me build a car park; if my love were a biro, let me work in a stationer's...' Well, you get the idea.

Or just go for the post-it stuck to the fridge. Nothing proclaims love like 'I love you - but hands off my cheesecake.'

Becky Mayhew

Read more of Becky at beckysaysthings.wordpress.com



Sky's the limit

What's the top speed in Tolworth Road? Surbiton driving instructor Colin Stewart of the Kingston School of Motoring recently took this snap of the street.

"The speed limit in Tolworth Road is 30mph," reports Colin. "If you knew the limit of the road you are turning from is 20mph, then you could work it out. My guess is that some prankster stood on the wall and turned the sign round!"



Where is Surbiton's next property hotspot?

Largewood Avenue, Ravenswood Avenue and Hamilton Avenue in Tolworth are likely to become sought-after streets, predicts leading Surbiton estate agent Richard Gee.

A partner at Hawes & Co in Victoria Road, Richard thinks the roads' three-bedroom semis represent good value after maintaining fairly flat prices through 2012.

"Overall, prices didn't do too much, although more attractive, well-maintained properties held up well; especially period houses, which have appreciated in price," he said of the past year.

Lately, the district which has surged ahead is the area bounded by Cotterill Road, Thornhill Road, Douglas Road and Ditton Road. "It has probably been underrated in the past decade, but has really picked up over the last year or two as buyers have realised how close it actually is to Surbiton station," he said.

"The houses are much bigger than the cottages of central Surbiton, and the area has seen above-average increases.

"For 2013, the market is looking positive, although we don't expect to see any significant change in prices. We're expecting to see a general increase in activity, especially for good family homes, of which there is still a shortage. Serious sellers are pricing their

properties correctly, and are achieving sales.

"But there is still a lot of overvaluing by agents, and some vendors have unrealistic expectations because of this. It means some properties have taken a long time to shift.

"The factors that make buyers and sellers more realistic on price include getting into the right catchment areas for schools, having to upsize or needing to downsize."

Which part of Surbiton has scope for growth?

"I think Largewood Avenue, Ravenswood Avenue, Hamilton Avenue - that part of Tolworth - has scope. At present you can still get good three-bedroomed terraced houses and semis with reasonable gardens for £300,000-£350,000.

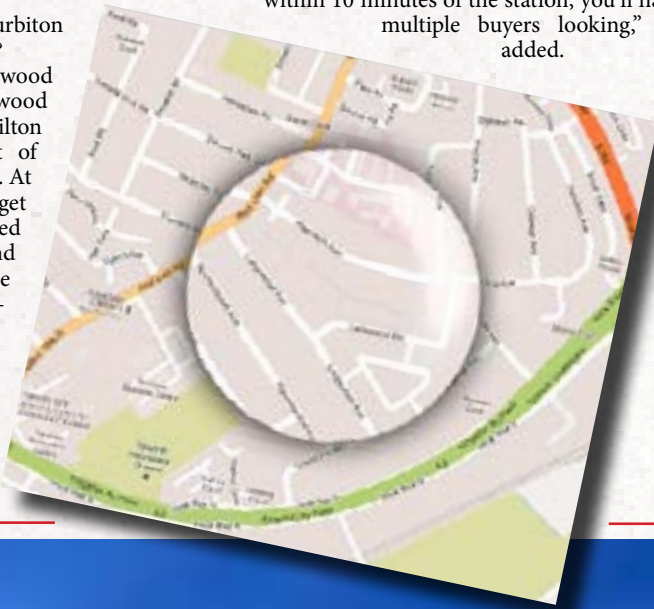
"I also think some flats in the Lovelace Road area of Surbiton are good value. They've stayed around

£240,000-£300,000 for donkey's years.

"The other good-value buys in Surbiton are period conversions. They have big rooms and are often in nice locations in grand old buildings.

"Maple Road and the river roads always have an appeal."

The biggest draw is still being near Surbiton station. "If you have an attractive property within 10 minutes of the station, you'll have multiple buyers looking," he added.



Foodie lament

by Morris Thain

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