



Don't try to park in the town's dinkiest cycle lane! p3



Festive masks and other Xmas ideas on p5



The shadowy life of our local 'Banksy' revealed! p7

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We're ready to jab

Sites are now being set up to inoculate Surbiton's residents against Covid-19, says council leader Caroline Kerr.

The battle against coronavirus is switching to a new phase, with her teams preparing to deliver a programme of mass vaccination at a string of designated local centres, with the most vulnerable first in line.

As we near the end of the second lockdown, Cllr Kerr, right, says she's



heartened by the community spirit and neighbourliness displayed during the crisis.

"It's been hard for people, but I've been really proud of Kingston," she told The Good Life. "There was a 'Blitz spirit' in March, when people supported each other, neighbourhoods came together and we saw awe-inspiring volunteering."

Overall, she's been impressed with the level of compliance with Covid rules, though she acknowledges that it's been a tough ask to urge everyone to endure a second strict lockdown.

She firmly believes that the most effective track and trace system is

community-based. "Where it has been rolled out locally, the rate of contact tracing is 97%, while recent data suggests the national scheme only contacts 60%. People respond more willingly to someone local, rather than someone from a national call centre," she said.

"We have a real commitment to finding people, as it affects our community," she said, adding that the borough takes a four-pronged approach: phone, email, text, "and if that fails, knock on the door!"

News about a vaccine may have boosted morale but doesn't, she stressed, alter the core 'hands, face, space' message to reduce spread of the virus.

Cllr Kerr was pitched straight into the war on Covid-19 when the former ITN newshound was elected council leader on the evening in March Boris Johnson announced the first lockdown.

Eight months on, in a wide-ranging interview, she discusses food poverty, care homes, cycle lanes, climate change and more.

• Full interview on p9

Turkeys have been given the bird!

For the first time in 110 years, Surbiton's independent butcher will not stock Christmas turkeys! Jennings' one-in-one-out rule makes customer collection all but impossible. Instead, the Ewell Road shop is leaving turkey deliveries to its trusted supplier.

Kevin Jennings (whose nan is in this 1935 snap) said: "It's another thing to add to the list of bizarre impacts of the virus... a butcher's shop with no turkeys!"

Geese, chickens, ducks, game birds, venison, pork, gammon, beef, bacon and acclaimed home-made bangers can still be ordered, but turkeys are via www.kellybronze.co.uk, for Fedex delivery on Dec 23. The online code JENNINGS adds bonus extras.

"It feels strange that we aren't stocking turkeys for the first time in 110 years," said Kevin (whose own family prefer goose on their Christmas table).

The shop at 146 Ewell Road is open through to Christmas, takes orders (020 8399 4870) and has full info at cjdenningsandsons.com



Festive lighting up time

Surbiton will sparkle with Christmas lights and a festive tree, thanks to a hefty council grant... but Tolworth Broadway misses out again. However, it may get a glittering display in December 2021. See p5



• Star Wars to ancient Greeks. The roles of John Dodd, p4

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Berrylands tower blocks are rejected

Objectors are breathing a sigh of relief after a bid to build two seven-storey blocks of flats by Berrylands station was rejected.

Bugler Homes wanted to build 56 one, two and three-bed flats at 127 Chiltern Drive and neighbouring Chiltern Works... land currently occupied by light industrial units, warehouses, and The Circulatory community-run upcycling centre.

But Kingston Council planning officers rejected the proposals, citing loss of commercial space, lack of affordable and family homes, density, height and style. Plans would, said officers, be incongruous and have next to no greenhouse gas emission saving.

The developer cannot appeal the decision, and will need to submit a completely new application to pursue further plans for the site.

Dee Ayling, chair of the Rose Walk Residents' Association, which led the campaign against the development, said: "We are very proud of our efforts. We know the developers will be back, and have never disputed the need for

housing, but the height, mass and aesthetic are not in keeping with the area. We will take the victory, for now!"

Berrylands ward councillor John Sweeney said: "This rejection is a victory for Berrylands residents. From the start there has been a great deal of concern about plans for the site. It sparked public meetings, 120 objections from Berrylands residents and ignited a Facebook group [Residents of Berrylands] with 900 members."

"Height, density and access issues were top among concerns expressed about this application by both residents and councillors."

"I hope any new proposals will take on board this feedback."

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Any way you slice it

In a vote of confidence in Tolworth Broadway's long-term future, **Cake Box** has opened, offering calorific treats to those with egg allergies.

Vegetarian and egg-free, the shop has opened in defiance of the general gloom surrounding retail in the second lockdown. The 140-branch chain was launched in 2008 by two cousins in north London, and it has weathered the pandemic well via online sales and deliveries. The new Tolworth shop is one of a host of recently added franchised outlets.

What sets it apart from regular bakeries is that staff can add personalised handwritten icing messages to cakes while you wait. It also sells cake by the slice.

The shop at 23 Broadway used to be Refresh, the Christian book, gift and card centre. The 1,000sq ft retail space, sandwiched between Pizza GoGo and Superfish, has a small enclosed courtyard at the back.

The franchisee, who had to stump up an initial £135,000 investment, pays £21,000 a year rent. The parent company projects that in normal times it should generate around £7,000 turnover a week.

Nothing is baked on-site; everything is trucked in from elsewhere.

Tim Harrison

Megan's a first-class girl

Surbiton's newest restaurant will launch when lockdown lifts, boosting morale in the beleaguered high street.

Megan's at the Post Office replaces Zizzi, its name celebrating the former incarnation as Surbiton's main PO.

It's a year since Zizzi shut in 2019, following a corporate decision to close half a dozen branches. Like Zizzi, Megan's will encourage group bookings once the rule-of-six ends.

There are novel touches, with a real tree spiralling up the stairs leading to the loos. Covid permitting, the hours are 8am until late. The menu is based round all-day breakfast (poached eggs and coconut cappuccinos specialities) until 5pm, plus healthy oat and yoghurt bowl options.



The evening menu is a mix of Middle Eastern and Mediterranean (the chef is Turkish). Think posh lamb kebabs, steak 'n' chips, cheese fondue, grilled chicken, prawns and salmon. Veggie options include quinoa falafel and cauliflower, and vegan chorizo.

In what sounds like a challenge (and Surbitonians love a challenge), Megan's is also planning weekend early-evening Prosecco deals; all you can neck in 90 minutes for £20.

Like Wags n Tales round the corner, it's dog-friendly and laptop-friendly (strong wifi is promised), and insists it won't shoo you out if you linger all day, nursing a cold cup of tea.

Megan's, which began in 2002 in Chelsea, is recruiting on Instagram... [@megansrestaurants](#)

The old post office building opposite Sainsbury's is an architectural gem which illustrator Lisa Tolley chose for a montage of local landmarks (below). Before it was built, the Victoria Road site was occupied by York Villa which, in Oct 1870, became the town's cottage hospital. When the PO opened in 1899, the hospital moved to nearby St James' Road. **TH**

Hearty home takeaways



His portions are generous, his meals tasty and nutritious. But what else would you expect from a marathon coach who escorts groups on training camps in Portugal and France, then cooks for them? Neil Aitken began takeaway service **Berrylands HomeChef** in his Surbiton Hill Park home when lockdown put the kibosh on his Embrace Sports camps abroad.

"A friend of mine in Bath got me into it," said Neil, who cooks up takeaway feasts at weekends. The menu changes weekly. Each meal has a starter and a main. Order on Facebook on the **Berrylands HomeChef** page by end of play on Thursday, then pick up in allotted slots between 6-7.30pm on the Friday or Saturday.

It's £9.95 for starter and main, with big portions and vegetarian, vegan, dairy-free and gluten-free options.



From roses to radishes

Heaven knows where he found the name, but former Surbiton florist Jamie Grant swapped roses for radishes and called his subscription delivery service **Good Life Veg Box**. Jamie, who once ran **Gardenia** in

Claremont Road (now **Humphrey & Brand**) changed gear in the pandemic after finding **New Covent Garden** awash with surplus quality produce as restaurant orders dried up.

He put his idle delivery vans to use, and went back to his roots (dad Andy was a greengrocer). Jamie goes to market twice a week, wife Annie packs, and the vans roll; less packaging, no middlemen, and deliveries to all local postcodes. His family box contains between 17 and 19 varieties of fruit, veg and herbs. "It makes sense from a budget perspective too," said Jamie. Orders: [www.goodlifevegbox.co.uk](#)

● You might expect to see a fox in your garden when you're at the sink doing the washing up, but a badger? Josh Preston of **One Dish Dinners** regularly spots one. "We think it lives under our neighbour's shed in Arlington Road," said Josh, who recently started a meal service with dishes ready for the oven, delivered to your door and made with fresh local ingredients from Jennings the butcher and Stear greengrocers. Beat the badger to placing an order! Email [orders@onedishdinner.com](#), [www.onedishdinner.com](#) or view the menu at [www.onedishdinner.com](#)



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the good life

Editor: **Tim Harrison**

Set up in 2012, the community paper for Surbiton, Tolworth, Berrylands and Long Ditton appears six times a year between March and November. We deliver to

11,500 homes and the issue is also available to download on our website. We're always delighted to hear from you, whether it's about editorial or advertising, or joining our band of local volunteers who help us deliver. The email address is:

[thegoodlifesurbiton@gmail.com](#)
Between issues, news appears on Instagram and Facebook

(@thegoodlifesurbiton) and on our website, where fresh stories are posted most days, and where back issues are archived.

[www.thegoodlifesurbiton.co.uk](#)

This paper is also available at Michael's shoe repairs, Shoes At Last, Jennings, the cornerHOUSE, Community Motors & Stear greengrocers.

2nd highest tax

Typical borough Band D properties fall into the 'very high tax' bracket, paying the second highest council tax in Britain: £1,945, up 4%. Long Ditton's average is £1,511 according to www.propertydata.co.uk/council-tax

Organic box co-op

Weekly organic fruit 'n' veg boxes can be collected from the Museum of Futures, Brighton Road, or delivered for a small fee by a volunteer-run co-op. Profits subsidise boxes for locals in need. www.goodfoodcoop.org.uk

Anne was so near

Sadly Anne Dale, whose memories of a bygone Surbiton were featured in the last Good Life, died on Nov 13, five days before the 100th birthday she – and the community in Arlington Road – had been so looking forward to.

Gifts, crafts & food

Sip mulled wine at the Christmas First in Tolworth market: Sun, Dec 6, 11am-3pm. Arts, crafts, gifts and food in the slip road opposite Our Lady Immaculate. Organiser Charlotte Levy of SHEDx hopes Santa's sleigh will make an appearance too.

A bunch of florets

Surbiton-hand-tied specialist Simon Smith has again swapped flowers for florets, becoming a pop-up greengrocer with a counter in the door. The shop, by Wilders deli in the station forecourt, also does home deliveries.



Cash converters

It's a bleak time for owners of cars with easily reached catalytic converters. There's been a rash of thefts in Long Ditton and Surbiton, with thieves selling the stolen parts to scrap dealers. Targeted: Honda Jazz, Toyota Prius and Auris and Skoda Felicia models.

Down the drains

Surbiton councillors have agreed to step up drain clearing in Surbiton Hill ward after resident Christopher Matkin told them the leaf-choked culverts were blocked, and causing problems.

Rec given grant

The Friends of Victoria Recreation Ground have been awarded £1,896 to help their efforts to restore planting in the rec... especially the flowerbeds at the Victoria Avenue entrance.

Passports please

Broomfield Avenue briefly re-enacted Passport to Pimlico when wags sealed the street off at both ends for a morning, using commandeered signs from the King Charles Road barrier.

Sleighed by Covid

Even Father Christmas has had to curtail his activities for Covid. The annual Surbiton Rotary Club Christmas street collections, led by Santa on his sleigh (a repurposed milk float), is in jeopardy.

For many residents, the Rotary sleigh coming down the street to piped festive songs is the beginning of Christmas.

"Unless rules change, Santa and his sleigh, along with the elves, are confined to barracks," said spokesman Nigel White.

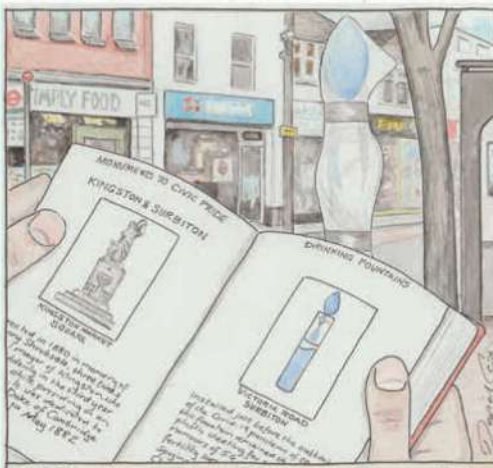
Rotary has visited roads throughout Surbiton, Berrylands, Tolworth and Chessington on dark December nights collecting thousands for local charities for the last 50 years.

This year, in case Santa has to hang up his boots, people are asked to donate by texting **ROTARYSANTA** to **70085**, stating the amount you wish to give, or by visiting www.surbitonrotary.org.uk and donating on the Virgin Money Giving link.

Though the club has been unable to meet for most of 2020, it has kept up its charity work.

SURBITON LIFE

by David Cox



Still seeking someone obscure enough to unveil it

M&S customers in fury over loos

"I think it is very sad they aren't accommodating their customers anymore," said an angry Maureen Hutchinson about M&S Simply Food in Tolworth.

Maureen, and many like her, are livid that the Tolworth Broadway store has shut its toilets to the public and now directs people to Costa Coffee and other cafes instead.

"A lot of people are complaining about it," said Maureen. The toilets at the supermarket closed in March, with M&S staff telling customers it doesn't have to keep them open if it isn't serving tea and coffee (which stopped in lockdown).

"We permanently closed the toilets in our Tolworth store earlier this year. We appreciate some customers will be disappointed and apologise for any inconvenience," said an M&S spokesperson. Waitrose in Surbiton has kept its open.

Alexandra ward councillor Sharron Sumner sympathises with shoppers for whom the lack of accessible toilets in Tolworth is proving a deterrent to shopping.

"Readily available toilets are essential to many in our community," she said. "The disabled, our more elderly, children, those on medication and – if I dare mention it, menstruating women – can find themselves in urgent need. M&S in Tolworth is a focal point for the community and it's a shame they feel it's necessary to make this decision."

Cllr Sumner plans to approach store managers to see if the council can do anything to support the toilets' reopening.

"I do feel toilets should be kept open, and if the council needs to provide some financial assistance to do so we should be helping them out," she added.

The nearest public facilities to The Broadway are in Alexandra rec (if you don't count the loo at the library... when it's open). The rec loos' hours (depending on any government Covid guidance changes) are down to dusk. There is a soap dispenser in those loos, but you're advised to bring your own hand sanitising gel. **Jane Grove**

Lines of duty?

Residents of Victoria Avenue are wary of any workmen bearing pots of paint after contractors added double yellows to the dinky cycle lane by KFC.

"They're almost as wide as the lane itself," said Julian Meers, who watched contractors solemnly paint the lines. "There should be a prize for anyone who's able to park here!"

It's among the shortest of Surbiton's growing network of bike lanes, letting cyclists legally pedal the wrong way down a one-way street. Yet despite its size, it conforms to national standards. Rules state that cycle lanes should not be less than 1.5 metres, and this one qualifies. Just.

Victoria Avenue has gained so many lines during the pandemic that it's starting to look like a cross between a Bridget Riley op art painting and a Mondrian.

Yellow and white lines start and finish all over the place... and sometimes overlap. A modest example is shown below.



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Welcome home, Ratty!

Berrylands-based Citizen Zoo has raised £18,250 to bring water voles back to the Hogsmill River. The rewilding group smashed its original £12,000 target. The money will help recruit a dedicated water vole officer to manage the scheme and scale up the project to the Thames.

Over the next two years the water vole habitat will be restored, and invasive American mink, which predate them, removed. Water voles were once abundant in our rivers, but populations have declined 97% since the 1970s. They are the fastest declining UK mammal.

Kingston Council biodiversity officer Elliot Newton said: "It's just a few years since the last water vole disappeared from the area, so it's a recent extinction event."

Sixty volunteers have been taught to carry out a habitat survey. Returning voles won't be released until 2022, when any mink entering the area will either be ethically killed or captured and relocated.

"This demonstrates that a passionate community can come together and reverse local species extinctions," said Elliot.



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Extra, extra, read all about him!

Ten years ago he was sleeping rough on a bench in Claremont Gardens... making John Dodd an unlikely Notable Surbitonian. Yet despite lacking two brass farthings to rub together, he has raised thousands for charity via decades of sponsored walks, inspired by the silver screen. You'll search the film industry IMDb database in vain for his name, but he appeared alongside Harrison Ford in a Star Wars film, and was in Hammer horror flicks with Peter Cushing, Vincent Price and Christopher Lee.

Now 75, and settled in King Charles Road, he spent his working life as a film extra, even writing a whimsical hotchpotch of a book on his experiences from the perspective of a lowly walk-on character.

Not At The Moment! (Extra Publications, 1990) gives an insight into the humdrum reality of life on a film set, and the sitting around until 'crowd artistes' are called forward. As an extra in John Schlesinger's film Yanks, Dodd was chuffed to be called a 'supporting actor'. "That sounds much better!"

An engaging raconteur who could talk for England, Dodd is a familiar figure in Surbiton with hat and driftwood walking stick. His screen credits go back to an era before computer-generated imagery, when background crowds were real people.

He was one of Darth Vader's troops in the Star Wars films, a prison officer in McVicar, a peasant in Ivanhoe, an ancient Greek in Clash of the Titans, a Russian soldier in Reds, a citizen in 1984, a clown in Empire of the Sun. Adverts, promos, documentaries, blockbusters... whatever the job, he'd be there on time, ready to be a distant out-of-focus diner in a restaurant, a man on a bus or a waltzer on the dancefloor.

He makes a few bob by delivering leaflets and menus, but when it comes to walking it's the charity challenges he loves.

"I've been doing my walks for 25 years; I like to keep myself as fit as possible. It started in 1995. I did six that year, raising money for Macmillan, Marie Curie, the lifeboats and others. Now I do walks for smaller charities; the next is for seven charities. It's a 10-mile walk from Surbiton to Croydon."

Why Croydon? It's where his actor pal Dave Prowse (best known as Darth Vader and the Green Cross man) had a gym... and all John's walks go to places of significance to stars of stage and screen. "I walk to the birthplaces of actors, actresses, directors, and especially anyone with a connection to Hammer horror films," he said. "I love Hammer films!"

Croydon is also the birthplace of another of Dodd's favourite

actors, Miles Malleon, whose cameo roles enlivened many Hammer films, including The Brides of Dracula, alongside Cushing.

Actors he has met down the years gladly sponsor Dodd's efforts, which have included a five-day walk from the Woking birthplace of actor and singer Mark Wynter to the 60s star's home in Kent. It raised £272, but it all adds up. The running total is now £17,000.

He has even done cross-country marathon walks dressed as Santa, and has walked from significant point to significant point to honour guitarist Jet Harris, Susannah York and Laurence Harvey, and plans a future hike for Kingston's Wicked Lady star, Margaret Lockwood.

The longest walk he ever undertook lasted six and a half weeks, marching from King Charles Road to Inverness! When in Scotland, he always changes into a kilt. "People are very kind," he said. "I intend to continue until the year I die."

On one walk he was sponsored by no fewer than 92 members of the cast and crew of Emmerdale, while Surbiton MP Ed Davey is an admirer of his fund-raising, and has sponsored him three times. He keeps his walking memories and cuttings in a big scrapbook.

Blisters are an occupational hazard, and he has also had to contend with leg ulcers. That necessitated a short stay in intensive care at Kingston Hospital on the first day of lockdown in March. "Men over 60 just get them," he said. "It doesn't deter him; he's unfailingly optimistic and cheery."

Good-natured folk regularly offer him a bed for the night on his walks, but if all else fails he'll sleep under the stars. He came to Surbiton a decade ago, initially staying in rooms at the Black Lion pub. But when money became tight, he slept for a while on the benches in Claremont Gardens and at the riverside. "I was homeless for eight weeks when I was 65," he said.

After a couple of short stints at the YMCA he was supported by the local charity Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness, to whom he says he owes a huge debt of gratitude. He also receives regular support from Kingston's local healthcare team, notably George Tong, with whom he enjoys a good rapport.

But back to the silver screen. Dodd worked twice with Peter Cushing, the first time in 1980 when he played a soldier in A Tale of Two Cities. "I also played a Victorian policeman in a 1984 film called The Masks of Death, in which Peter Cushing was Sherlock Holmes," he said. "It was the last time I saw him alive; he died at 81 of prostate cancer."

"I've loved film since I was 13," said the confessed horror flick buff. "But I don't have nightmares! I never dream about them."

He is particularly keen on Dracula movies (his late chum Cushing played Dr van Helsing five times), and even wrote a film script for the studios, The Ring of Dracula. Sadly it was never made.

Dodd's favourite Dracula



movie? "It has to be the first Dracula film; I love the dignity of Christopher Lee," he said.

His yarns about life on film sets or in TV studios of movies are immensely entertaining; one story triggers the next, and it's a task to interrupt the flow. "I was in Minder," he declared out of the blue. "I was a taxman, chasing Lionel Jeffries on a motorbike around Teddington Lock!"

He was also an extra when Michael Caine played Jack the Ripper. "I was a footman," he said proudly.

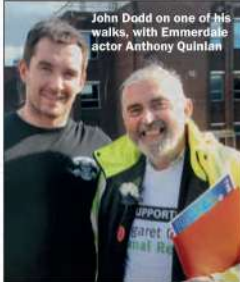
Born in Hexham, Northumberland, in 1945, he originally wanted to be a film cameraman. "I used to write to film stars and directors. When I was 18 I went to London and rang the doorbell of Anthony

Asquith [director of The Winslow Boy] to ask for his help getting into the business."

But in the end it was a chance meeting with a market stallholder who also worked as a film extra that led to a career of fleeting moments in movie backgrounds. A favourite role was in A Demon In My View. "It was filmed at Mortlake Crematorium," he said. "I was the priest, while Anthony Perkins sat reading the Daily Telegraph. I had to make a little speech, then press the button to send the coffin away!"

John has no living relatives, and never married. **Tim Harrison**
● John Dodd, b March 11 1945

NOTABLE SURBITONIANS John Dodd



John Dodd on one of his walks, with Emmerdale actor Anthony Quinn



A grainy old image with Harrison Ford. While Ford played Han Solo, John was a stormtrooper in Return of the Jedi

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Her mantra is waste-not, want-not, bags are made to last, and a percentage goes to saving the oceans and marine wildlife, something the enthusiastic diver is passionate about.

In 2019, six months into her handbag journey, having led corporate design projects for multinationals, she was selected as a finalist at the Independent Handbag Designer Awards in New York.

Now she's adding jewellery (statement earrings for those never-ending video calls!) to her range, and hand-made cotton, ocean-inspired masks. See the collection at www.tatumdiamondlondon.com

"Fashion doesn't have to cost the earth or oceans," said Tatum. "I'm proud of the bags that bear my name and excited at where I can take my label." **Jane Grove**

● Freelance florist Jo Power makes Christmas wreaths to order from her Cleveland Road home. Jo, who has created displays for numerous weddings and events over the past 12 years, including Wimbledon, Hampton Court Palace, and the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, as well as providing displays for homes, is making festive wreaths to brighten the front doors of Surbiton.

"As most of my work is based within the hospitality industry it has been a tough year, and I'm sure many will feel the same too," said Jo, whose wreaths start at £30. "Having more time on my hands I have decided to make made-to-order wreaths at home."

She is happy to deliver locally. Email jopower@gmail.com for more details, or see her Instagram account for pictures at [driedandfestive](https://www.instagram.com/driedandfestive)



● Christmas cards, painted by veterans at the Royal Star & Garter, are now on sale. They include a Christmas pudding and a robin painted by 93-year-old Surbiton care home resident Dick Jahn, right, who did his National Service after the Second World War in the Corps of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME). www.charitycardshop.com/starandgarter



● For Sian Headley, left, the past six months have been hectic. In May, after the government's face-covering guidance, she began sewing fabric masks. The Fleece Road, Long Ditton, resident could barely keep up with demand. For each mask sold, 50p went to the NHS. So far that's £1,430. She has a different face mask theme each month, and has created limited editions for Christmas.

The former head of music at Kingston Academy has run Robin's Bobbins for six years producing colourful, bespoke costumes, personalised items, school essentials, and seasonal creations – all by hand. To explore the range, and to order your Christmas-themed goodies or mask visit www.robinsbobbins.co.uk

● Join a Winter Wonderland Walk round Long Ditton. Homes will be decorated for the festive trail. If you buy a gift bag from the Friends of Long Ditton Infant and Nursery School, you'll receive a map of the walk, a songsheet for doorstep singalongs, details of a scavenger hunt, sweets, a picture to colour, a ginger bread recipe and a raffle ticket. "It's in the spirit of community fun organised over the past few years. Families can enjoy some festive sparkle as they walk around," said organiser Kim Jones. The trail runs Mon, Dec 14 to Sun, Jan 3. Buy your goody bag and guide by emailing longdittonfriends@outlook.com

● What do you get the Surbitonian who has everything? A letter rack in the shape of the station, or a replica of Tolworth Tower, created by Long Ditton designers Molly Wilson and Nick John, who are at www.wilson.co.uk



● Surbiton has a pop-up Christmas market on the Sundays leading up to Christmas, thanks to the high street's new stylist Andrew Thompson. Socially distanced stalls will be set out in Salon No13 at 13 Victoria Road on Dec 6 and Dec 13, noon-4pm, with the hairdressing chairs removed to create the market space.

Masks are mandatory, entry is free, and there's a one-way system through the salon, so visitors will emerge in the St Philip's Road car park, where the Halloumi Bite van will be sited for festive snacks.

"It's aimed at local traders and businesses who are going to need a little help this year offering their produce," said Andrew. "I am offering them space in the salon free of charge, as a way of helping out the local community."

Light fantastic

Surbiton high street WILL sparkle with Christmas lights and a 25ft fir tree this year. Last year, decorations only went part way down Victoria Road, but councillors on the neighbourhood committee voted for the most expensive option before them... £12,523 of seasonal jollity.

The aim is to add cheer to a shopping area hit badly by lockdown. Fifty lampposts will get the magic wand treatment in Victoria Road and Claremont Road, with Brighton Road also sparkling... if there are lights to spare.

While applauding the decision, Cllr Sharron Sumner bemoaned the fact that once again Tolworth Broadway has missed out. She requested something 'amazing' for the Broadway in December 2021.



● In need of present inspiration? Look no further than the glass shelves of Shoes at Last in Maple Road, where you'll find jewellery by Surbiton designer Ingrid Rossi, topical cards by Proud London, festive candles from Tiptree, luxury sheepskin slippers for men and women from Celtic & Co and fun decorations by Wood & Wool.

● Fifty local crafters and creatives are displaying their work on Facebook page **Handmade Kingston Market Place**.

Crochet, jewellery and candle maker Sarah Richardson of The Place to Make, who organises the annual Handmade at the Lamb events in Surbiton, said: "People were choosing to buy local, support local, and stay local," said Sarah. "Now we're having to buy more online, but here is a way to still support local artists, makers, and culinary experts."

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A fleet of electric bikes arrives in the borough in January. The sustainable transport team is working with electric bike provider Human Forest to bring in 100 bikes, building to 500 by spring. The bikes are operated by a smartphone app. Hire cost is 15p per minute for the first 10 minutes, then 10p per minute. The e-bikes will be near Surbiton, Tolworth and Berrylands stations, & retail, leisure and school sites. "Covid means many residents are seeking alternatives to public transport," said the council.



Try a bike before you buy

Two wheels are better than four. So says cyclist and Surbiton Hill ward councillor Hilary Gander (council portfolio holder for sustainable transport). She urges those who live, work or study in the borough to take advantage of council schemes.

Try a new, or nearly new, bike for a month (£10 kids, £20 adults, including folding bikes) or £50 for an electric one. If you like it, you can buy it at a discount. A free cycle skills session is also available to increase your confidence.

"It's a great way to get pedalling without a massive outlay," she said. "By hiring first with support from [council partner] Peddle My Wheels all you have to do is enjoy the ride."

Alternatively, borrow a bike for a month, completely free. As with Try Before You Bike, you'll also be loaned a helmet, lock and lights, so you'll have all you need to start. Kingston Council offers one-to-one cycle training and bike maintenance courses to get you on your way. For more details visit www.kingston.gov.uk and search for 'Try Before You Bike'.



The Thames is the cleanest river in the world flowing through a major city, so Good Life reader Madders Hern was astonished to watch a man working with a powerful magnet on a 10m stretch close to Queen's Prom fish out 12 shopping trolleys, 10 bicycles, several lengths of metal fencing, an umbrella and a handful of coins... creating a sad and shaming heap of junk on the riverside walk. "I couldn't believe there was so much dumped stuff," she said.



After a gap of 58 years, a red electric double-decker is moving cleanly and quietly through Surbiton. This demonstrator is being tested on the 71 route. Electric trolleybuses last ran in the area on routes 601, 602 and 603, way back in 1962. Using Chinese technology and a body by Alexander Dennis of Scotland, the bus starts on the 281 route (which, back in the day, was the 601 trolleybus) on July 3, 2021. Graham Burnell took the picture.

For the second year in a row, Clandon Wood, where many Surbitonians opt to spend eternity, has been named best natural burial ground in the UK.

The nature reserve down the A3 in West Clandon triumphed in the 2020 Cemetery of the Year awards. Manager Christina Lawson said it was important recognition for the team which maintains the grounds.

"The beautiful natural setting and outdoor services has made a tremendous difference to many final farewells, and has been a real blessing for bereaved families in these challenging times," she said.

Founder Simon Ferrar (right) said the award endorsed the concept of bringing together nature and the cycle of life in a tranquil environment, where loved ones can be laid to rest, regardless of faith or belief.



Christina Lawson and Simon Ferrar

Part of the burial fee goes to an account which maintains the 31-acre site as a haven for hedgehogs, deer, squirrels, voles, moths, butterflies, insects and birds, and native plants.

Graves are single depth, coffins biodegradable and - unlike pressured urban burial areas - there is almost unlimited space in the reserve.

It's a challenge to be both green and cosy, says Janice Cripps Something to fire you up outdoors



Fire pits, outdoor rugs and patio heaters have been flying off the shelves since September as the nation prepares for a Covid winter, hoping to spend more time socialising in the garden.

It's a modern dilemma; we know the health benefits of being outdoors, but we also know there are no environmental positives associated with outdoor heating. So if it's what you're after, weigh up the eco-credentials.

It's hard to beat the mesmerising appeal of a naked flame, making firepits and chimineas the No1 choice for creating garden ambience. Smoke is a pollutant and health hazard, but using locally and sustainably sourced wood means your fire has the potential to be carbon neutral.

For an instant living flame, consider a gas-

fired patio heater. But, they are expensive to run, take a while to heat up and waste a lot of energy.

A better choice for sustainability is a heater run on bio-ethanol, a fuel produced from food waste. It has impressive eco credentials. The fuel burns clean, with no scent or smoke, and you can use it indoors. Sounds the perfect choice... but the fuel is expensive and the heat output isn't as effective as other heaters.



Most patio heaters run on gas or electricity, burning fossil fuels and releasing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. If it's the route you choose, the heater delivering

warmth in the greenest, most economical way is an electric quartz infrared heater. The heat is instant and feels like the sun on your face. The Department for the Environment says it has only 15% of the carbon footprint of a gas heater.

Many infrared heaters are large, unattractive, and on bulky stands or wall-mounted. Like most things, you get what you pay for. There are stylish options from about £200 upwards.

The more discreet, the better. I'd opt for something that could sit neatly under a dining table or that resembles an elegant floor lamp. Check if it's low-glare (or no-glare) and that it can be plugged into a convenient outdoor socket; no one wants a spaghetti junction of cable. Check it can stay out all year. An IP65 rated heater is secure against dust and water and can function outdoors in all weathers, but check with the manufacturer.

Finally, just wear a jumper!

Janice Cripps is a professional Surbiton garden designer.

For advice, planting plans, or projects - from concept to completion - visit www.janicecripps.co.uk

Clandon Wood

Burials, ash interments and nature reserve



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Hark the herald

It's time to lift the mood with a joyful carol from St Matthew's church music director Simon Hancock.

Simon's melody, set to the words of Intiaz Dharker's poem *Go to the Child*, has been published by Goodmusic Publishing (www.goodmusicpublishing.co.uk)

The choral singer, composer and arranger from Kingsdowne Road, Surbiton, was one of six finalists picked from more than 400 entrants in last year's Radio 3 Carol Competition.

His delightful composition for an unaccompanied mixed voice choir was performed by the BBC Singers. You can hear the choir's performance at www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07xggm1. "I'm very pleased with it," said a chuffed Simon, 63. "I did it at home on the electronic keyboard, playing around with a few tunes and chords, then began shaping and refining it. I hope to play it at the St Matthew's carol service."

Simon has composed other Christmas carols, organ works and anthems, and has arranged many four-part hymns and carols for use by church worship bands.

In 1993 his prize-winning choral setting of Dorothy L Sayers' *The Three Kings* was performed at Canterbury Cathedral by the Cathedral Choir.

And his *Toccata for Organ* was performed twice at the London Festival of Contemporary Church Music last year.

Our Covid reality

A series of first-hand accounts of what it has been like living and working in a Surbiton care home during the Covid-19 crisis has been published by the Royal Star & Garter charity.

The **Covid-19: Life on the Frontline** blogs feature accounts from residents and staff who contracted the virus, but who pulled through. Among those detailing their experiences at the Upper Brighton Road home for veterans and their partners living with disability or dementia is resident Phyllis Hales, below, a 98-year-old Second World War Women's Auxiliary Air Force veteran.

Phyllis remembers watching the news after testing Covid-19 positive. She said: "I was concerned by the high number of deaths and I was concerned I might not survive. I thought 'Well, this could happen to me'. But there was nothing I could do."

Lead nurse Damian Walicki describes how he 'felt like a failure' after testing positive, and said that he thought he was letting his colleagues down while he was isolating.

He says: "This has been one of the toughest challenges of my career, because we are kind-of fighting with ghosts. You couldn't see the virus, but you knew that it was there."

And nurse Jude Lally speaks candidly about the physical and psychological toll the disease had on her, and the guilt she felt at not being able to work, despite suffering 'incredible pain'.

She also discusses the heartache felt by members of staff when residents passed away, having been diagnosed with the virus.

"Staff have relied so much on each other for support. I didn't doubt the support for each other was there before, but you saw it again and again," she added.

You can read their stories in full at www.starandgarter.org/media-centre/our-blogs



Phyllis Hales



Nurse Jude Lally



Lead nurse Damian Walicki admits he felt he was letting his colleagues down after testing positive for Covid

Cycle lane plan is scrapped

A proposal under a 'healthy streets initiative' to introduce new cycle lanes in Ditton Road has been dropped following the reaction of residents in a public consultation.

Kingston Council put forward two proposals to consider - locating the cycle lane next to the kerb inside the parked cars, or painting white lines and cycle logos in the carriageway on the outside of parked cars.

Neither found favour with residents, who preferred the 'do nothing' option.

The results of the consultation dismayed some councillors on Surbiton's neighbourhood committee who had been hoping most residents would be in favour of the idea to link up different parts of the area's cycle network.

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Out from the shadows

A shy street artist lives among us. You'll have come across his imaginative work in Surbiton, and further afield. Using acrylic spray paint and pens, Paul Don Smith, 48, created the lockdown image of Captain Sir Tom Moore, below, whose portrait appeared overnight on a crumbling gate post in Cadogan Road.

More recently, Judy Garland's Dorothy, left, appeared alongside him. London's East End is full of his stunning portraits, often on an epic scale, in open spaces as well as more hidden, obscure sites.

Amy Winehouse, Jimi Hendrix, Harry Potter, Tom Hardy, James Dean, Jessica Ennis, the Queen, Elizabeth Taylor... in all there are 400 paintings on walls, doors, tunnels, alleyways and boarded-up windows. Nelson Mandela (below) has also been celebrated.

Local fitness icon Joe Wicks can be seen running down a Surbiton alley, alongside the 1982 and 2017 Blade Runner brigade, Brando as *The Godfather*, and Ian McShane as Winston in the John Wick American neo-noir action-thriller series.

Paint runs through Paul's veins. He grew up in Clapham, with an early love of superheroes and initially challenged his schoolfriends to draw him their favourite characters.

"I learnt at an early age that there's always someone better than me," he said. "This taught me a lot about competition; it's good, it's healthy and I appreciate art everywhere in all forms."

Dyslexic, and knowing he always wanted to paint, he completed a BTEC in graphic design. However, he is, for the most part, self-taught. Favourite artists include Winston Churchill, Cézanne, Monet and the French sculptor Auguste Rodin.

Much of Paul's inspiration comes from Hollywood movies, London gangsters and idols from the music industry.

It takes him a day to carve and cut out the large intricate stencil templates, and there are often two or three layers to consider. Dorothy's Yellow Brick Road painting has five layers.



Paul will ensure he can paint there. Then, along with weather considerations and interruptions from a curious, interested public, he will share his remarkable talent.

Who would he like to paint now? Having just painted the family dog Buttons by the side of *The Entertainer* in Kingston, he says that top of his list is Dev Patel, the British actor best known for *Slumdog Millionaire*, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* and *Lion*.

And if anyone can offer a space to show his work, with a percentage of sale money going to charity, Paul would love to hear from them. Email firedom_1@hotmail.com

Kate Harland

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'Pothole Close' gets an overdue facelift

Rectory Close has been through the mill. The Long Ditton road, known locally for its numerous potholes, has undergone a facelift, otherwise known as 'fine milling'.

The road surface has long been a source of grievance to cul-de-sac residents. The asphalt topping over the concrete base was peeling off in chunks, pitting the road and making it unsightly, and hazardous to cross.

Residents had lobbied Elmbridge Council and Surrey County Council's highways department for years for work to be done. Finally their calls for action were heard.

The top surface was removed and the concrete retextured and relevelled. Then cracks and joints were filled making it smoother, so it will need less maintenance in future. Fine milling is an innovative treatment used on concrete sections of the M25.

"All in all, it looks much better, and I believe most of the close is happy," said Marcus Williams, who has campaigned for the work. Fellow resident Emma Wilde said: "The fact that it is uniform with no holes is a vast improvement. It means that you no longer just focus on the mess the road is in every time you drive up it."

"It took a bit of getting used to, but now it is a little more weathered it looks much better."

Dittons councillor Nicky Darby, instrumental in getting the work done, said: "I'm delighted; the road is planned back to the original concrete surface. This is a new way for Surrey to repair old-style surfaces, and a better option than simply filling in the more recent asphalt cover, which tends to lift, leaving an unsightly lumpy road with inevitable frustration and safety concerns for residents. I very much hope this type of repair can soon be rolled out elsewhere in the Dittons."

Jane Grove



Shops often claim a 'makeover' when all they've done is replace some shelving. But check out the transformation of PC Rescue Squad, the computer repair centre at 17 Tolworth Broadway. It has gone from Steptoe's yard to the bridge on the Starship Enterprise in one move. If you knew it before, you'll gasp in awe. Respect! www.pcrecuesquad.co.uk



Surbiton's 'things to do' list includes a monument with a clock, Becky Mayhew reveals

Let's take a moment from the absolute disgrace that is 2020, and focus on the important fact that the Coronation clocktower by the entrance to Waitrose car park is rated on Tripadvisor as the fifth best thing to do in Surbiton.

I told you this was important. If you're surprised by this, then perhaps, like reviewer FunkyWildcat, you've 'walked past this many a time so it's become normal I suppose, which is exactly how I imagine people who walk past, say, the Pyramids feel each day.

Admittedly there is some confusion on Tripadvisor as to the clocktower's place on the list - as Alex W a little irately points out, it's 'not actually something to do' - and a feeling that one shouldn't go out of one's way to look at it, but 'if you walk past it, great.'

I think what Alex W is saying is that the following scenario probably wouldn't go down very well:

MUM: Right kids, it's the first day of the summer holidays, guess what we're doing today?

KIDS: Strawberry picking!

MUM: Nope.

KIDS: Guildford Spectrum!

MUM: Nope.

KIDS: Legoland!

MUM: Nope.

Is this the perfect day out?



A 71 bus passes the clocktower. Must be an old photo; no one's wearing a mask

KIDS: (breathlessly) Not... not Disneyland?!!

MUM: Nope... the clocktower by Waitrose!

Mum's smile fades as her children seem to age 1,000 years in front of her.

On the flip side, there is some serious clocktower appreciation on display, with Pumbridge going so far as to say 'Goodness me, we'd miss it if it disappeared.' I mean, I'm all for historic landmarks (it was built in 1908 to commemorate the coronation of Edward VII, don't you know), and

as clocktowers go it's... nice... but it's... it's not St Paul's, is it? If St Paul's Cathedral suddenly disappeared one can imagine a bit of a hoo-ha, but if Surbiton's clocktower suddenly disappeared, the owners of the Clock Tower Cafe would have the mild irritation of changing its name to, I don't know, the Waitrose Car Park Cafe. But... would we miss it?

John M sagely concedes that he 'cannot expect it to be much more than a distraction from the heavy traffic that passes it', but he does point out that 'as a fan of, and annual visitor to, Surbiton, I'm glad the clocktower exists, which leads me down the rabbit hole of being incredibly interested in John M's annual pilgrimage to Surbiton. Weird to think people may actually leave their own towns to visit Surbiton.'

I mean, we're pretty cool but we're not exactly New York, are we? At least now I've brought this landmark to your attention you might notice it, and some may try to make it something 'to do'. Though I'd ask that, before you do, think of the children.

www.beckysaysthings.com

Dig this! Ancient Tolworth



In 1998, Bob and Lynne Dean took part in the 'Time Team Big Dig'. "The idea was you had to dig a one metre cube hole in your garden and record everything you found," said Bob.

"We dug a hole in our back garden in Red Lion Road, and found what the expert who looked at it described as a Mesolithic flint tool." That's it in the picture, and it's now in the Museum of London's archaeological archive.

"The flint expert said it had taken the history of Red Lion Road back by more than 9,000 years!" said Bob. "Was the Red Lion pub there back then, I wonder?"

The other stuff Bob unearthed was nowhere near as interesting... some asbestos roof tile, Victorian plate fragments, animal bones, scallop shells, tobacco pipe fragments and the concrete footing from an old wooden post.

For more recent memories of life in Surbiton and Tolworth see the Kingston, Surbiton, Tolworth Memories, Local History and Genealogy page on Facebook.



A wellbeing clinic offering nutrition advice, massages and 'aesthetic medicine' will open once lockdown lifts. The 360 Degree Clinic is at 58a Victoria Road, between Superdrug and Sainsbury's, in what was Essensuals (and before that, Toni & Guy).

Conversion work is under way, with the salon/clinic recruiting beauty and massage therapists, doctors and dermatologists and nurse prescribers.

It offers laser hair removal, IV infusion drips, massage and treatments to 'bring out the youthful glow and brightness in you', making 'beautiful clients even more beautiful'.

Greenfield

Would like to wish everyone...

Merry Christmas

&

Happy New Year

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In at the deep end

Who's first in line for Covid vaccination?

There's a real sense of urgency; we want to get this up and running as soon as possible. It will be rolled out first to those considered most vulnerable; care home residents and their staff, NHS staff, people over 80. In an ideal world, it would have been good if the government had taken Sage's advice and locked down earlier. I hope, on December 2, when lockdown lifts, we'll at least go back to Tier 2 rather than being pushed into Tier 3.

Why was Kingston so quick to offer free school meals at half-term & Christmas?

We felt it was a priority, and I'm sure we were right. Knowing that a child might be hungry is not something we can turn a blind eye to. I was proud of our response, and the fact that we were able to get it together at very short notice. But alongside that was an amazing response from our local businesses; so many restaurants offering free meals to families, with 'no questions asked'... on trust.

As leader you were flung straight into the pandemic melée. How have you fared?

It wasn't so much 'in at the deep end' as high-diving from a platform! It's been an extraordinary time. I've never worked harder, I've never had a job that's been as absorbing and challenging. I go to bed thinking about it, I wake up in the morning thinking about it... I dream about it. It's all-absorbing.

Relatives are frustrated when access to loved ones in Surbiton care homes is blocked. Your thoughts?

There are no easy answers. My own mum lived in a care home for the last two years of her life, and I'm glad she didn't live to see this period. It would have been so distressing for us not to be able to visit. I know those visits kept her going. The policy now is more flexible, and I welcome that; care homes can make their own decisions. Mental health matters, and it's heartbreaking to think of someone possibly in the final years of their life feeling abandoned. It's worse for someone with dementia, who may not understand why they're not getting visits.

Councillors have backed Surbiton's farmers' market's return from enforced absence. What about its future?

It's wonderful; we all need a boost, and events like the farmers' market are great for morale. I really hope the next ones can go ahead. The rules say you can have food markets. You're not allowed to sell flowers, so it may have to be reduced... but I know local councillors and neighbourhood chairs are working at it to keep it going. We all know it's really valued, and it would be lovely to keep it alive.

Cycle lanes divide cyclists and car owners. As the bike lane network grows, do you risk alienating drivers?

Everywhere we put cycle lanes in, there has been resistance at the disruption. It's painful; it's like having an extension put on your house. But you can't get the benefits of active travel without going through disruption. I don't want to alienate drivers. Like many, I'm a cyclist at some times and a motorist at others. I don't like it turning into a tribal issue. In March, when the first lockdown was imposed and people were only allowed out to exercise, I felt a real sense that our network was coming into its own. Compared to many boroughs we were well provided for, making it easy for people to get to parks without using cars. Over time habits will change, and it will be better for air pollution, our health, congestion... so in a way it solves a lot of problems. And I don't wear lycra!

When you watch TV news coverage of the presidential election, do you miss your old overseas reporting days?

I don't. I did love it when I did it, but it's a long time ago. I feel I've got a new challenge, so I don't look back at all. This is more challenging than anything I did as a TV reporter!

What about the protection of the Seething Wells filter beds and the wider climate issue?

Ward councillors have taken a lead on Seething Wells. We're doing what we can with the Article 4 protection [see p10].

In a wide-ranging interview with The Good Life after eight months as Kingston Council leader, Cllr Caroline Kerr shared her thoughts with TIM HARRISON about Surbiton's expanding cycle lane network, the funding of free school meals, environmental worries, balancing the budget... and what will be on her plate on Christmas Day



but it's private land and there's a limit to what the council can do. On broader climate change, our children and grandchildren will not forgive us if we sit idly by and pretend we don't know about this. It's become a mainstream concern, and time is running out to tackle it. I feel very committed to it. In a small way, cycle lanes are one manifestation of that commitment. But there are other things; reducing heat that's lost from homes is, not very sexy, but it's really effective.

The borough budget is looming next spring, with some tough choices to make...

It's definitely on the list of big challenges! It's never been harder to know where we are, financially. Obligations change all the time with Covid, and sometimes government funding is put in place retrospectively to cover something, but it's usually not enough to cover it. We're mindful all the time that the sands are shifting and we really don't know what we'll be looking at when we come to set the next budget.

Surbiton sometimes feels that Kingston town centre dominates the borough...

I lived in Surbiton for a very long time - 15 years in Berrylands, in The Ridge, so I have a

long association with Surbiton, and my children went to school in Tolworth. Each area of our borough is very distinctive; each ward is distinctive. It's swings and roundabouts. Kingston gets its name on the name of the borough, but Surbiton has its charm and, in a way, has the benefits of a small-town community centre without the hurly-burly of parking and traffic jams. I genuinely feel we're lucky to be where we live, with beautiful things on our doorstep.

How will the Kerr household mark Xmas? Turkey? Goose? Nut cutlet?

I don't know what will be allowed! We normally get together with my sister's family, but I don't know what will be permitted this year. For a long time I was a turkey person. Then, a few years ago, my whole household became vegetarian and we've had a few nut roasts over Christmas. I became a vegetarian for environmental reasons... but I take a slightly liberal interpretation of the term on Christmas Day and I think, well, rainforests aren't being cut down if I have a bit of turkey! I'm sometimes prepared to break the rules.

James Richardson, who hit the headlines in the last Good Life with his vision for Berrylands generating all its power needs via a linked solar network, reports a surge in interest from the community.

"A number of solar energy experts, councillors and local residents have joined our mailing list; we have around 20 signed up and are discovering more about the energy generation market," said the 45-year-old from The Ridings. "We're investigating the technologies that we would need to make the project work, and are getting legal advice about setting up a community benefit organisation."

James has unearthed similar projects in other communities around the world, and hopes to draw on their experiences. More at berrylands.communitysolar.org.uk

Secure visiting

Relatives will be able to visit loved ones at the Royal Star & Garter's home in Surbiton after a new Covid-secure room was opened at the Upper Brighton Road home for veterans.

Funded by the Scheinberg Relief Fund, the indoor room is partitioned floor-to-ceiling with glass. Residents and relatives have separate entrances, and a hi-tech sound system improves audibility. The room is thoroughly cleaned between visits.

The Star and Garter charity's chief executive Andy Cole said: "It will mean the world to our residents and their families."



Market's return

The return of Surbiton's farmers' market in October was hailed as a great success, with Maple Road closed to through traffic for four hours and the street becoming pedestrianised for the morning.

Covid restrictions will remain in place for the Christmas market on Sat, Dec 19, 9am-1pm, with shoppers following a one-way route round the stalls and asked to wear face masks (though not necessarily as eye-catching as the stallholder's above).

October's market saw a rise in attendance, with many stalls selling out of produce before the end.



Police officers from Berrylands and St Mark's wards joined forces with City of London animal welfare teams to raid an address in Surbiton after a tip-off about an illegal puppy farm.

Sixteen dogs were seized including seven German shepherds, six British bulldogs and two boxers. All were found to be in filthy conditions, with many in poor health and malnourished.



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New semis agreed

Plans to build two new semis in Sunray Avenue on Tolworth's Sunray estate have been approved... provided more space is given for the next-door neighbour to manoeuvre her car.

Linda Plesley, who has lived at 3 Sunray Avenue for 38 years, told the Surbiton neighbourhood committee that the proposed fence for the new houses would make it very difficult for her to turn out of her garage.

Councillors agreed, so the developer (who earned rare praise from the committee for the design of the new homes) was told to 'chamfer' the fence; a new word to many of the councillors.

The plot is a large, unused part of the garden of 1 Sunray Avenue, and the new homes will face Barnsbury Lane. One of the new houses will be two-bedroom, the other three-bedroom.

Paul Martin, who chairs the local residents' association, claimed that the homes "didn't look anything like Sunray houses", and questioned road safety aspects of the planned scheme.

But Cllr Malcolm Self said that elements of the existing Sunray dwellings had indeed been incorporated in the design, and complemented architect Joseph Kent.

Provided the chamfering is up to snuff, the homes have the green light.



Heroes collect awards

It's been a good month for community heroes Des Kay, left, and Tariq Shabbeer, who run 'The Circulatory upcycling centre in Chiltern Drive, Berrylands.

For a start, they received Frances Moseley awards to recognise their Save the World Deliveries through the pandemic, collecting - each week - five tonnes of supermarket food that is still edible but due to be thrown away, and delivering it to those in need across the borough.

Then Surbiton neighbourhood committee awarded the pair £3,000 to help them train volunteers. "They give their time so willingly," said Cllr Hilary Gander. Cllr Yoganathan said it had been his charity during his mayoral year. Cllr Sharron Sumner added: "They do brilliant work, and they've never before asked us for help."

● Also receiving one of the council's Frances Moseley awards was Surbitonian Mary Parmar of the Alpha Road estate, for supporting the community by organising events and helping vulnerable people. The Kingston Council award is named after a late Berrylands ward councillor.

Council ring around filter beds

Following a concerted campaign by activists worried about the worsening state of Seething Wells' historic filter beds, Kingston Council has moved to protect the area's biodiversity from potential harm.

It has thrown a six-month protective ring around the beds, which were built in Victorian times to counter the Covid of its day, cholera, and provide London with clean drinking water.

Developers have been eyeing up the 170-year-old beds, despite their designation as a site of importance for conservation, leading to the formation of Swag, the Seething Wells Action Group (www.saveseethingwells.org), to protect the habitat.

Worries have been increasing about loss of greenery on the site off Portsmouth Road, and the threat to bat populations and wintering wildfowl. A petition called on the council to act.

Now the local authority has brought in an 'Article 4 direction', a safeguarding measure removing the right - for the next six months at least - to put up fencing, gates or other means of enclosure

on the site without planning permission.

Residents can have their say on whether it should be made permanent during a six-week public consultation which finishes on Fri, Dec 18. To contribute visit www.kingstonletstalk.co.uk/consultation-seething-wells

Cllr Hilary Gander, who handles environmental issues for Kingston Council, said the context of the Article 4 direction was that the council aims to become carbon neutral by 2038, and added that the filter beds were an important part of that overall effort.

"We have monitored activity on the site extremely closely, and have previously intervened on plans when we have needed to do so," she said.

Swag says chemical sprays have been used to defoliate the areas around the series of water pools, reducing what were verdant borders to bare concrete edges. The site is owned by Isle of Man-registered company Cascina Ltd, whose 2014 appeal to the planning inspector (with Hydro Properties) to build 64 homes and a 92-berth marina failed.

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For the last four years, the Long Ditton Residents' Association, and many similar organisations, have been campaigning to protect and preserve the local Green Belt.

In the coming weeks Elmbridge councillors will vote on whether to approve a new draft local plan for presentation to the government's planning inspectorate.

The fate of Elmbridge's Green Belt land will be held in their hands. It's a pivotal moment.

The Long Ditton Green Belt is 166 acres (95 football pitches) and runs parallel to the A309, the Bypass. The publicly accessible area is known as One Tree Hill and Stokes Field nature reserve. It's a beautiful mix of open natural meadow and rich woodland, and is used for everything from jogging, dog walking, berry picking and cycling to nature rambles, pony trekking and visits by schools and youth groups.

The area is owned by Elmbridge Council and private landowners, including the housebuilder

Long Ditton's green and pleasant land is under threat, argues Paul Bartlett

Our precious Green Belt is at risk



Taylor Wimpey (the One Tree Hill area). Our deep concern is that if Elmbridge surrenders any Green Belt in the local plan, the process allows both the planning inspector and developers to request more Green Belt be considered for release. Given the land ownership, this will almost certainly include One Tree Hill.



In preparing their local plan in 2016, to meet the government's target of 623 homes per year or 12,460 over 20, the council included an option removing Green Belt status from three 'strategic development areas', one of which was in Long Ditton.

Following public feedback, it revised the plan by adding two new options. Last year's public consultation saw 85 per cent of respondents reject the sacrifice of Green Belt.

While we are yet to see the Elmbridge local plan, we are pleased that the council is aiming to deliver a variety of high-quality housing, which includes smaller homes for first-time buyers, for young families, for older people, and for travellers.

However our big fear is that much-needed infrastructure (schools, roads, doctors' surgeries, dentists, pharmacies, public transport...) will not be baked into the growth plans, and that Green Belt will be destroyed, negatively impacting air quality and the environment.

While we all appreciate the need for more housing, especially more affordable housing, it must be provided in the right areas and in the right way.

Simply eradicating our green open spaces and tarmacking over our green infrastructure is the wrong way to create environmentally friendly, sustainable neighbourhoods.

We need all Elmbridge councillors to vote to reject any plan that releases Green Belt land for development, so we will be watching the online Elmbridge cabinet and council meetings intently.

If this pandemic has taught us one thing, it's that access to green open space is not a luxury, it's a requirement for the physical and mental wellbeing of every resident. We hope Elmbridge councillors hear our calls to protect and preserve the Green Belt, giving us a green future.

● Paul Bartlett is the Long Ditton Residents' Association treasurer and green belt officer



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Stumped for a good read?

Looking for sun to pierce the winter gloom? Surbiton sports writer Vic Rigby has published a book about cricketer RP Keigwin. Born in April 1883, Richard Prescott Keigwin (inset) played against WG Grace, CB Fry, Jack Hobbs and googly inventor BJT Bosanquet in a career spanning university, MCC and county teams. A First World War code-breaker, he found fame

translating Hans Christian Andersen tales from Danish to English. He also minded goal for England in hockey, played tennis for Gloucestershire and football for Essex. He died in 1972. Vic, 72, of Grove Road, focuses on Keigwin's memories in **A Voice from the Golden Age**, drawing on letters Keigwin sent 50 years ago to book publisher John McKenzie, of South Terrace. McKenzie and Rigby go way back, playing cricket together for

Hook & Southborough. "Keigwin was a mediocre cricketer who played in some very famous matches," said Vic, who is in awe of the fact that RPK was still playing at 79. Keigwin was also a joker, nominating his dog as vice-president of his local club. The dog was elected; its name printed on the fixture card! The book is £15 at Regency Bookshop or via www.mckenzie-cricknet.co.uk

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Seven months pregnant, and paddleboarder Leah Fraser still gets out on the Thames at Surbiton. "I taught until a month ago," said Leah of The Good Life Paddle Co. "Now I just paddle for fun and to keep sane in lockdown! People expect you to stop all physical activity which is actually a really bad idea (so long as you have an uncomplicated pregnancy that is). I've been doing yoga, walking, swimming and paddling." She aims to be back teaching in the spring. For winter paddleboarders she advises paddling with a buddy, checking water temperature ("at 10° cold-water shock can hit rapidly, so wearing the right layers could save your life") and checking weather carefully. "Paddle against the flow, so you can rest on the return," she says. More advice? Email goodlifepaddle@gmail.com



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Food to keep you fit

Food is the basis of fitness, says nutritionist and personal trainer Will Manhire. Will, of Queens Drive, Berrylands, created a new nutrition consultancy during lockdown, Willpowernutrition. The 24-year-old former elite rugby player is highly qualified, holding both a BSc in Exercise and Sport Sciences and a Masters in Human Nutrition as well as personal training qualifications. "I pride myself on practising science-based exercise and nutrition methods and helping clients understand why they need to change their diet rather than simply telling them what to do," said Will. He takes a holistic approach and tailors programmes to goals, be it weight loss, muscle gain or all-round fitness, and whether it's for professional athletes or simply have-a-goers. He offers one-off consultations and package deals (the perfect Christmas present?), as well as online nutrition and exercise programmes. www.willpowernutrition.co.uk



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