

Surrey East Guiding March 2024 to March 2025

Beverly Heywood-Jones, Surrey East County Commissioner

Before I talk about our county, I would like to spare a moment to reflect on your theme. **Guiding journeys.** We each have a journey which is unique and special, full of fond memories of time spent together. For many of us, this makes us who we are and for our younger members, who are just starting out it is exciting and fun with so many opportunities for them to know that girls can do anything!

My own Guiding journey started as a brownie in Germany. When we returned to the UK, I joined 6th Walton-on-Thames guides, a huge vibrant unit led by a leader that inspired many girls to achieve their Queens guide and to continue as leaders. Although I moved to Kent and then to Surrey East, we have kept in touch and many of my longest and dearest friends are those I grew up with and have shared my guiding journey with. Shortly after I was appointed county commissioner, I wrote and thanked my leader for inspiring me and she replied that my letter had made her cry.

In Surrey East, we have almost 3000 girls starting out on their guiding journey. Our guiding programme which unites all the sections with a range of skills builders, unit meeting activities and badges is now 7 years old and has recently been reviewed. Next term we will see the launch of 72 new interest badges, inspired by ideas submitted by the girls. I looked to see what the most popular badges in our county were – I was surprised to see that Aviation and Mindfulness were the top two, with less surprisingly Be Well and Have Adventures as the top two themes. Its also great to see girls celebrating achieving the bronze, silver and gold awards for their section.

As you know, Guiding was re-branded in 2023 to make it stronger in the modern world where research shows that people don't all know Guiding still exists and what we are about, our brand is now being promoted widely to attract more volunteers and in June 2026 Guiding will be introducing a new uniform.

Key changes we have seen this year have been the launch of the young leader development programme where young leaders can select their own modules and earn badges for every 4, they achieve. This has been

aligned to the adult leader development programme, so they are well on their way to becoming qualified leaders when they turn 18. We also now have safer guiding training which replaces the old safe space 1, 2 and 3 so all volunteers need to complete one training every three years covering risk, compliance, complaints and inclusion.

On the technology side, it is clear our systems are old and need investment. This year we have seen the introduction of a more secure single sign-on and digital ID verification so volunteers can renew their DBS themselves and improvements continue to be focussed on reducing the admin burden on volunteers. In fact, there is a digital pilot underway, and Surrey East is one of two counties in England that are piloting a new unit meeting tool, effectively a phone app for unit leaders. Its early days but clearly essential stepping stones for our future ways of working.

Beyond Guiding, the nature of volunteering is changing with people wanting to volunteer more flexibly, so we must be open to change, be inclusive and welcome new people on a regular, occasional or adhoc basis.

We were sad to hear that Trefoil Guilds in Warlingham and Oxted were disbanded this year with the remaining members transferring to Reigate. Godstone Division is massively grateful for all the support the two groups have given to our units over the years, and for the contributions you have made in many ways towards Oxted Guide Hut and Warlingham Guide Barn.

We would like to thank Ewell Trefoil for helping at Epsom division's Empowerment event on Thinking Day. They ran a very successful skills activity teaching guides and rangers how to sew. We really appreciate their support throughout the year at various events including Summer Fun at the campsite and Ewell Yule.

We've done our best to inspire our units this year with so much to be proud of. In late June, nearly all our Guide units went to Scoutabout joining over 4500 scouts and guides and leaders in over 200 activities over one weekend camping in Ardingly. It was a particularly good year, with the sun shining all weekend.

In September, Mary led a team to rekindle 'Brownie Revels' with over 700 brownies at Walton Firs – free to roam in a safe environment taking part in a host of activities available to them. Feedback from everyone who took part was that it was amazing, with most people keen for it to be repeated soon.

For those of you who are familiar with Faurefold, our county holiday house and campsite in Westcott, you will see we have made some improvements this year with soundproofing being added to the hall and now a car park. All of this is thanks to the amazing team who fundraise year on year. This year we have been helped by a significant legacy that will enable many of the planned developments to be brought forwards, which is very exciting. Faurefold remains popular and is well used by guiding units in and out of county to support DofE expeditions.

In October, 50 leaders spent the weekend at Pax Lodge – taking part in a treasure hunt all round London walking an average of 10 miles each. This was led by Kate and Jane and was such a fun weekend as teams located the various landmarks, capturing photographic evidence using a mini mannequin. So popular in fact, that we have 37 signed up so far to a repeat event in Hautbois, Norfolk later this year.

In November, we represented guiding in the Lord Mayor's show with a walking float. Over 50 girls and volunteers with red, orange and yellow banners to signify the campfire that brings so many of us together. We were thrilled to see so many guiding and scouting groups supporting the parade and as we walked, we shouted familiar camp songs. We even made it onto the BBC.

And next week over 100 members including two trefoil guilds will tread the boards in the return of Musicals at the Leatherhead theatre – a musical extravaganza with units from across the county. We hope it all goes well for them.

More recently we have just completed a round of coffee and chats – informal drop-ins in every division on every day of the week for volunteers to raise queries and provide input to the county plans. Although some were

better attended than others – overall we had over 70 attendees and provided the opportunity for volunteers to come together. Going forwards we will build on this to further shape what we do.

We are very proud to have over 800 volunteers in Surrey East supporting 200 units. This year we have had our fair share of awards with 18 receiving long service for 5, 10 and 20 years. Congratulations to Liz Collier and Chrissie Harwood who received 30 years long service and to Anne Bowdery, Bernie Dunne and Ann Turnbull who received 40 years. Congratulations also to Avril Farley and Roberta Wilson who received county good service awards for their services to their Divisions. We are also delighted to hear that Debbie Rodgers from Godstone has completed her Queen's Guide award.

Finally, I would like to congratulate Lesley Bailey for her appointment as chair of Surrey East Trefoil. We know from her time as county commissioner what enthusiasm and skills she brings. I'm sure that she will be great!

Thank you.