Epsom murders advance police responses

Surrey Police say its response to coercive and controlling behaviour in domestic abuse cases is "significantly more advanced" following the Epsom College murders.

Emma Pattison, 45, was found dead alongside her seven-year-old daughter, Lettie, in the grounds of the Surrey school in February 2023. Mrs Pattison's husband, George Pattison, 39, is believed to have shot them at their home before killing himself.

During the hearing, the court learned that Mr Pattison called the police over an alleged assault against Mrs Pattison in 2016. Mr Pattison's shotgun certificate was removed temporarily while the matter was being investigated.

Surrey Police said the case was investigated "thoroughly" at the time but the alleged assault was not progressed due to lack of evidence. The force said there was no reason not to return Mr Pattison's certificate and a renewal application in December 2016, and again in 2022, was granted.

But Chief Superintendent Clive Davies said: "Look[ing] through the lens of what ultimately happened, the incident in 2016 was clearly part of Mr Pattison's controlling behaviour". Although Mrs Pattison never made any allegations of domestic abuse or coercive controlling behaviour against her husband, Ch Supt Davies said the force's "understanding and response to CCB is significantly more advanced now".

He added Surrey Police officers and staff are trained to recognise the signs of CCB, the homicide timeline and high-risk factors. Coercive control uses manipulation, intimidation and various forms of emotional and psychological abuse to gain power and control over their partner.

Ch Supt Clive Davies said: "The tragic deaths of Emma and Lettie draw attention to the need to dispel and challenge myths and stereotypes around who may or may not be victims of domestic abuse, and who indeed may be capable of causing such harm." He added that if these misconceptions are not tackled "many victims will feel unable to reach out, and will continue to suffer in silence, while those causing harm in relationships are able to exist unchecked".

After a direct plea from Emma Pattison's family during the hearing, Coroner Richard Travers also raised concerns that controlling and coercive behaviour should be considered in gun licensing. Surrey Police said it has reviewed the concerns raised in the Prevention of Future Death report published by the coroner including medical records in firearms licensing and CCB.

Ch Supt Davies said: "Domestic abuse in its many forms, whether coercive, controlling, physical, sexual, financial or emotional, must not be tolerated and we will do everything we can to support those who are being abused and ensure that those perpetrating it are brought to justice."

The response builds from Ch Supt Davies' statement to the hearing where he pleaded to "challenge stereotypes around victims of domestic abuse". He highlighted children can also be victims of domestic abuse in their own right, and urged the public to help make sure they are seen, heard and supported.

He added: "I would urge anyone who believes they, or a friend or family member, may be experiencing abuse to report it. We know sometimes the signs that someone is suffering from domestic abuse can be subtle and difficult to spot. However, if you have any concerns at all for yourself, or a loved one, please contact the Surrey domestic abuse helpline which can provide access to independent advice and support in confidence."

Contact Surrey domestic abuse helpline by calling 01483 776822 or visiting https://www.healthysurrey.org.uk/domestic-abuse/help

For anyone who feels they may be exhibiting harmful behaviour in their relationships, please contact the Surrey Steps to Change Hub via email: Enquiries@surreystepstochange.com or telephone 01483 900 905.

Related reports:

Surrey Police help end abuse victim's ordeal

Surrey joining up to tackle violence against women

Epsom College murder inquest

A coroner has called on the government to tighten gun-licensing laws after the former head of Epsom College and her daughter were murdered.

Emma Pattison, 45, was found dead alongside her seven-year-old daughter, Lettie, in the grounds of the Surrey school on 5 February 2023. Mrs Pattison's husband, George Pattison, 39, is believed to have shot them at their home before killing himself.

The inquest, which concluded in July, found that George Pattison was legally allowed a shotgun under a firearms licence, but he had lied about his medical history in renewing his application. Richard Travers, senior coroner for Surrey, warned in a Prevention of Future Deaths (PFD) report that "a risk of other deaths will continue to exist" unless gun ownership laws are tightened.

Between 2019 and 2021 George Pattison used an online service to prescribe him "significant amounts" of the drug propranolol to help him with symptoms of anxiety, according to the coroner's report. This was without the knowledge of his GP.

He was then able to lie to Surrey Police about his mental health condition during safeguarding checks on his gun-licence renewal application in 2022. When he was asked if he had been diagnosed or treated for medical conditions, which included 'Depression or anxiety', he responded 'No'. Although his GP's details were included in the form, they had no knowledge of George Pattison's use of online medical services.

Coroner Travers has raised the alarm that online doctors can be used as a loophole for those seeking a gun licence to avoid medical health checks which are meant to be safeguards. These medical checks followed from a PFD report in 2019 where a mother and daughter, Christine and Lucy Lee, were killed after police failed to assess the risk of returning guns back to John Lowe.

He also raised concerns that controlling and coercive behaviour should be considered in gun licensing after a direct plea from Emma Pattison's family during the hearing. Coroner Travers called for police leaders and the government to explore how licensing authorities could obtain details about an applicant's history of coercive controlling behaviour.

George Pattison had first gained a licence in 2012, which was then renewed in 2016 and finally 2022. Surrey Police were notified of a domestic violence incident in 2016, where it was alleged that Emma Pattison had assaulted her husband. The issue was investigated and, according to the PFD report, the shotgun certificate was temporarily removed, but later returned.

Coroner Travers highlighted it appeared there was no consideration by Surrey Police "whether this might have been an example of coercive controlling behaviour on the part of Mr Pattison". But, he added, there was evidence of later domestic abuse or coercive controlling behaviour. This evidence did not seem to be brought to the attention of the Licensing Officer when Mr Pattison applied to renew his licence.

Under current guidance, a GP has to confirm to the police whether an applicant has any relevant medical conditions, including mental health conditions. GPs often have digital markers on patient records if they have a gun licence to help monitor physical and mental health.

The PFD report has been sent to the Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper, the health secretary, Wes Streeting, and the chief constable of Surrey police, Tim De Meyer. Coroner Travers has called on the government departments to take action to prevent future deaths. He has also sent it to the National Police Chiefs' Council and British Medical Association. The authorities have a duty to respond to PFDs within 56 days.

Image - Epsom College: Naveed Barakzai/Maxal Photography. Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.5 Generic license

Leatherhead town on the way up?

Leatherhead could become a "destination town" with an updated shopping arcade and cinema screens, according to regeneration plans. The future project could also see a 'new neighbourhood' created with up to 11-storey apartment block and townhouses in Bull Hill.

The Swan Centre has been earmarked to be the "catalyst to revitalise the town" of Leatherhead. A new leisure area is set to be the "heart" of the Surrey town with four new restaurants, bars and cafes.

Plans include 14 retail units, four cinema screens for leisure and a new central market square for events. Retaining stores like Sainsbury's, Boots, WHSmith and others is also being considered in the development proposals.

Demolishing Leret House, the former offices on Swan Street, is another key part of the proposal. Speaking at a webinar on July 30, project officers said they are looking to reuse as much of the fabric of the building as possible by retaining the concrete frame.

Locals could see apartment buildings up to 11 storeys popping up in the town centre, with houses ranging between three to four stories. Prospective plans for Bull Hill, the second part of the regeneration scheme, include apartment flats and townhouses, as well as parking facilities, offices, and a park. Officers are also looking at plans for a hotel with retail spaces on the ground floor.

Between one, two and three bedroom flats could be available in the new apartments, with the family houses being three to four bedrooms each. MVDC and Keir Property detail a mixture of open market and affordable homes for purchase and rent could be on the offer.

Councillor Keira Vyvyan-Robinson said: "We appreciate that building heights are a sensitive matter, and this is why the sketches and layouts in the masterplan show illustrative heights only at this stage." The Cabinet Member for Projects stressed that "nothing has been decided" as the plans were still in the pre-application phase and "are likely to evolve based on [consultation] feedback".

A Kier Property officer said the project is "looking to get the right balance" of housing heights, so it can "sit comfortably in its environment." Upgrading the existing park in Bull Hill is also part of the initial proposals. Project officers said they wanted to make the park more accessible to people in Leatherhead by improving the play areas.

Launched on July 8 with five consultation events, people can give feedback to the prospective plans until September 26. Leigh Thomas, Group managing director, Kier Property said the consultation events so far had given him "much food for thought". He added the team were looking to adapt the plans "according to the needs of the local community".

MVDC and Keir Property has announced new consultation dates, including:

- Monday 19 August, 5:30pm to 7:30pm at St Mary's Church Hall, 10A The Ridgeway, Fetcham, Leatherhead KT22 9AZ
- Thursday 5 September, 5:30pm to 7:30pm at Ashtead Peace Memorial Hall (Ralli Room), Woodfield Lane, Ashtead KT21 2BE
- Wednesday 11 September, 5:30pm to 7:30pm at The Old Barn Hall Bookham (Main Hall), 55 Church Road, Great Bookham, Leatherhead KT23 3PQ

Keir Property and MVDC is looking at submitting a planning application in 2025 and, if approved, to start building by spring/summer 2026.

Artistic Impression Of The Arrival Square from North Street, south east corner. (Credit: Mole Valley District Council and Keir Property)

Epsom welder's widow seeks help with cancer claim

A woman who believed her incurable cancer may have been caused by washing her husband's work clothes is looking for information. Annette, who was married to a former welder in is appealing for information following her diagnosis with an incurable form of cancer linked to asbestos exposure.

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral composed of thin, needle-like fibres which was widely used in construction. Asbestos was completely banned in 1999 after research showed swallowing and breathing in the fibres trap them in the body, inflaming and scarring the lungs which can cause cancer.

Peter Vaughan, Annette's husband, worked as a welder around **Epsom and Ewell** throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s, where he is believed to have come into contact with asbestos used in insulators for buildings and machinery such as asbestos blankets or gloves.

Annette claims she may have been exposed to asbestos while washing Peter's work clothes, if he came into contact with asbestos while at work. Annette was diagnosed with the rare and aggressive cancer, mesothelioma, in summer 2023 – six years after Peter sadly died in 2017.

Now, with the help of legal firm Leigh Day, Annette is appealing to Peter's former colleagues to help her with information about

conditions at his work. She hopes the information will help her bring a legal claim as she faces the incurable disease.

"Mesothelioma is an aggressive, terminal form of cancer which can develop in an individual later in life even through secondary exposure to asbestos," said Claire Spearpoint, asbestos claims solicitor at law firm Leigh Day. "Annette believes that this may have been the case with her diagnosis, however following Peter's death she has limited access to information regarding the possible presence of exposure at his former places of work."

Leigh Day is looking to support Annette's claim by speaking to anyone who worked at Surrey Sheet Metal Crafts, Grundy Teddington and Vestec throughout the 1960s to 1980s. They may be able to offer information if asbestos was used and how asbestos exposure occurred. Annette is also hopeful that any local tradesmen who worked in the **Epsom and Ewell** area at the time may be able to offer information that could be of help.

Peter worked as a welder and director at Surrey Sheet Metal Crafts between 1965 and 1967, a company he set up with two other men. He was then employed at Grundy Teddington in the Twickenham and Teddington area throughout 1970 to 1971, before working at Vestec for 12 years between 1975 and 1987. During his time at Vestec, he was a supervisor and often referred to as 'quvnor'.

While former employees who overlapped with Peter at these companies would be particularly useful, Annette is also looking to speak to anyone who worked at Surrey Sheet Metal Crafts, Grundy Teddington or Vestec who could offer information on the kind of work undertaken.

All three companies are no longer in existence and have been dissolved, one as recent as March 2024. If you can provide any relevant information please contact Claire Spearpoint at: cspearpoint@leighday.co.uk

Picture of Peter Vaughan as a younger man (Credit: Leigh Day)

No sex please, we're British police

Two ex-Surrey Police officers have been banned from the profession for gross misconduct after engaging in sexual activity on various occasions at police stations whilst on duty.

One former officer was found to have given oral sex to her tutor police officer whilst on duty at Horley Police Station. PC B admitted to performing the sex act on her tutor, PC C, and allegedly told another officer she gave oral sex on a sergeant's desk at Caterham Police Station. Mr C has continued to deny the allegations.

Epsom and Ewell Times has withheld the names of the former officers involved as we take the view that the news-worthiness in the report is the handling of these matters by our local police force.

The police misconduct hearing panel, held on July 25, found Ms B and Mr C "neglected their duties for their own gratification". The pair breached professional standards by engaging in sexually inappropriate behaviour whilst on duty.

Evidence was heard from another police officer who said Ms B had admitted to her that she and former PC C had engaged in sexual activity on a number of occasions at Caterham and Horley Police Stations. One officer said she saw former PC's B and C "getting up off the floor and laughing" after interrupting them "in a darkened room" at Caterham Police Station.

Report documents state the pair were alleged to be "kissing and cuddling" whilst on duty at Horley Police Station, a quieter station, on January 15, 2023. A police officer and former colleague said that he saw Mr C coming out of a dark room with his "outer layer tee-shirt untucked" and not wearing any police protective equipment such as body armour and belt kit. The officer walked past the room which former PC C had left and saw Ms B facing away from him, appearing to be tying up her hair.

Concerned with what he saw, the officer reported it to an inspector who checked in with Ms B's welfare after her shift. Ms B stated that former PC C had not behaved inappropriately to her and denied anything of a sexual nature happened between them.

But Ms B allegedly admitted to an officer she was in a relationship with former PC C. Mr C's wife also provided a statement to the panel, in which she said in April 2023, her husband confirmed that "he had an affair with a trainee officer at work".

In lying to a senior officer about her relationship with Mr C, the panel found the former PC B clearly breached the "most serious" standard of honesty in police professional behaviour.

Making matters worse, the panel considered that both former officers "deliberately" went to the "quieter" Horley station to carry out their sexual activities. Their sexual conduct was "repeated and sustained" over a period of time and in secret because "the officers knew it was wrong", according to the report.

Members considered that former PC C was especially deserving of blame as he was former PC B's tutor constable, meaning he had leadership responsibilities for mentoring her. The panel claimed he "failed" to act as a role model to Ms B.

Ms B was also criticised as she "failed to raise concern" about the alleged relationship when reportedly given an opportunity to do so by an inspector and instead lied to her. "No real remorse" was shown by either party and it was noted that Ms B refused to hand over her personal phone in full cooperation with the investigation.

The panel agreed the former officer's behaviour amounted to gross misconduct and it would undermine trust and confidence in policing if the public had been aware. They found the pair "neglected" their duties and responsibilities whilst on duty at a police station, and "discredited" the force.

Both officers resigned from the force in July 2023 while the investigation was still ongoing. The panel concluded the former officers' behaviour amounted to gross misconduct worthy of dismissal.

Head of Professional Standards, Superintendent Andy Rundle, said; "Surrey Police expects a high level of professionalism from our officers and staff. The misconduct process for those who do not meet those standards is stringent and we will take all action within our power to ensure that those who do meet these standards are dealt with robustly.

"The hearing found that if former PCs B and C had not already resigned, they would have been dismissed without notice. Both former officers' details will also now be placed on the College of Policing barred list indefinitely."

Surrey Police ethics print on wall at Mount Browne HQ. (Credit: Emily Dalton/LDRS)

Hyperia's screams have mixed local responses

What's it like being neighbours to one of the biggest theme parks in the UK? "It depends if you like screaming," residents say. Living next to Thorpe Park has split opinion with some locals saying they like the 'nice screams' and others saying they struggle to sit in the garden.

The park, between Chertsey and Staines-upon-Thames in Surrey, has recently introduced its newest and biggest ride, Hyperia. Some locals said they could hear the screams and noise from the ride about a mile away on opening day, but not all of the park's neighbours are bothered by it.

Joyce Hunt, 93, has lived next to the theme park for 40 odd years and "loves to hear" the screaming. She said: "It's great to see young people go and enjoy it. They have a good scream there." Joyce said the park was handy when her grandchildren were young and she could walk to the park with them.

Bricklayer Kevin Nye, 52, said it's "great" living next to the park and hearing the "nice screams". He moved into the street eight years ago for "peace and quiet". Although it's busy in the summer, Kevin said it's calmer the rest of the year.

But one couple said Thorpe Park "encroaches on [our] daily lives" and they "don't leave the house after 5pm". Jackie, 55, said the traffic on the roads is so bad after the theme park closes she "doesn't bother" leaving the house. One time, Jackie said she was stuck on the roundabout for 25 minutes, when her home was just a short walk away.

"It's one of the reasons why we're thinking about moving away from Surrey," said Jackie, "Staines is too congested". Jackie and partner Neil, 60, moved to the area 20 years ago when Thorpe was just a "small park" but now they say the number of customers is "out of proportion".

First opened in 1979, Thorpe Park has grown from strength to strength and expanded its rides and attraction offerings. A spokesperson for Thorpe Park said it has not received any complaints from local residents next door to the park about recent issues of parking, noise or litter.

Sitting outside in the garden, the couple said it's not so much the screams that disturb them but the click click clicking of the rides as the cars climb to the top, and the sudden whoosh that follows on its way down. With Halloween parties, late functions in the evening- the pair said it's "never quiet".

Other locals, like Alan, 59, said he "didn't want to sound like an old fogey" but sometimes the PA system for the autumn functions was "too loud" and lasted until 11pm at night. But he accepted it is a theme park: "What do you expect? There are worse things to live next to."

Thrill-seekers visiting Thorpe sometimes park down residential streets around the site to avoid paying parking fees. Although some neighbours said they "don't blame" people for trying to save a few quid, one couple had even taken to putting bricks on the curb outside of their house to stop people parking.

Liz and Barry Taylor, 58 and 73, said people parking outside their house at the weekends can cause a lot of traffic and congestion down their quiet road. They said sometimes they struggle to get out of their drives and dodge other cars, but it has not been "too bad" since Hyperia opened. "It's alright," said Liz, "but I'd rather it wasn't there."

Not all the neighbours mind it: Johanna said it is "no problem", adding that she is "all in favour of working people" trying to save money. She said: "When you think about the problems of the world- it's nothing. They are youngsters."

Neighbours raised issues of people chucking litter out of their car and onto the kerb as hometime comes around. "Lots of rubbish gets left along the road," said Joanne Bolton, 65. She moved next door to the park three years ago to be closer to her daughter. Residents complained of fast food packaging and wrappers being thrown out of cars and "left tumbling down the street" before people drive home.

But Joanne said: "I like looking out at the green area [of trees around the park]. If that goes I'd be mad." Although she "quite likes the screaming", she gets more wound up about the planes that fly over her garden.

A Thorpe Park spokesperson said: "Thorpe Park is very much part of the local community we operate within and has been positively contributing to the local area for 45 years. We strive to do all we can to ensure we keep our local residents, staff and guests happy, and we pride ourselves on being an established part of the community, taking our responsibility as a good neighbour seriously. We have a long-standing positive relationship with our local residents and this is something we value and want to maintain."

The vast majority of park guests visit for a single day. "Substantial" on-site car parking is available, along with good public transport links near Staines Train Station. The Thorpe Park Express bus transports guests directly between Staines Train Station and Thorpe Park at regular intervals during the day and during operational hours.

The spokesperson added: "Here at Thorpe Park we pride ourselves on being a significant employer of local people. Our teams work closely with our local community to ensure we are giving back to our local area and contributing towards making it a positive place to live and work on a number of levels."

"Thorpe Park worked hard to support the residents association in working with Cllr Hulley and Surrey Highways to bring improvements to the roundabout – at our own cost – to accelerate and resolve long standing issues impacting residents."

Some more of these initiatives include Site Conservation teams doing daily litter picking along the main road leading to Thorpe Park, in both directions, and beyond the perimeter. Teams also make regular landscaping support from our teams to ensure local green spaces are kept well maintained.

Image: Suntooooth License details

Mental health art exhibition in Epsom

Children and young people using mental health services have been taking part in a 'My Voice Matters' exhibition, which allows participants to express themselves through the medium of art.

The exhibition is an opportunity to celebrate the talents of the children, young people, parents and carers and to support them in using art to tell us how their voices matter. The "My Voice Matters" Exhibition opens from 2pm on August 27 and runs until September 6 at The Horton Arts Centre in Epsom.

Children and young people who use services such as STARS and New Leaf were invited to create art and encouraged to think about how their voice matters. "I feel satisfied when I do art," said a young person who contributed to the exhibition. "It is simple." They are displaying a painting called 'Flowers' at the show.

"Being able to express yourself through art can be a therapeutic experience for some but can also during the process release traumatic thoughts, experiences, and feelings," said Rebecca Robertson, who works as a Specialist Mental Health Therapist

within STARS and is also a qualified Art Therapist. She explained: "It's not just the finished image, which is useful, but also the process of creating it."

New Leaf and STARS provide specialist mental health services for children in Surrey. They offer trauma and attachment therapy to children in care, care leavers, adopted children and those subject to Special Guardianship Orders (New Leaf) and children who have suffered sexual trauma (STARS). The service is delivered by Mindworks Surrey.

The STARS service supports children and young people who have been affected by sexual abuse and assault. The New Leaf Service supports children and young people who are in care, leaving care, adopted or under special guardianship orders.

Emina Atic-Lee, Service Manager for STARS and New Leaf services, said: "Last year's exhibition received the most incredible feedback from young people, their carers and families, as well as the members of the local community who visited. We are really pleased to be able to put on another exhibition this year."

The exhibition is free to enter and showcases artwork by both young people and their parents/carers and staff.

Image: Sibling painting from My Voice Matters exhibition. (Credit: Surrey and Border Partnership NHS Trust)

Redhill theatre gone to rack and ruin?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Epsom Hospital upgrade at risk?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Healthwatch Surrey, a non-profit advocating for locals to get the best of their NHS, claims wellbeing "does not solely lie in the hands of doctors and other frontline staff" but the built environment can also affect patient safety. According to NHS data from 2022/23, estate and infrastructure failures in England disrupted the care of more than 2,600 patients.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A lesson in Green Belt development?

A controversial plan to build 446 homes on Green Belt land near Horley, Surrey, has been approved on appeal, overturning the local council's initial rejection.

The development, proposed by Rydon Homes, will include up to 446 homes - including 201 affordable homes (45 per cent), and four Traveller pitches on land west of Reigate Road in Hookwood. Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) confirmed there is a significant unmet need for this type of specific housing within the local area.

Despite concerns about its impact on the Green Belt, the planning inspector ruled that the "very substantial public benefits" of the housing outweighed the harm to the protected area. This decision comes amid what the inspector called "an acute need for affordable housing" in the district.

MVDC rejected the outline planning application, claiming it could appear "cramped" and "incongruous" with the surrounding area. MVDC's initial decision report from November 2023 said the development will have a "detrimental transport impact".

However since then, the authority changed the site from being a 'protected area' in the Local Plan to a 'potential development site' – so they could not defence their original decision. The developer launched an appeal.

The scheme was allowed after the developer Rydon Homes attended the inquiry with a team of 16 headed by a KC. At the start of the hearing MVDC & Charlwood Parish Council withdrew their objections to the planning application.

The inspector noted the opportunities for transport, employment and other facilities due to its proximity to Hookwood, Horley and Gatwick Airport. He also found transport options were satisfactory and in agreement with Surrey County Council.

Concerns were raised by locals that the increase of around a thousand new residents would put pressure on GPs and schools. Rough plans put forward by the developer suggests it will create new community facilities like early education, but details are not yet apparent.

Although the inspectorate agreed there was a degree of harm to the character and appearance of the neighbourhood, he concluded there was "very special circumstances" to build on the Green Belt.

Image: View of development land west from Hookwood, Horley. (Credit: Google Street View)