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Surrey Tory MPs against school fees VAT

22 September 2024



Special Educational Needs families should be exempt from Government plans put VAT on independent school fees, six Surrey MPs have said.

Claire Coutinho, Jeremy Hunt, Ben Spencer, Rebecca Paul, Greg Stafford and Lincoln Jopp argue in a open letter to the chancellor Rachel Reeves, that VAT on school fees misunderstands the sacrifices many families make to give their children a better life.

They said the 20 per cent increase would force parents to send their children to state schools and increase pressure on the system – applications from parents “transferring from independent schools” in Surrey jumped from 116 between November 2022 to August 2023, to 382 the following year when Labour’s VAT plans on private schools gained traction.

The Conservative Surrey MPs said price rises disproportionately affect educational needs pupils as 93,000 children at special independent schools do not have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP).

If their parents are unable to afford the increases, they argue, children would have to attend schools less able to cater to their complex situations.

The Treasury argues that ending tax breaks on private schools will help recruit 6,500 new teachers while children in local authorities where their needs can only be met in private schools will not have the fees apply to them.

East Surrey MP, Claire Coutinho, said: “One in four children in Surrey attend an independent school.

“Their parents are saving the Government money by paying for their independent school, and paying for a state school place through their taxes.

“To penalise them for this and increase pressure in the state system is wrong.

“As a former minister for special educational needs, I am acutely aware about the impact that Labour’s tax changes will have on children with special and complex needs.

“These families, who have often faced uphill battles to find a school that meets their child’s needs, will now be taxed and many children who have settled in a school environment will be forced to move.

“Labour must reconsider this ideological policy and introduce an immediate exemption for SEND children.”

The Government argues that it has carefully considered the impact ending VAT will have on pupils, families and schools across both the state and private sector.

Ending tax breaks on private schools, it said, would help raise revenue to change education,.

The Government does not expect significant numbers to move to the state sector part way through the academic year, citing the stable number of children in independent schools since 2000 – despite a near 75 per cent “real terms increase” in average private school fees over that time.

Pupils in independent schools, funded by local authorities because their needs can only be met privately, will not have the fees apply to them as the council’s will be able to reclaim the VAT.

A government spokesperson said: “We want to ensure all children have the best chance in life to succeed. Ending tax breaks on private schools will help to raise the revenue needed to fund our education priorities for next year, such as recruiting 6,500 new teachers.

“Fees for students with an Education, Health and Care Plan that states their needs cannot be met in the state sector will have their private school fees paid by the Local Authority that can then reclaim the VAT they pay.”

Relared reports:

Taxing question for Surrey’s private schools

Claire Coutinho MP for East Surrey

Gatwick expansion update

22 September 2024

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Local authorities have said they will not support Gatwick Airport's plans to expand unless its growth is dependent on meeting environmental and noise targets.

According to legal documents, the impacted councils are concerned that there is currently a "lack of sanction" against Gatwick if the growth of the airport exceeds expected environmental guidelines without clear accountability.

Airport chiefs at Gatwick, the country's second busiest airport, want to modify its northern runway so that it can increase passenger numbers to about 75 million a year on 386,000 flights. It says this will help minimise delays, bring in about £1 billion into the region's economy every year, and create 14,000 jobs – all while staying within agreed noise levels. It also has a carbon action plan for how the airport will be net zero for its own emissions by 2030, with aviation emissions excluded.

Gatwick Airport has applied for a Development Consent Order (DCO), a legal document that allows the construction of major infrastructure projects. Part of the process requires the applicant to show the planning inspector how it will mitigate the impact of the development.

The airport's current position is that the impact from the growth of the runways will be controlled by an air noise envelope (a way to limit sound) an annual cap of 386,000 commercial air transport movements, surface access commitments/SACs (55 per cent people accessing the airport by public transport by 2040) and a carbon action plan (to reduce carbon footprint).

Councils such as Crawley Borough, West Sussex County, Surrey County, Reigate and Banstead Borough, Mole Valley District and Tandridge (together the JLA) have been consulted on the proposals and have written to both Gatwick Airport and the planning inspector with recommendations.

The JLA say they are "concerned" that the current project "will impose unjustified adverse impacts on local communities, local businesses, and the receiving environment". The group disagree with the Planning Inspectorate's recommendations for the major development and believes it does not go far enough to address their concerns.

Instead, the JLA has put forward an approach where any increase in passenger numbers would be dependent on Gatwick Airport's achievement of specific targets which would avoid, limit and reduce impacts of the project. The group said that if all their recommended measures were adopted, including the Environmentally Managed Growth framework (EMG), they would "not object".

Under the JLAs' proposed approach, Gatwick Airport would be required to continually monitor and regularly report on the extent of the environmental effects associated with the airport in the four areas: noise, air quality, greenhouse gases and surface access. In each of the cases, the JLAs say they want to ensure Gatwick meet their specific targets and are held accountable, to prevent the airport expanding at any cost.

The group has proposed a tier system in which to monitor potential breaches in environmental commitments. For instance, if air quality or green gas emissions go above a certain point (level 1), Gatwick will review the current measures and work on mitigation. Then, if air quality gets increasingly poorer (level 2), Gatwick will review its pollutant contributions and introduce mitigation measures, perhaps preventing further capacity. If the limit for air pollution is breached, further mitigation would be required to solve the problem and no more aeroplane flight slots will be allocated.

The JLAs also want further clarity on the impacted areas exposed to higher levels of aircraft noise, especially areas where noise could wake people up. Measures should also be applied to give Gatwick Airport an incentive to transition to quieter aircraft and noise insulation as soon as possible, according to the JLA's statement. The JLAs also want to secure night time controls for flying.

The examination of the proposed DCO closed on August 27. The Planning Inspectorate will make a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Transport, who will then make a final decision on or before February 27.

A London Gatwick spokesperson said: "We are fully committed to making sure the airport's growth is sustainable. London Gatwick has thoroughly assessed the environmental impacts of its growth plans, which include environmental mitigations related to noise, carbon emissions and surface access improvements.

"As part of our sustainability policy we are committed to reaching net zero for our own scope one and two admissions by 2030, as well as continuing to reduce overall energy use, invest in on-site renewable energy, and continuing to source 100% renewable electricity.

"London Gatwick is delighted with the strong support shown by many local people and businesses during the recent hearings, who all voiced their desire to see the airport grow for the economic benefit of the area. We thank them for their ongoing support."

Related reports:

Gatwick Airport Expansion

Gatwick 2nd runway sneaking in?

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Gatwick expansion plans revealed

Gatwick to get 2nd runway?

Gatwick Plans (Image PINS / Gatwick)

Surrey Coroner calls for action over ambulance wait

22 September 2024



The death of a man who waited more than three hours for an ambulance has prompted calls from a coroner for quicker clinical assessments.

Philip Ross died at the Royal Surrey County Hospital on December 19 2023 after a fall in his home on December 3.

Surrey's assistant coroner Susan Ridge ruled that Mr Ross died of multiple organ failure after his accidental fall. Ms Ridge said she was concerned South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SECAmb) has not shown evidence that its timeline for clinical validation is being met, as in this case.

Clinical validation is when a case is sent to a clinician to decide the best response for the patient at the right time.

Mr Ross' wife called an ambulance at 11:25pm after her husband had a fall and was unable to move. Initially, Mr Ross' case was labelled by SECAmb as Category 3, which would have a response time of 120 minutes, or two hours. Paramedics did not arrive until 2:30am, the Prevention of Future Death report stated.

During the wait, Mrs Ross made "a number of increasingly anxious calls to the ambulance service" about the urgency to help her deteriorating husband, according to the report.

Ms Ridge said Category 3 cases had a response time of 120 minutes and SECAmb aimed to validate these calls with a clinician within 90 minutes. But the NHS Trust's target was not met in this case.

"No clinical validation of the calls took place until well over 2 hours from the initial call," Ms Ridge said. The court heard the delays came from a "surge" in the number of calls as well as a lack of available clinical staff or "clinical hours".

Categories 3 and 4 are judged as less serious cases and so have longer required response times from ambulances. However, this can become extended even longer at times of high demand.

The report stated: "Because of these potentially long response times, timely clinical validation is important to ensure correct categorisation and/or identify a deteriorating situation."

The coroner said she is concerned that late or delayed assessment and sorting of these initially 'less serious' cases is "placing patients at risk of early death".

The ambulance service has 56 days from 16 September to respond to the coroner's report.

A SECAmb spokesperson said: "Our thoughts and condolences are with Mr Ross's family. We are very sorry that we were not able to respond to him more quickly.

"We recognise that there are times when we are taking longer than we should to respond to some calls and are working hard to address this and improve performance across all categories of call. Having recently been written to by the coroner, we will respond in full to her within the requested timeframes."

Image: South East Coast Ambulance vehicle example. (Credit: Emily Dalton/LDRS)

Surrey's outstanding beauty expanding?

22 September 2024

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The Surrey Hills could be made significantly larger as Natural England considers expanding the borders of the county's "iconic and beautiful" landscape.

Each year millions of people are drawn to Surrey's "views and beauty" as they search out rare habitats and ancient woodlands – not to mention locations from Hollywood hits – and now moves are afoot to protect even more of Surrey's cultural heritage.

A consultation has been launched on expanding the Surrey Hills, with up to 27 new areas brought under the label, that could result in the area of outstanding natural beauty being made up to 30 per cent larger.

That figure includes the potential 13 "minor areas" that could be removed from the protection afforded by the designation.

An area of outstanding natural beauty are protected by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to conserve and enhance natural beauty. Any planning proposals submitted in these areas must have regard for the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Surrey Hills.

Nature England area deputy director Allison Potts said: "If the proposed areas are added to the Surrey Hills National Landscape, this could bring many benefits including conserving and enhancing the natural and cultural heritage, as well as the views and beauty of the area.

"It will give improved access to nature for the benefit of people's health and wellbeing whilst boosting economic growth and local tourism and safeguard a nationally important landscape for future generations.

"All on the doorstep of London."

The Surrey Hills, described by Natural England as "an iconic and beautiful landscape encompassing rare habitats from acid and chalk grassland to extensive ancient woodland" is enjoyed by millions of residents and visitors.

It stretches across the county and includes the chalk slopes of the North Downs from Farnham at its furthermost western point to Oxted in the east. Its southern boundary stretches to the densely wooded Greensand Hills around Haslemere.

The consultation features an online survey as well as a series of roadshows to help Natural England consider whether to approve a draft designation order to include new land within the national landscape.

It is the first time the Surrey Hills boundary has been reviewed since its original designation in 1958 and comes after a number of borough and district councils began designating areas bordering the Surrey Hills as Areas of Great Landscape Value in recognition of their value at a county level.

Natural England, after a formal request by the Surrey Hills National Landscape Board, will now consider whether these and others should be included within the designation.

If successful it would still require approval from the secretary of state for environment, food and rural affairs.

In 2023, more than 1,500 individuals and organisations responded to the survey to express their views on the future of the Surrey Hills.

Of those, an overwhelming majority supported the extensions, Natural England said.

Ms Potts added: "If the proposed areas are added to the Surrey Hills National Landscape, this could bring many benefits including conserving and enhancing the natural and cultural heritage, as well as the views and beauty of the area.

"It will give improved access to nature for the benefit of people's health and wellbeing whilst boosting economic growth and local tourism and safeguard a nationally important landscape for future generations. All on the doorstep of London."

Areas under consideration include Wey Valley Hogs Back Cranleigh Waters, Hatchlands and East Clandon as well as Headley Hill Limpsfield, Betchworth Hills and Mole Valley

Image: Surrey Hills National Landscape, Frensham Ponds (Image Natural England/ LYDIA2)

Epsom landlord fined for neglect

22 September 2024

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A bedsit landlord who repeatedly ignored warnings to fix flats dubbed “cold”, “damp”, “filthy”, and a “firetrap” has been hit with a court bill approaching £32,000.

Epsom Pars Limited, which runs a 21-room house in multiple occupation (HMO) near Epsom Downs was ordered to pay the fines and costs by Staines Magistrates’ Court after they pleaded guilty to 48 criminal charges.

The case was brought forward by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council after the landlord repeatedly ignored warnings to carry out improvement works to the property.

Councillor Rich Michalowski, executive member for place, planning and regulatory services said: “This case underscores the importance of landlords being held accountable to ensure tenants are living in safe, well-maintained homes.

“Reigate and Banstead enforcement teams, armed with legal powers, will continue to take action against those who fail to meet the legal standards, ensuring that unsafe and unfit housing has no place in our borough.”

The company was ordered to pay fines, costs, and a victim surcharge totalling £31,840. The charges included various forms of disrepair and fire safety offences, the council said.

The prosecution comes on the back of months of exchanges between the landlord and the council.

During that time officers from the private sector housing team were said to have repeatedly warned the landlord against its continued non-compliance that left people living in “cold”, “damp”, “filthy” “firetrap” of a property.

During sentencing, magistrates spoke of the “repeated, unacceptable non-compliance” and noted that the problems identified had put tenants at risk, according to a council statement.

Image RBBC

Epsom residents score double-century

22 September 2024



Two residents at Linden House Care Home in Epsom have celebrated their 100th birthdays surrounded by fellow residents, relatives, and the dedicated staff at the Surrey-based home.

Edith Valerie Griffiths, known as Val, and Evelyn Houseman marked their milestones with a small but special get together with friends and family. Val and Evelyn, who have both lived rich and active lives, were delighted to share their landmark birthdays with those closest to them.

Val, who was born in Richmond, Surrey, experienced a childhood of frequent moves due to her father’s work. Despite the disruptions, Val developed a passion for sports, excelling in tennis, table tennis, ice skating, and skiing. During World War II, she was evacuated to Berkhamsted but returned to London after a year. Val married at the age of 33, becoming a mother to three boys, and is now also a grandmother of three.

Evelyn, a lifelong resident of Epsom, is renowned for her knitting and love of fashion. Having worked as a seamstress, she takes pride in the knitted jumpers she still wears today. Evelyn has always been passionate about music and dance, and she never misses a chance to be the first on the dance floor when Linden House hosts live entertainment.

Maintaining a healthy diet and drinking very little alcohol has helped Val live a long and happy life. Val’s family believes that moderation has been key throughout her life but also acknowledge that good genes have played a significant role in her longevity.

Josephine Gbadamosi, manager of Linden House said: “Celebrating Val and Evelyn’s 100th birthdays has been a wonderful experience for everyone at Linden House.

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“These incredible women have lived rich, full lives, and their stories continue to inspire us all. It’s a privilege to have them as part of our community, and we look forward to creating many more happy memories together.”

Linden House, located in Epsom, Surrey, is rated ‘Good’ by the CQC, with an ‘Outstanding’ rating for its well-led category. Part of Wren Retirement Living, Linden House is managed by Healthcare Management Solutions, committed to providing high-quality care in a supportive and engaging environment.

Surrey scientists invite children to reach for the stars

22 September 2024



Children need to dream big and reach for the stars to become the country’s future space engineers and budding astronauts, say the organisers of Guildford’s World Space Week High Street Takeover.

Scientists from the University of Surrey and the Institute of Physics are encouraging young people, who may one day want to build the rockets and technology that make their way to space, to join them at Guildford High Street and Tunsgate Quarter, all day on Saturday, 5 October.

Event-goers will have the chance to get up close and personal with a miniature version of the Mars Rover and find out how it works on Mars; thanks to the Observatory Science Centre, there will be a state-of-the-art pop-up planetarium. Researchers from Surrey will be on hand to showcase the range of fascinating space-based work taking place at the University, and employers from the local space sector will be on hand to answer any questions that young people may have about working in the field.

Professor Adam Amara, Head of the School of Mathematics and Physics at the University of Surrey, who is also an astrophysicist, said:

“Our primary goal as educators is to inspire people – and that is why our University is delighted to once again host this event with our partners from the Institute of Physics.

“The space sector in our region is a truly exciting, forward-thinking place and the goal of events like this is to ensure that the sector has a pipeline of skilled young people who dream big and reach for the stars.”

For more information on other activities happening at the World Space Week High Street Takeover, visit our website.

Image: credit: Grant Pritchard / University of Surrey

Epsom murders advance police responses

22 September 2024



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.

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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

22 September 2024



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.

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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

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Epsom welder's widow seeks help with cancer claim

22 September 2024



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

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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 'guvnor'.

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

22 September 2024



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.

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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)

Surrey police to move to Epsom and Ewell constituency

22 September 2024



Surrey Police purchased the featured premises in Cleeve Road, Leatherhead, in 2019 for over £20 million. The address is just over 5 miles from Epsom High Street and is in the recently expanded Epsom and Ewell Constituency. Will the intended move reported below improve policing in our area?

Surrey Police’s plan to move 400 officers from Reigate to Leatherhead has triggered calls for guarantees on response times and street presence from the area’s MP.

People must not be made to suffer longer police response times or fewer officers on the streets over the police’s decision to permanently move its eastern headquarters from Reigate to Leatherhead, the East Surrey MP has said.

Surrey Police vacated Reigate Police Station last year and shared offices with Surrey Fire and Rescue after dangerous aerated concrete, known as RAAC – which can collapse without warning – was found throughout the base.

It has now taken the decision to permanently move out of the borough with up to 400 officers and staff moving across – although a long-term site within Reigate and Banstead for its Safer Neighbourhood Team is still being sought.

It says the move demonstrates the force’s commitment to retaining an operational base in the heart east Surrey and will allow it to maintain a visible presence in the communities it serves, fight crime and protect people.

East Surrey MP Claire Coutinho has written to the force demanding assurances it can deliver on those promises.

She said: “While the RAAC issue at Reigate Police Station must be resolved, residents in the east of the county will want assurances that a move to Leatherhead will not cause longer response times or less police presence on the streets.

“I have written to Surrey Police to get these assurances for residents and I will be discussing what this means for our area when I meet local officers in the coming weeks.”

Surrey Police had to leave Reigate Police Station permanently after RAAC was found throughout the building, and in October 2023 it moved staff into Wray Park, Reigate, on a temporary basis with Surrey Fire and Rescue.

From there it began its search for a long-term solution including the demolition and rebuild of Reigate Police Station.

Surrey Police said the decision to refurbish its Leatherhead site, bought in 2018, was “based on operational requirements, partnerships with other public services, best value for the residents of Surrey, and long-term viability for the Force itself.”

The former Electrical Research Association and Cobham Industries site in Leatherhead was bought when Surrey Police had planned to sell off its Mount Browne headquarters in Guilford and relocate its main HQ across the county.

Instead the force decided to close its central Guildford police station, refurbish Mount Browne, and offload the Leatherhead industrial site but the enforced closure of Reigate Police Station has meant a rethink about its East Surrey division and the new plan hatched.

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This recommendation was approved on August 6 at the Estates Strategy Board.

Tim De Meyer, Surrey Police's chief constable, said, "The desired move to Leatherhead shows our commitment to retain an operational base in the heart of the East of Surrey where we can maintain a visible policing presence in the communities we serve, to fight crime and protect people.

"This is an opportunity to build a new divisional headquarters which will be operationally fit for purpose and serve the east of our county for many years to come."

Surrey's Police and Crime Commissioner, Lisa Townsend, said, "This is exciting news and if we get planning approval gives us a unique opportunity to build a bespoke divisional HQ that is fit for purpose for our hard-working police teams on the east of the county.

"The situation with RAAC at Reigate Police Station has presented us with some difficult and unexpected challenges and I would like to pay tribute to all those officers, staff and volunteers for their patience and understanding over the last year.

"I am well aware of the importance Surrey residents place on local policing, and I want to reassure people living in Reigate and Banstead that the neighbourhood presence in their communities will not be affected by these plans.

"There have been some tough choices to make but I believe that Leatherhead presents us with the best option in providing both value for money for Surrey residents and an eastern HQ that is fit for a modern police force."

Councillor Paul Kennedy, Mole Valley District Council's cabinet member for internal services and security, said: "While any proposals remain subject to planning permission, this potentially signals yet another boost to the town, alongside the progress of our Transform Leatherhead initiative.

With the addition of an HQ and around 400 members of staff comes the promise of a boost in footfall into the town centre and a positive impact on the local economy."

Surrey Police said it is still committed to having a presence in every borough and district and that there will be a minimum of one front counter facility in each.

They added that, while locations will be reviewed, there will be no reductions than we currently provided, and no reduction in service.

Image: Premises bought by Surrey Police in 2019 for £20,485,000. Google street view.

A classes for Rosebery girls

22 September 2024



The class of 2024 at Rosebery School Sixth Form did themselves proud with one in three A level results including an A* or A.

The excellent results also saw 86 per cent of students achieve grades A* to C and the average vocational qualification saw a distinction, so it was celebrations all round.

"These results are a testament to the unwavering hard work, dedication and determination of our exceptional cohort," said David Lach, Head of School.

"We could not be prouder of the Class of 2024. We have always known they were a special and talented group, and we are delighted that their efforts have resulted in such fantastic outcomes. Well done, girls!"

There were many outstanding results, but to highlight a few of the school's most notable performers: Ysabel C was awarded an incredible 4 A*, Ilana A and Edith P achieved 3 A*s and 1 A, Rachel A achieved 4 A grades. Jessica W received 3A*s. Connie H, Becca J, Elizabeth Q P and Maya S were awarded 2A*s and an A in their core A levels but with Maya and Connie also achieving an A* in their EPQ.

"Following the school's recent Outstanding Ofsted Judgement for Sixth Form Provision, and building on last year's record-breaking results, Rosebery School Sixth Form continues to excel and grow stronger each year – with the school receiving a record number of both internal and external applications to join the Sixth Form in September," said Mr Lach.

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Hyperia’s screams have mixed local responses

22 September 2024



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

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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

'Don't put your national trust in Barclays' climate protestors urge.

22 September 2024



On Saturday, 3rd August, visitors to Box Hill from Epsom, Ewell, and surrounding areas held a peaceful demonstration, urging The National Trust to cease banking with Barclays.

The group organised a picnic protest at the iconic Box Hill viewpoint, displaying banners and placards to appeal to the charity to drop Barclays, which is Europe's largest financier of fossil fuels.

Box Hill, renowned for its stunning views across Surrey, is one of the hundreds of sites owned by the National Trust. The organisation is a guardian of nature reserves, national parks, coastlines, historic buildings, and estates across the country.

The demonstrators carried banners and placards with messages such as 'Love National Trust, Not Barclays'. They engaged with families, distributing leaflets and collecting signatures for a petition that calls on the charity to switch to a bank that does not fund fossil fuels.

Kristine, an NHS doctor from Epsom and mother of four, expressed her concerns: "I have been visiting Box Hill and other National Trust sites with my four boys since they were babies. Exploring nature as a family is invaluable, and I am very disappointed that an organisation like the National Trust does not prioritise the natural world we are leaving for our children in its banking choices.

"Barclays is destroying nature with its horrific lending and investments in unethical industries. Knowing that I am indirectly supporting Barclays spoils my visits to National Trust sites. Since realising the impact our choice of bank can have on the climate, I switched to an ethical bank last year. I see no reason why the National Trust cannot do the same."

The demonstration was part of a week of vibrant actions by campaigners across the country, aimed at urging the National Trust to cut ties with Barclays, which has invested $235.2 billion in fossil fuels over the past seven years.

Despite publishing a new energy policy earlier this year, which it hailed as a step towards a "science-based" approach to "financing the transition", Barclays continues to finance notorious fossil fuel companies such as ExxonMobil and Royal Dutch Shell. In 2023 alone, Barclays provided $24.221 billion in financing to fossil fuel companies.

The bank's new energy policy has faced widespread criticism for loopholes that allow it to continue supporting carbon-intensive industries such as fracking. Meanwhile, investigative journalists have revealed that Barclays' "sustainable finance" is being used to fund pipelines and oil expansion projects.

Recently, other institutions have announced their intentions to sever ties with Barclays for ethical reasons. Christian Aid and Oxfam have already withdrawn their funds from Barclays.

Cambridge University is also in the process of withdrawing its support for Barclays and is leading a group of universities and colleges that are investigating more sustainable financial products. Despite its commitment to natural conservation, the National Trust is lagging behind other charities and thought leaders within its sector.

Alice, a mother of one from Sutton, who participated in the demonstration, said: "I have been donating to the National Trust for years and even used to work in the tea shop at another local property.

"But I never realised that all this time my money was going directly to Barclays Bank, a bank that funds fossil fuels and arms—both of which I am completely opposed to. I don't want my money to support such a horrific business, and I wish the National Trust would make much more of an effort to cut ties with Barclays.

"They have been aware of their members' ethical concerns for years now, yet they seem to be doing very little about it."

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Euronews reported in February: “Addressing climate change is a critical and complex challenge,” said Laura Barlow, group head of sustainability at Barclays. “We continue to work with our energy clients as they decarbonise and support their efforts to transition in a manner that is just, orderly and addresses energy security.”

Barclays announced that it will no longer provide direct financing for new oil and gas projects, starting in 2024. This policy change is part of a broader strategy where the bank has committed to mobilizing $1 trillion in sustainable and transition finance by 2030 to help facilitate the energy transition. Additionally, Barclays has introduced a Transition Finance Framework and placed restrictions on financing for companies heavily involved in oil and gas expansion.

Barclays’ representatives have defended their approach by stating that the bank’s role is to support an energy sector in transition, focusing on companies that are actively investing in low-carbon technologies. They argue that their large-scale operations enable them to be instrumental in financing the global shift towards more sustainable energy sources. The bank has also set stringent expectations for its energy clients, requiring them to have decarbonization plans in place by 2025, along with specific emission reduction targets.

This approach has been described by Barclays as a balanced effort to meet the dual challenges of addressing climate change while ensuring energy security and affordability. However, this stance has received mixed reactions, with some campaigners arguing that the bank’s policies do not go far enough in curbing support for the fossil fuel industry.

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