

Epsom Hospital upgrade at risk?

8 August 2024



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, Ashted 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, Ashted 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.”

Surrey Police’s response to national disorder

8 August 2024



Following the tragic events in Southport last week and the subsequent violent disorder we have seen across the country, we are providing our communities with an update on our policing approach.

While at this stage, in Surrey, we have not seen the levels of disorder, protests, or reports of hate crime that have been seen across other parts of the country, this has understandably caused concerns within our communities.

Since we first saw the increase in violent disorder across the country and where specific communities have been targeted, local officers have increased their visibility and engagement where we know that residents, businesses, and faith leaders are feeling vulnerable. Patrols have been increased in key areas across the county so that our communities have a visible presence from us. We recognise that this is a challenging time for all our communities, and we are committed to providing reassurances to those who may be concerned for their safety.

We are already seeing an increase in reports of misinformation and disinformation, which we know can be extremely concerning for our communities. Our officers have a vital role to play in reassuring those who feel concerned, vulnerable or unsafe in our county, and the spreading of this misinformation and disinformation can cause further alarm. We would encourage the public to not only challenge what they read online and consider whether it could be misinformation, but also not

to share this further on social media.

If you do see information circulating online about possible disorder, please report these to us so that we can investigate and respond. You can also approach local officers when they are in the area to raise any concerns or ask any questions that you may have. If you would prefer to report information anonymously, you can contact independent charity Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111. In an emergency, always dial 999.

We are continually reviewing the information we receive around reports of potential disorder or crime. Our policing response will always work alongside our priority of ensuring our communities feel safe and supported by us.

Chief Superintendent Graham Barnett said: “We would like to reassure all our communities that we are prepared should there be disorder in Surrey. We have specialist teams and resources in place to make sure we can continue to protect our communities while we respond to reports of disorder. We will continue to facilitate peaceful protest, but violent disorder will not be tolerated, and we will respond to this robustly. Arrests will be made, and charges will be brought to those responsible.

“I would like to thank our communities for their continued support as we work together to protect the public, provide reassurances around our policing approach, and robustly tackle any disorder we may see in our county.”

Image: TheEssexTech Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Green Flag Awards Honour Epsom and Ashtead Commons

8 August 2024



Local communities are celebrating as both Epsom Common and Ashtead Common have been awarded the prestigious Green Flag Award, recognizing them as two of the best-managed green spaces in the UK. This esteemed award, administered by the environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy, sets the benchmark for the management of recreational outdoor spaces across the UK and internationally.

Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve (LNR) has achieved this accolade for the 18th consecutive year, underscoring its continued excellence in environmental stewardship. The site, managed by **Epsom & Ewell Borough Council**, is a haven for biodiversity, featuring oak woods, pasture woodlands, and wetlands that are home to rare species like cotton spotted orchids and purple emperor butterflies. It is also designated as a Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI) due to its significance as a breeding bird habitat.

Councillor **Liz Frost**, (RA Woodcote and Langley) Chair of the Environment Committee, expressed pride in the achievement, attributing the success to the hard work of volunteers and partners, including the Epsom Common Association, the Lower Mole Partnership, and Natural England. “This award is a testament to the dedication of our volunteers and staff who work tirelessly to maintain this beautiful and biodiverse space,” she said.

In Ashtead, the Ashtead Common has also been honored with the Green Flag Award, further enhanced by receiving Green Heritage Site Accreditation. This recognition highlights the site’s exceptional conservation efforts and its status as a National Nature Reserve since 1995. Managed by the **City of London Corporation**, Ashtead Common is renowned for its ancient oak pollards and diverse habitats, including those supporting rare invertebrates and breeding birds.

Ben Murphy, Chairman of the City Corporation’s Epping Forest and Commons Committee, noted the significance of the award, stating, “These awards demonstrate the effectiveness of our management plans in preserving open spaces like Ashtead Common for future generations. It also reflects the positive impact of the City of London Corporation’s investments in local communities.”

Both sites were evaluated on several criteria, including accessibility, safety, cleanliness, community engagement, and efforts to combat climate change. The awards celebrate the commitment of the staff and volunteers who ensure these spaces remain welcoming and well-maintained for the public. The Green Flag Award scheme highlights the importance of well-managed green spaces in fostering community well-being and promoting sustainable living.

The achievements of Epsom and Ashtead Commons underscore the value of preserving natural habitats and providing safe, accessible green spaces for all. As community members and nature enthusiasts enjoy these areas, the Green Flag Award serves as a reminder of the critical role that well-maintained parks and reserves play in our social and environmental health.

Image: Great Pasture at Epsom Common. EEBC

Bikes that blight the blind

8 August 2024



Dear Editor,

I would like to bring a serious problem to the attention of Epsom residents, that is if they are not already aware of it but do not want to do anything about it. For at least the last year I have been battling and campaigning against motorbike delivery riders who insist on illegally parking in Epsom Square (formerly Derby Square) off Epsom High Street and all along that stretch of the High Street.

Continually all through the day these motorbike riders park their motorbikes and I do mean the whole of the motorbike, on the pavement. They ride their motorbikes on to the pavement and park up. At times their has been as many as 21 motorbikes parked on the pavement outside shops like McDonalds. It is a serious safety issue as well as being an illegal parking matter.

I have reported this issue to Surrey County Council Parking Enforcement Team dozens of times and all that happens is that they send an Enforcement Officer out,

who simply moves the motorbike riders on and what always happens is the riders return later on. The Parking Enforcement Team should be fining them and then they might start to listen.

I have contacted my local new MP a couple of times about this issue but I have yet to receive an acknowledgement about the matter. I am sure my local MP is very busy as she is newly elected but this is a local issue and that should be the focus of any MP, to deal with their local issues. I am a blind person living in Epsom and there are a higher than average of blind people in Epsom as there is a residential housing building in Epsom for blind people.

Surrey Parking Enforcement Team need to get a grip of this situation before there are some serious accidents.

Regards

Russell Bailey

Swail House Association for the Visually Impaired

Image: Delivery moped on pavement in Epsom - Google

Epsom Town as a Safe Place to Live? Is it our future or our past?

8 August 2024



Epsom and Ewell Times is putting the spotlight on crime and anti-social behaviour blighting residents and businesses in the centre of the town of Epsom. In a series of reports over the coming weeks journalist and local Town Ward resident Romana Sustar will bring facts, opinions and responses from those effected and those responsible for solving the problems.

Epsom, a market town in Surrey, England, is often celebrated for its charming high street, historical significance, and the famous Epsom Downs Racecourse but it would appear that a combination of reduced police presence, a lack of resources, and a far too tolerant attitude to anti-social behaviour has resulted in a perceived decline in the safety of residents at night in Town Ward.

Is the image above our past or our future? No one is certain, so all we can say for sure, is that for the residents of the Town Ward, this is our present. The picture was taken on 28 July 2024, the scales are for drugs, the alcohol is brought for purpose, not sold from any local club or bar, and the graffiti is more than a week old and unchallenged.

What the picture does not show, is that everyone in authority has been aware of the rat infestation and general filth for some time, and that they are specifically aware of this illegal activity after hours in this location, but are yet to engage with residents or respond to the increased criminality in any meaningful way.

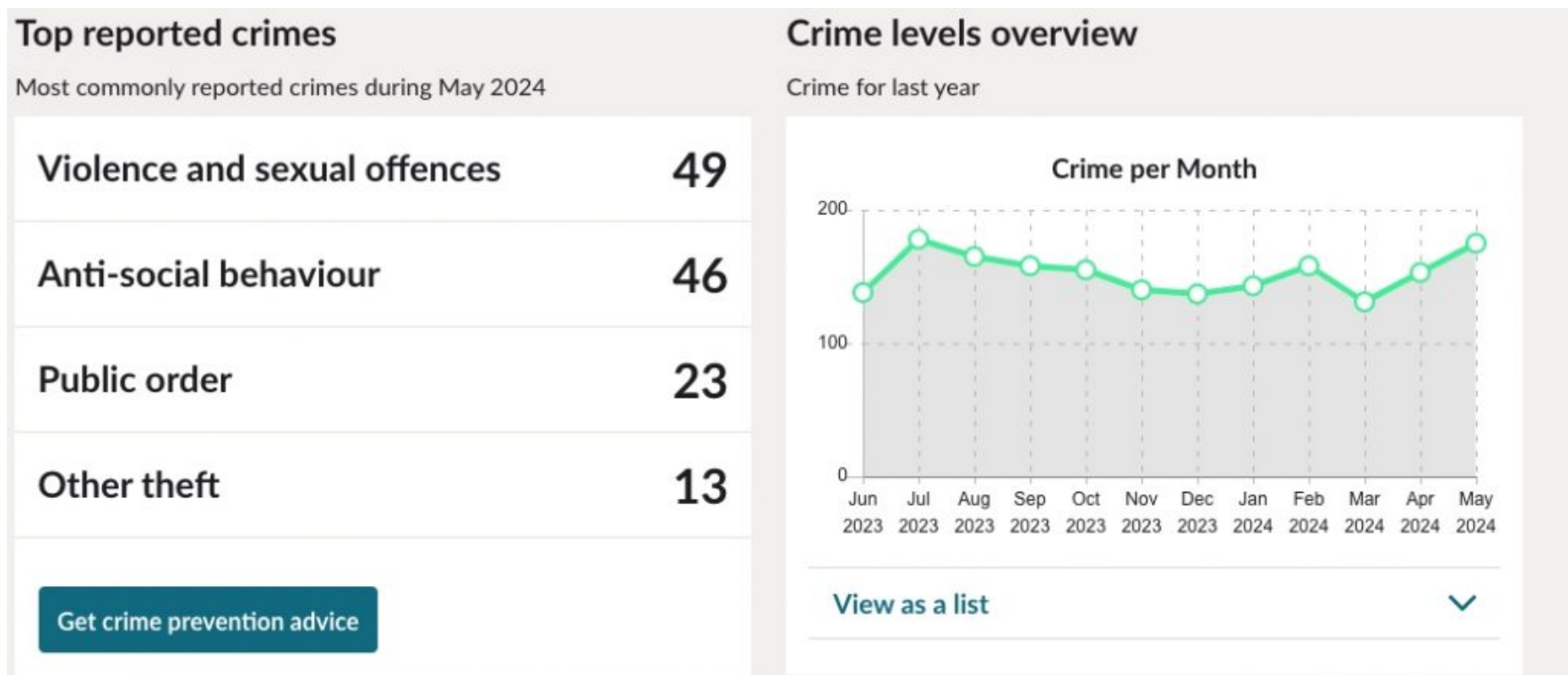
To be clear the photo is genuine, entirely unstaged and fails to show the true extent of the decline in standards and the acceptance of criminality and anti-social behaviour within 300 metres in all directions. And so it is genuinely perplexing why our community fails to confront activities such as those shown, when it is apparent that they are bad for the community, bad for business, bad for residents and indeed bad for the drug users, as the spike in knife crime proves.

That being said, let's also be careful when we talk of failures, let's not talk in space or point any fingers. When communities fail they fail together and they live with the consequences together.

So let's start with an open mind and state that for now all we know is that the drug dealers, criminals, thugs and the lazy litterers are to blame. Today let's just simply ask ourselves why we put up with it, why we let it happen and what we can do to reverse the trend.

In April 2016 after the sale of the local police station Inspector Elkins said "If anything, the public will see more police presence with more officers patrolling the area." (Craig Richard Surrey Comet) but we are yet to find a single Town Ward resident who actually believes this is true, so let's also be careful with our own statements.

We really don't know what role such comments, the lack of local charging and detaining facilities, and the general cuts to the police have actually played in damaging the reputation of the local Police. What we do know is criminals feel confident enough to have drug parties in open areas in Town Ward, and gangs in the same area will carry knives then chase down and stab their enemies without a care.



What we need is data so perhaps the reported crime figures will give an insight. Here they are for May 2024, which is well before the Friday 21 June 2024 multiple stabbing that the straight line rise to May was obviously heralding. And who has not seen open and likely unreported shoplifting recently?

It does look fair that residents who live centrally might be questioning what has gone wrong, what has changed and what can be done to restore order?

"I have lived in this block for 18 odd years and have seen and felt a rapid decline in general of this once vibrant, friendly and safe area of the town." (long time

Epsom Town resident).

Finger pointing and headline grabbing clickbait articles will ultimately achieve nothing, but resentment and distraction from the real issues, so what can we actually do to assist change?

In a series of articles, we will investigate the true position in 2024 and will ask the questions others appear too frightened, or too disconnected to ask. We will report the real statistics and engage with any and all local initiatives in order to advise residents how to access accurate information, and how to engage the elected and taxpayer funded bodies that exist to ensure the common good.

We will focus on the area from the end of Station Approach on West Street to the end of Upper High St including Derby Square and once we have the June figures we will move to focus on any efforts residents and local business owners are undertaking, to improve their environment, rid themselves of pests, and reclaim their common areas from the drugs and crime that seems to have moved in.

Whilst Epsom is not New York, the problems it faces today would appear to be similar to those of 1980s New York, with graffiti, fly-tipping, vermin, and a general disregard for law and enforcement, which then leads to open drug dealing and finally street violence. As the Mayor of New York at the time said: "Obviously murder and graffiti are two vastly different crimes. But they are part of the same continuum, and a climate that tolerates one is more likely to tolerate the other."

So the real question becomes can local residents and businesses introduce practical, appropriate and effective solutions to enable and assist our local politicians and enforcement officers in carrying out their duties to us, or is our future already mortgaged to decline, filth and ever increasing criminality and anti-social behaviour?

See letter about the nuisance of delivery mopeds in the Town Centre.

Satisfy your eye at Epsom film festival

8 August 2024



Epsom based **Satisfied Eye International Film Festival** (SEIFF) is set to dazzle film enthusiasts with its "Best of Fest 2024," running from July 26-28 at the brand new **Picture House** in Epsom Square. This special event will showcase the top-rated films from SEIFF's history, highlighting exceptional storytelling from over 20 countries since its inception in 2018.

The festival kicks off on July 26 with the "People's Choice" segment, featuring films like the Spanish short "Ainhua" and the heartwarming "A Kiss" from the Netherlands. This selection promises a journey through a variety of emotions, setting the tone for the weekend.

On July 27, the morning begins with "Kids Animation," where young audiences can enjoy charming shorts such as "The Kite" and "Ian, A Moving Story." The afternoon continues with "Best of British," spotlighting homegrown talent with films like "The Legend of Bob Leonard" and the poignant "An Irish Goodbye."

Saturday's programming also includes the thought-provoking "Underage Engineers," an inspiring Polish documentary, and the "Rising Stars" segment, which showcases emerging filmmakers. The day wraps up with "The Human Condition," exploring deep human emotions through shorts like "Bonobo" and "Hot Chocolate."

Sunday, July 28, starts with "Adult Animation," including the award-winning "Lost & Found" and the haunting "The Driver Is Red." The festival then honors female filmmakers with the "Wonder Women" segment, featuring powerful films like "A Travers" and "The Letter Room."

The weekend concludes with "All Blood Runs Red," a collection of shorts addressing diversity and prejudice, and "A Night at the Oscars," celebrating SEIFF's past Oscar nominees and winners, such as "The Neighbor's Window" and "Brotherhood." Finally, "The Lighter Side" closes the festival on a humorous note with a series of comedies including "Career Day" and "Archibald's Syndrome."

This year's SEIFF promises a cinematic feast, offering something for everyone and celebrating the best in independent filmmaking. Don't miss the chance to experience these compelling stories on the big screen.

For full programme and tickets **click HERE**

Footage of Epsom College murders aftermath not for idle police viewing

8 August 2024



An ex-serving Surrey Police officer has been banned from the profession for gross misconduct after viewing body-worn camera footage of a "significant local and national case" without a legitimate reason.

The Local Democracy Reporting Service understands that the footage was of the moment the headteacher of Epsom College was found dead. Surrey Police have not confirmed which specific footage was viewed, however the date of the footage aligns with the date that officers were called to Epsom College.

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

The former Surrey Police cop, Mr Baseer Ahmed, admitted he watched the body-worn video (BWV) footage of the serious incident on 5 February, but denies he did so without a policing purpose.

The police misconduct hearing panel, held July 1, found Mr Ahmed breached professional standards as he unnecessarily watched footage of the police attending

the scene, where the victims were found.

Professional standards state that there must be an express policing purpose to access body-worn camera footage, to ensure it is not accessed unnecessarily.

Mr Ahmed watched some- not all- of the footage on February 7, days after the major incident was reported, and picked up by newspapers. He was not given specific instructions to look at the footage nor carry out any enquiries, according to the misconduct report.

A Staff Officer for Chief Superintendent Budd since 2022, Mr Ahmed’s role included accessing additional information for his Chief Superintendent. Working in West Surrey, the panel noted it was not in this instance appropriate for Mr Ahmed to find out information from other divisions.

The panel found Mr Ahmed did not appear to be watching the video as part of a genuine work activity. For example, he made no notes, did not attempt to discover the location of the incident or tell any senior colleagues about it.

Although admitting he watched part of the video footage, Mr Ahmed has continually denied not having a justifiable policing purpose for accessing the footage. He also denies a breach of the standards and that his conduct amounts to gross misconduct.

The panel was not satisfied and Mr Ahmed was found to have breached standards of professional behaviour, confidentiality, orders and instructions. The report reads: “It is important to remember the high standards that members of the public rightly expect Police Officers to adhere to, the extremely difficult circumstances being faced by family members in this particular case and the likely effect that unnecessary viewing of the footage would have on them.”

The panel agreed this amounted to gross misconduct and it would harm the public’s view of the police service for watching footage of a major incident without legitimate purpose. This was aggravated by Mr Ahmed acting contrary to national guidance, without any specific instructions and continuing asserting he had valid policing reasons to access the footage.

Mr Ahmed resigned from Surrey Police on December 15, 2023 – 10 months from the incident- with his last day being January 15 this year. If he was still a serving officer, the panel said he would have been dismissed to maintain public confidence in and to uphold high standards in policing

Whilst Mr Ahmed attended the two Pre-hearings, he did not attend the misconduct hearing due to ‘personal reasons’ he cited in an email.

Head of Professional Standards, Superintendent Andy Rundle said: “The public rightly expect that police officers behave at all times with integrity and respect.

“Ex-officer Ahmed breached this trust when he looked at body worn footage of a crime scene, despite having no policing purpose. This behaviour is not acceptable, and a thorough professional standards investigation was launched.”

A full inquest into the deaths of George, Emma and Lettie Pattison is due to take place later this month on July 30.

Surrey police said they are not officially confirming what body worn footage Mr Ahmed viewed due to “other ongoing judicial processes” that have not yet been concluded. The full inquests into the deaths are expected to take place on July 30. Surrey Police confirmed it is the Epsom College incident “off the record”.

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

Surrey teacher banned for underwear social media pupil chat

8 August 2024



A Surrey teacher has been banned after messaging pupils about thongs, favourite underwear, and shaving.

[The Teachers’ Regulation Agency (TRA) has not published the name of the school in the interests of pupils. The Epsom and Ewell Times has decided not to publish the name of The Teacher for the same reason.]

The Teacher has been prohibited indefinitely from the profession and can no longer teach in any school, sixth form college, relevant youth accommodation or children’s home in England.

The 30-year-old can apply to have the order set aside after June 29, 2026 and has one month to appeal the Secretary of State’s decision.

In a Teachers’ Regulation Agency (TRA), she was found to have behaved unacceptably and brought the teaching profession into disrepute after failing to keep professional boundaries with pupils between February 2023 and May 2023.

The panel, which sat in her absence after The Teacher declined to attend the June 2024 hearing, found she communicated with pupils via social media – discussing underwear, relationships, shaving, body piercing and vaping. The TRA did not name the school in their report, to prevent undue harm to pupils.

The Teacher was also said to have met up with pupils outside school and later tried to conceal her behaviour – asking them not to communicate with her, while her social accounts were being monitored and deleting exchanges.

The report reads: “Instead of teaching the dangers of social media to young children taking their initial steps into the online world, The Teacher actively exposed them to such risks.The panel therefore found that The Teacher’ actions constituted conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.”

In a signed statement of agreed facts, The Teacher admitted the allegations in full.

They read: The Teacher admits that she engaged in discussions... in connection with underwear. The Teacher accepts that she initiated a conversation ...about the topic of thongs, which was in response to (a pupil) asking what underwear The Teacher owned. The Teacher also accepts that she received messages... in which (a pupil) described what underwear she liked. The Teacher also accepts (a pupil) sent The Teacher internet images of underwear that (a pupil) liked. The Teacher accepts that she discussed with (a pupil) what underwear The Teacher owned and how [they] wore their underwear”,

The Panel Decision and reasons on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education report read:

The teacher also messaged about whether she had a boyfriend and “what things put her off”.

A week after pausing communications while accounts were being monitored, messaging started up again, with the teacher telling the pupil “not to tell anyone about their contact.”

The Teacher also admitted deleting a large majority of messages in an effort to conceal what had been sent. She also admitted to deliberately misleading the school over the nature and extent of her communication with pupils on social media.

The report read: “At the school’s suspension meeting, The Teacher accepts that she told the school the pupil had been in communication with her for one week and that The Teacher had been trying to ‘bat her away’.”

The Teacher is prohibited from teaching indefinitely and cannot teach in any school, sixth form college, relevant youth accommodation or children’s home in England. She may apply for the prohibition order to be set aside, but not until 29 June 2026, 2 years from the date of the order.

Image: Ibrahim.ID Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence.

Average house price in Epsom and Ewell over half- million.

8 August 2024



Epsom and Ewell saw the largest increase in new build completions in the **South East** between **2021-2023**, new data has revealed.

The study, conducted by architectural visualisation experts at Modunite, investigated ONS data on the number of new build completions from 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, to find which **local authority has seen the biggest increase in new build completions year-on-year**.

Key findings:

- **Epsom and Ewell** saw the largest increase in new build homes, at **133%** – compared to the English average of **21%**
- **Tunbridge Wells** ranks second with an increase of **130%** new build completions
- **West Oxfordshire** had the biggest drop in house prices across England (**13.10%**)
- **Milton Keynes** saw the largest volume of new build homes in 2022-23 (**2,480**) in the South East, and the second-highest in England

For the full study, head to: <https://www.modunite.com/a-review-of-englands-new-build-market/>

The results:

Local Authority	Average house price 2022	Average house price 2023	% decrease in house prices	2021-2022	2022-2023	% increase 2022-2023
Epsom and Ewell	£543,670	£533,491	1.90%	90	210	133%
Tunbridge Wells	£454,657	£446,490	1.80%	270	620	130%
Hastings	£271,727	£270,043	0.60%	10	20	100%
Arun	£351,693	£350,191	0.40%	490	930	90%
Eastbourne	£298,348	£296,227	0.70%	40	70	75%
Dartford	£355,378	£353,765	0.50%	400	660	65%
Canterbury	£361,144	£357,128	1.10%	370	600	62%
Thanet	£315,384	£310,705	1.50%	290	410	41%
Chichester	£470,413	£452,668	3.90%	590	810	37%
Tonbridge and Malling	£438,694	£431,931	1.60%	270	370	37%

Please find the full dataset [here](#).

Modunite can reveal that **Epsom and Ewell** has seen the largest increase in new build completions in the South East, with a **133% increase** from 2021-2022 compared with 2022-2023. Between 2021 and 2022 **90 new builds** were completed, in comparison to **210 in the following year**. House prices in Epsom and Ewell also dropped by 1.90%, down to **£533.491**.

Hastings ranks third

Hastings ranks third. From 2021-2022, Hastings completed **10** new build homes, increasing by **100%** by the end of 2023 with a total of **20**. This is largely higher than than the average number of new build completions across all the local authorities in England (**21%**). House prices in Hastings have also fallen by **0.60%** between 2022-2023, to an average of **£270,043**.

Tunbridge Wells ranks second, with a **130% increase in new build completions** between 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. A total of **270** new builds were completed in 2021 -2022, in comparison to **620** the following year. House prices in Tunbridge Wells have also decreased by **1.80%**, down to **£446,490** on average.

Image: <https://oaktondevelopments.co.uk/henrietta-place-new-build-homes-epsom-surrey/>

Campaign to keep local child cancer services local

8 August 2024



Wandsworth Council is leading a campaign against the NHS decision to move children’s cancer services from two South London hospitals into Central London and the new Labour Government will be asked to step in. NHS England announced its decision to move the children’s cancer centre based jointly at St **George’s Hospital, Tooting**, and **The Royal Marsden, Sutton**, to Evelina London Children’s Hospital, Lambeth, in March.

Wandsworth has now confirmed it will refer the decision to new Health Secretary Wes Streeting in a bid for him to intervene. The council is particularly concerned

about the prospect of parents having to travel via public transport into Central London with immunosuppressed kids to reach the Evelina.

The authority said Richmond, Kingston, Merton, Sutton and Surrey councils are set to join the cross-party campaign, as children in their boroughs currently receive care at the existing children’s cancer centre. Richmond approved plans to challenge the decision in May.

Opposition to the plans began to grow after the NHS launched a consultation on two options for the future location of the centre last year – either moving it entirely to St George’s or to the Evelina. The centre has provided specialist children’s cancer services to those aged 15 and under living in South London, Kent, most of Surrey, Brighton and Hove, Medway and East Sussex for 25 years.

The NHS said it has to move the centre as a new national service specification in 2021 outlined very specialist children’s cancer treatment services must be on the same site as a paediatric intensive care unit and other specialist children’s services. The Royal Marsden does not have a paediatric intensive care unit, meaning a small number of children with cancer requiring intensive care are transferred safely by ambulance to St George’s every year.

Labour Wandsworth Council leader Simon Hogg urged Mr Streeting to work with local authorities challenging the decision to find ways to keep services at St George’s. He said: “We have opposed these plans to move specialist children’s cancer care from St George’s from the start. Our serious concerns remain – getting to Evelina hospital through Central London traffic will be challenging at the best of times. Travelling by public transport is not an option for vulnerable children who are on immunosuppressant medication. So there has to be a better solution to these plans.”

Local MPs have also publicly opposed the plans. Tooting MP Dr Rosena Allin-Khan described the decision to move services from St George’s as ‘deeply disappointing’ when it was announced in March, and signed a letter to previous Health Secretary Victoria Atkins asking her to review it. The letter was also signed by Putney MP Fleur Anderson, Mitcham and Morden MP Siobhain McDonagh, Richmond Park MP Sarah Olney and Twickenham MP Munira Wilson.

Services are not expected to move until 2026 at the earliest. An NHS London spokesperson said: “Evelina London has been chosen as the future location for the children’s cancer centre following a rigorous process, including involving clinical advisers, parents, charities, nurses and research staff. The future centre will stand ready to give cutting-edge treatments that require intensive care on site, like other major centres worldwide.

“Service reconfiguration is rarely easy and we recognise that during consultation, parents and families raised a number of concerns about the change in location, including about travelling further into London, and what that will mean for them. Our focus now is on detailed implementation planning which takes all of these concerns into account to support families and staff.”

An Evelina spokesperson added: “We are fully committed to working with patients, their families, staff from the current service, and other partners to design the new service with children, young people and staff at its heart. This will ensure continuity of care during the transition period and a plan for the safe transfer of the service.”

A St George’s spokesperson said: “We understand the concerns being raised by our communities who want to keep specialist children’s cancer care at St George’s. We are working with NHS England and our partners and will continue to provide outstanding care to children and their families throughout this process.”

Charlotte Lillywhite – reporter.

Image credit Jean Barrow Licence