EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

29th October 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

Up to £1 where sold

Criminal convictions follow Banstead construction site death

18 September 2026



Two companies and a manager have been sentenced 9th September), after being found guilty of a health and safety charge of failing to discharge their duties following the death of a labourer who died on a construction site in Banstead in June 2020.

Gheorghita Arsene, 33, died when a 10ft (3m) trench collapsed on top of him, covering him in soil. He had been working on a site in Park Road where an old care home was being demolished to make way for a new purpose-built home.

Following a three-month trial at the Central Criminal Court in London, principal contractor Appledorn Developments Limited were found guilty of a health and safety charge of failing to discharge their duties. They were fined £500,000 with the judge, Her Honour Judy Khan KC, commenting that “their failure to ensure that a safe system of work was motivated by the desire to get the works done quickly and cheaply”.

T Vaughan Limited were also found guilty of a health and safety charge of failing to discharge their duties and were fined £650,000. They were also ordered to pay a further £40,000 in costs. The judge said she was” satisfied that systems were in place, but these were not sufficiently adhered to or implemented”.

Contracts manager Anthony O’Connor, 42, of Romford, Essex, pleaded guilty to failing to discharge his duty under the Health and Safety Act 1974, which was accepted by the prosecution. The judge sentenced him to 10 months in custody, suspended for 18 months, and ordered to carry out 150 hours of unpaid work, saying that “a number of workers were exposed to the risk of harm”.

The jury failed to reach a verdict in relation to a charge of manslaughter against O’Connor.

Site manager Peter Wraith, 54, from New Waltham in Lincolnshire, was found not guilty of manslaughter and assistant site manager Gregory Peake, 51, from Bromley in south-east London, was acquitted of failing to discharge his health and safety duty.

The court was told that a health and safety inspection found there were no supports to the trench and the excavated soil had been deposited unsafely close to it.

Mr Arsene, described in court as a “good man who worked hard and achieved everything through his hard work”, had been working to replace a damaged pipe at the bottom of the trench and was clearing soil when one of the trench walls collapsed.

Despite desperate attempts by his colleagues, they could not pull him free.

Fire and ambulance crews were called to the scene but faced similar difficulties in digging Mr Arsene out, and he was confirmed deceased at the scene shortly after the incident took place.

Senior Investigating Officer, Detective Inspector Debbie Birch, said: “Gheorgita Arsene’s death could have been avoided if the appropriate health and safety measures had been followed. It can be easy to cut corners to save time and money but this tragic death highlights just how important health and safety legislation is on all building sites.

“Sadly, this resulted in the death of a 33-year-old man who was simply trying to do his job, and our thoughts remain with his family and friends at this difficult time.”

A Health and Safety Executive spokesperson said:

“Gheorghita Arsene’s death was as horrifying as it was preventable. He lost his life because basic precautions were not in place to protect workers from the well-known risks that come with excavation work.

“Anthony O’Connor had observed workers in the trench without adequate protection and was aware of the measures required to prevent a collapse.

“This case is a stark reminder that when basic safety standards are ignored, the consequences can be fatal. Companies and individuals alike have legal duties to protect workers and where they fail to do so, and we will not hesitate to take enforcement action.

“Our thoughts today are with Mr Arsene’s loved ones, as they mourn their loss.”

Surrey Police

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

29th October 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY