

From: Lyn Koukoulis [REDACTED] >
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Subject: Regulation 19 Representation

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--Email From External Account--

REGULATION 19 REPRESENTATION: CANTERBURY DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN (2042/3)

Respondent: Lynda Koukoulis
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Test of Soundness: Unsound (Not Justified, Not Effective, Not Consistent with National Policy)

1. Strategic Road Network Failures: Brenley Corner & A299

Test of Soundness: Not Effective / Inconsistent with NPPF.

The Plan is unsound as it assumes a functional strategic road network that does not exist and has no funded route to existence.

- **Infrastructure Deficit:** The Plan relies heavily on the Brenley Corner (M2 J7) roundabout to distribute traffic. However, following the **March 2026** cancellation of the major upgrade in the Road Investment Strategy (RIS3), National Highways admits the junction is at capacity.
- **A299 Gridlock:** The Plan fails to account for the cumulative pressure from developments in Thanet and Swale. The A299 Thanet Way already faces paralysis during emergency closures, (the two tunnels regularly close, and the traffic then is re-routed onto the A2990), which will be exacerbated by the proposed 23,000 homes.
- **NPPF Violation:** Contradicts **NPPF Paragraph 111b**, which requires strategies and investments for supporting transport and development to be aligned, and **NPPF Paragraph 114**, as significant transport impacts (congestion) cannot be cost-effectively mitigated.

2. Flawed Traffic Modelling: Whitstable, Brooklands & Bodkin Farm

Test of Soundness: Not Justified.

The evidence base for the transport strategy is "not fit for purpose."

- **Discredited Data:** Kent County Council (KCC) issued a holding objection in October 2025 for the **Brooklands Farm (Policy W4)** development, stating its modelling was fundamentally flawed. Including this site in the Local Plan is, therefore, not "justified."
- **Whitstable "Armageddon":** The Plan fails to model the cumulative "lock-on" effect of **Bodkin Farm (Policy W8)**, **Whitstable Heights**, and the new secondary school. It misses the actual school-run peak (07:30–08:30) and ignores the blocking back of traffic at Chestfield and Swalecliffe roundabouts.
- **NPPF Violation:** Contrary to **NPPF Paragraph 113**, which requires a "clear and compelling justification" for network management, and **NPPF Paragraph 114**, which demands a "vision-led approach" to mitigate capacity impacts—not an avoidance of them.

3. Water Scarcity & Sewage Infrastructure

Test of Soundness: Not Effective.

Development is proposed in an area where utilities cannot meet demand.

- **Water Supply Crisis:** South East Water has warned it will struggle to supply housing growth beyond existing plans. The Broad Oak Reservoir is a decade away (2035+), and South East Water are not sure that they have the funds to build it, yet development is front-loaded.
- **Sewage Failure:** Southern Water infrastructure is at capacity. The Swalecliffe Wastewater Treatment Works already requires emergency mitigations. The Plan lacks legally binding **Grampian conditions** to ensure sewage upgrades are delivered *prior* to occupancy.
- **NPPF Violation:** Fails **NPPF Paragraph 20(a)**, which requires plans to "align growth and infrastructure," and **NPPF Paragraph 180**, which requires development to be appropriate for its location to prevent unacceptable levels of water pollution.

4. Healthcare & Hospitals

Test of Soundness: Not Positively Prepared.

- **Hospital Gap:** While Kent and Canterbury Hospital is mentioned, there is no binding timeline or funding commitment for a new facility.
- **QEQM hospital in Margate is running at capacity as is William Harvey in Ashford.**
- **GP Shortfall:** The Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) admits primary care upgrades are largely "unfunded" or "aspirational."
- **NPPF Violation:** Contrary to **NPPF Paragraph 96**, which mandates that planning policies should "aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places" with the necessary "social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs."

Conclusion

The Plan is **not effective** because the critical infrastructure (Brenley Corner, sewage, water, and healthcare) is unfunded and undeliverable. It is **not justified** as it relies on flawed traffic modelling for Whitstable. It must be withdrawn until a robust, funded Infrastructure Delivery Plan is secured.

Below are newspaper articles referring to the lack of infrastructure.

Project to make vital upgrades to busy Brenley Corner in Faversham dropped from government's plan

Max Chesson

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Published: 11:18, 27 March 2026

Updated: 18:35, 27 March 2026

Long-awaited upgrades at one of Kent's busiest roundabouts have been dropped despite pressure on the network reaching breaking point.

Brenley Corner – which links the A2, M2 and A299 New Thanet Way on the outskirts of Faversham – was set to be improved as part of the government's Road Investment Strategy scheme.



Brenley Corner will miss out on crucial government-funded upgrades. Picture: Barry Goodwin

Three options had previously been on the table – widening the arms of the roundabout, creating a new, smaller roundabout and building a new flyovers which would bypass the route.

However, updated papers from the Road Investment Strategy 3 (RIS3) scheme now reveal the highly anticipated works will not take place within this phase of upgrades taking place until 2031.

On documents uploaded by the Department for Transport earlier this week, there is no mention of Brenley Corner or any of its associated road names.

As it stands, it is now not even being considered as part of RIS4, the next generation of heavy-duty road upgrades due to take place in the 2030s.

It comes after assessments carried out by National Highways found there is “no significant network need that justifies a major network enhancement”.

Action has long been called for at the site as it becomes notoriously snarled up during rush hours.

The junction is often left congested

The junction also gets congested when Operation Brock is implemented on the M20, and lorries attempting to bypass Brock are turned back at Brenley to join the contraflow.

The area deals with thousands of cars a day, and two major housing developments in the area were relying heavily on upgrades to Brenley Corner to justify their approval.

It means critics of the 2,500-home Duchy of Cornwall estate, which was approved earlier this month, will now have fresh ammunition, while the approval of 1,800 homes in Dunkirk could also be affected.

Shaptor Capital, the firm behind the latter development, admitted last year rush-hour queues could be almost five times longer during construction.

Forecasts submitted by the firm show that once just 400 of the new homes are occupied, the number of vehicles queuing to come off the M2 at Faversham will grow from 30 to 148 during the morning peak.

Traffic at Brenley Corner is a regular sight

However, it also stresses there will be a trigger point - forecast to be somewhere between the occupation of the 400th and 800th home - when it will implement its own bespoke redesign of Brenley Corner, aimed at improving the roundabout's capacity without waiting for long-promised government investment.

This will include new traffic lights on three of the five approach roads, widened entry lanes on the A2 and M2 slip-roads, and the removal of an existing merge lane from the A2 London-bound off-slip, replaced by a signal-controlled approach to reduce weaving and lane-switching.

This interim scheme was put forward because the much more extensive overhaul of Brenley Corner remained unfunded and unscheduled at the time.

As a result, the developer's proposals – which were effectively a stopgap to make the roundabout marginally more resilient until wider strategic investment comes through – is now the only upgrade planned for the site.

Faversham and Mid Kent MP and former Shadow Secretary of State for Transport, Helen Whately, has been left furious by the news.

The long-standing Conservative said: "The decision by the government to abandon the Brenley Corner upgrade will shock residents, so soon after Swale Borough Council has approved the Duchy development.

Helen Whately has hit out after the plans were dropped. She is pictured here with former roads minister Guy Opperman

"With thousands more homes in the pipeline for East Kent there's no way the junction will cope. Hours and hours in traffic jams looks like the inevitable consequence.

"Swale Borough Council has said many times that the developments around Faversham depend on investment in Brenley Corner, so this now begs the question – will they think again?

“And what about the Government’s plans for us to take a huge share of the new housing planned for the South East?

“I’ve said it before, and I’ll say it again: the Government needs to think again about our massive housing targets.

“There isn’t the infrastructure, and this decision shows they have no intention of providing it.”

A DfT spokesperson said: “While major enhancement to Brenley Corner didn’t represent good value for money, National Highways will continue to assess the needs of the route going forward.”

It follows “extensive development work” by National Highways during the current strategy phase but it was decided there “was no significant network need” requiring the junction to be upgraded.

Brenley Corner will be considered as part of “future investment planning” by National Highways, the government says.

Swale Borough Council and Kent County Council have been contacted for comment.

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Stretches of A299 and four overbridges could close in ‘worst-case scenarios’ if £63m funding bid fails

Millie Bowles

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Published: 05:00, 06 May 2026

Drivers could see stretches of the A299 closed and four road bridges over the dual-carriageway shut in “worst-case scenarios” if a £63 million funding bid fails.

Kent County Council has warned of the potential consequences if it cannot secure government cash to fix deep-rooted structural problems impacting the road’s surface.

Bumps on the A299 Thanet Way have seen a 50mph limit imposed since September

A 50mph speed restriction has been imposed since September along a stretch between Dargate and the Roman Galley pub that has been likened to a “rollercoaster”.

Those issues will be temporarily addressed by remedial works this summer, but KCC has now applied to the Department for Transport’s Structures Fund for money to carry out a package of improvements aimed at keeping the route open long-term.

It includes refurbishing two tunnels, repairing four overbridges damaged by ground movement and carrying out deeper reconstruction of sections of the carriageway.

But officials have admitted that without the funding, they may eventually be left with no choice but to consider shutting parts of the network.

In the most severe circumstances, that could mean closing Chestfield Tunnel, Ramsgate Harbour Approach Tunnel and the Cliffsend Underpass if ageing safety systems fail and cannot be replaced.

Shutting the Chestfield Tunnel would effectively close the Thanet Way between Herne Bay and Whitstable.

A lengthy contraflow was used to carry out urgent safety works in the Chestfield tunnels in 2024

Four road bridges over the dual-carriageway could also close if the structures deteriorate further, impacting Golden Hill and Molehill Road in Whitstable and Thornden Wood Road and Bullockstone Road in Herne Bay.

A KCC spokesperson said: “For the overbridges, the worst-case scenario is having to shut the routes that use them, however, we would exhaust all other options such as weight restrictions or lane closures prior to this.

“For the tunnels and underpasses, likewise we may end up in a worst-case situation where we cannot safely keep these assets open to traffic if we cannot secure support with funding the necessary overhauls to the safety equipment within them before we exhaust the limited spares we still have stock for.”

The warning comes despite all of the affected infrastructure currently being deemed safe.

However, experts say the underlying issues are worsening.

Sections of the road have been plagued by cracking, undulations and sinking caused by shifting clay beneath the surface, while four bridge abutments have already been affected to the point their expansion joints can no longer function properly.

Meanwhile, the tunnels and underpass rely on ageing safety systems - including ventilation fans used to clear smoke, toxic fumes and pollution – that are now beyond their intended lifespan.

Crucially, KCC says it is no longer able to source spare parts for some of the equipment, raising the prospect of future failures that cannot be fixed.

Engineers working on faulty jet fans in the Chestfield Tunnel in June 2025. Picture: KCC

That risk was highlighted in 2024 when a jet fan failure in the Chestfield tunnel led to major disruption and a lengthy contraflow system while temporary repairs were carried out.

At the time, transport bosses admitted the specialist equipment could not simply be replaced quickly, with parts needing to be sourced “from all over the place”.

The latest bid aims to avoid a repeat of that scenario becoming permanent.

The council has stressed the funding bid is separate from already-announced resurfacing works due to begin this summer.

As previously reported, **sections of the Thanet Way between Whistable and St Nicholas at Wade will be closed overnight** between June 1 and July 21 to smooth out the most hazardous areas so the 50mph limit can be lifted.

Those works are designed to improve safety in the short term but do not tackle the deeper structural problems now at the heart of the £63m bid.

There will need to be a level of match funding, meaning the total cost of the scheme will exceed the amount being requested, although the final figure is still being calculated using Department for Transport modelling.

If the government backs the scheme further detailed investigations will be carried out to determine exactly how much of the route needs rebuilding and how the bridges can be stabilised.

The four road bridges over the A299 Thanet Way that require structural work to make them safe long-term

But if the bid fails the council says it will be forced to rely on short-term repairs, increasing the risk of stricter limits, more frequent closures and ultimately the kind of drastic measures it is now warning about.

The Thanet Way bid sits alongside a separate request for up to £46.3m to restore the A226 Galley Hill Road in Swanscombe following a cliff collapse.

Cllr Peter Osborne, cabinet member for highways and transport, said: “We know how important these roads are to the people who use them every day – whether that’s getting to work, running a business or staying connected with family and friends.

“This funding would help us fix long-standing problems, prevent future closures and give local communities the confidence that these routes are safe and reliable for the long term.

“We have made a strong case for the funding, and I hope the government sees just how important this is for communities in Kent.”

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Water firm will 'struggle' to supply planned homes

Image source,PA Media

Image caption,

South East Water faces a £22m fine for supply failures from regulator Ofwat

By **Daniel Esson**

Local Democracy Reporting Service

- Published

14 March 2026

A water company has said it may "struggle" to supply water to thousands of planned new homes in Kent.

The blueprint for 23,000 new properties across Canterbury, Whitstable and Herne Bay is reaching its final stages and councillors have voted to place additional scrutiny on South East Water (SEW).

The water firm has come under pressure in recent months, with confirmation last week that it faces a £22.46m fine for water outages across the county between 2020 and 2023.

At a council meeting earlier in March, SEW's director of operations Douglas Whitfield said the company has told regulators it will **"struggle to supply any housing growth above what's included in our water resource management plan"**.

At a Canterbury City Council (CCC) meeting in February, councillor Naomi Smith proposed a motion to form a new countywide body to scrutinise SEW's performance.

Citing water outages in East Kent in 2025, as well as those affecting Blean and parts of Canterbury in early 2026, the motion described the firm's response as "woefully inadequate".

"Public confidence in South East Water is at an all-time low," she said.

The council voted to look at forming a South East Water stakeholder group, led by CCC and bringing together all local authorities served by the firm, said the **Local Democracy Reporting Service**.

Image caption,

Douglas Whitfield is South East Water's director of operations

Legally, water firms must provide water to all new homes being built and have to plan in order to do so.

Whitfield said: "Unfortunately, I can't magic new water out of the ground in the short term, so the focus that we're really putting on in the next five years is around smart metering."

The council is reaching the latter stages of its local plan process – the overall strategy identifying the locations of 23,000 new houses in the district up until 2043.

The plan includes proposals for a brand new reservoir at Broad Oak, near Sturry.

SEW unveiled proposals for the £362m facility, a scheme first suggested in the 1970s, for the 200-acre project estimated to hold 5,126 million litres of water and supply up to 22 million litres a day, equivalent to 275,000 full baths.

Whitfield said the Broad Oak Reservoir would "give us some headroom", but was not expected to be up and running until 2035.

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Water supply to be material consideration in determining future housing applications in Tonbridge and Malling

Published: 11:58, 11 April 2026

-

Water shortages and the implications for new housebuilding were the subject of a debate this week.

Matt Boughton, the leader of **Tonbridge and Malling** Borough Council, hosted a webinar on Wednesday (April 8) explaining his council's approach.

Council leader Matt Boughton says water shortages will be considered in future housing planning applications

It follows news that South East Water will not be able to supply water to all the new homes which the borough is obliged to build in its new Local Plan.

The online audience included representatives from residents' groups who were keen to hear how the news might help them stop unwelcome housing applications, but also planning consultants looking for assurance that their clients' plans could still go ahead.

South East Water, the cause of the furore, was not represented at the webinar.

Cllr Boughton (Con) explained how the borough had been consulting on its draft Local Plan, which included plans to build 19,620 homes, as required by the government, by 2042, when South East Water had responded that its own infrastructure planning **would only allow for an additional 6,318 homes** in that period.

The council had immediately written to the utility company asking the firm to confirm that it would be unable to provide water to cope with the government's housing targets for the borough, to which the answer had been "Yes. We would be unable to accommodate any growth beyond that forecast in 2024."

It could look at ways of increasing supply or reducing demand, but any new supply plan would take until 2029 to prepare.

Bottled water stations have become a frequent sight during recent water outages in Kent

South East Water already has plans in hand to increase supply, by, for example, completing the Butler Water Treatment works at Aylesford, increasing water storage at the Halling reservoir and upgrading both the Tonbridge and Pembury Water Treatment plants.

But Cllr Boughton explained that these were works required to help South East Water meet its current growth targets of 6,000 homes, and would not facilitate the extra 13,000-odd homes beyond that.

The issue has forced yet another pause in the borough's Local Plan making process, while TMBC attempts to gain some guidance from the government about what it should do, with Cllr Boughton saying: "This does have the potential to derail the Local Plan".

Cllr Boughton wrote to the housing minister on February 11, asking for guidance, but has received no written response.

Instead, the council has been told the government's Water Delivery Taskforce would look at ways of "unblocking" Tonbridge's water supplies at a meeting later this month.

Cllr Boughton said: "The only way out of this is either for the government to reduce its housing targets, or for South East Water to increase its supply.

"Neither of those is within the control of this council."

The government has shown no willingness to reduce house-building targets for local authorities

In the meantime, the council would be assessing all future planning applications with water supply in mind.

There was an existing policy within TMBC's last approved Local Plan, dating from April 2010, known as Policy SQ5.

The policy allows the council to take infrastructure considerations into account when determining planning applications.

In view of South East Water's warning, the capacity to supply water to a development would now become "a material planning condition," said Cllr Boughton.

But, he said, that did not necessarily mean future planning applications would be refused.

If the application were for a brownfield site, where there had been a previous water usage, and the applicants could demonstrate that the new water usage would be no greater than before, then there would be no problem.

If the application were for a greenfield site, with no water usage, except perhaps agricultural, applicants would need to provide evidence that a supply was available.

One agent asked why such measures were needed immediately. As **South East Water had said that they could provide water for an extra 6,318 homes, didn't that provide some "headroom," while a longer-term solution was found.**

But Cllr Boughton said there were applications already granted permission, but not yet built out, for around 6,000 homes, so the headroom had already been used up.

The council leader said that another question the borough had asked South East Water, but as yet had not received an answer, was whether the potential supply difficulties lay equally across the borough, or whether some areas could absorb more housing, while others would struggle.

Water supply was not an issue considered when planning inspector Beth Davies granted planning permission for 52 homes at Ivy Farm

One question came from East Malling resident Tim Warrener, who asked what effect the new situation would have on the development of 52 homes proposed at Ivy Farm on the Wateringbury Road.

The scheme **was granted outline permission at appeal** in January despite a vigorous community-led campaign against it, but Mr Warrener said the area already had existing water-supply problems because of decaying Victorian-era pipework.

Cllr Boughton said: “My understanding is that the application still needs to submit a reserved matters application.”

After the meeting, Mr Warrener said: “I took that response as implying the developers would have to face the question of water supply. So perhaps this means that Ivy Farm won’t be going ahead after all, or at least not soon.”

Kent County Councillor Harry Rayner warned the meeting that logically the problem did not just apply to housing and could extend to say, a new school.

Cllr Boughton said he was not aware of any school plans for the borough.

Another participant, Joanne Kollberger, pointed out that the issues did not just apply to Tonbridge and Malling.

There had been water outages recently in Maidstone, Canterbury and Herne Bay as well.

“Is anyone looking at the bigger picture?” she asked.

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Behind the scenes as GPs face 'tidal wave of demand'

Image source,BBC/Michael Keohan

Image caption,

Tom McGuirk broke his arm playing football over the weekend

By**Michael Keohan**

Kent political reporter

- Published

22 January 2026

The phone lines open at Whitstable Medical Practice at 08:00 GMT sharp, and within ten minutes, there are 150 calls waiting for an appointment.

It is a stark illustration of the pressure that the NHS is under this winter, particularly in Kent, where East Kent Hospitals NHS Trust **declared a major incident**.

Whitstable Medical Practice runs at a relentless pace, as I spend a day watching staff try to meet a demand that shows no sign of easing.

They move quickly between reception desks, consultation rooms and clinical areas from the moment the doors open, and by mid-morning, the waiting areas are filling up. But this is not just a traditional GP surgery.

01:36

Figure caption,

Watch: Behind the scenes as GPs face 'tidal wave of demand'

Whitstable Medical Practice is one of the NHS's trailblazer sites, designed to take pressure off hospitals by offering a much wider range of services in the community.

On site, patients can have X-rays, minor surgery and specialist clinics that would otherwise require a hospital visit.

Throughout the day, I see patients coming in for eye appointments, dermatology consultations and follow-up checks that, in another part of the country, might involve a long wait or a trip to an acute hospital.

The idea is simple. Treat people closer to home, more quickly and reduce the strain on overstretched emergency departments.

However, even with the expanded model, demand is overwhelming.

GP Alistair Headon tells me: "Even if we could offer appointments 24 hours a day, seven days a week, I know there would still be unmet demand."

He says he regularly does more than 12 hours a day in the clinic, completely aware that it will not be enough to see every patient who would like to see him.

Winter often presents a "tidal wave of demand", he adds.

'Easier than A&E'

As the morning progresses and patients begin to be seen on the GP side of the practice, the urgent treatment centre is also in full flow.

People who have become unwell or injured over the weekend present themselves for X-rays and assessments.

One of those is Tom McGuirk, who broke his arm playing football. I meet him as he begins to have his arm set in plaster.

McGuirk says he "managed to get an X-ray" within 30 minutes, acknowledging his good fortune.

"Without this kind of practice, I'd no doubt be still waiting in A&E to be seen," he tells me.

Image source, BBC/Michael Keohan

Image caption,

Dr Alistair Headon said there would be unsatisfied demand even if appointments were available all hours of the day and night

The pressure does not ease as the day goes on, with the centre ever busy until services end at 20:00.

By late afternoon, staff are already bracing themselves for the next day – fully expectant that phones will light up again as soon as the lines open.

What is happening in Whitstable reflects a wider picture across the South East this winter.

Hospital trusts are under intense strain, ambulances are queuing outside A&E departments and GP practices are stretched to their limits.

This centre shows how the NHS is trying to adapt and innovate but also underlines the harsh reality that sheer demand is testing these new models of care to breaking point.

Image source, BBC/Michael Keohan

Image caption,

Dr John Ribchester warns that more patients are being seen by fewer GPs

Dr John Ribchester, director of strategy for the medical practice, meets me between appointments.

He tells me: "The NHS is under real pressure. We are now seeing more patients seen by fewer GPs and that adds to the pressure."

As I leave, patients are still arriving, and staff are still working diligently through their lists.

For them, the winter pressure is not a headline but relentless reality, every day of the week.

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East Kent A&E crisis: Why William Harvey Hospital in Ashford turned café into a makeshift ward

Max Chesson

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Published: 05:00, 19 September 2025

Updated: 11:30, 19 September 2025

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“Humiliating” and “horrific” were among the words used when an overwhelmed Kent hospital resorted to turning its coffee shop into a makeshift ward earlier this week.

The cafe at the William Harvey in Ashford was closed off to customers so patients could be treated behind a barrier of screens.



Patients were treated on beds in the café area at the William Harvey Hospital in Ashford on Tuesday. Picture: Submitted.

KentOnline's exclusive story made national headlines and laid bare the depth of the emergency care crisis engulfing the East Kent Hospitals Trust.

Politicians, patients and campaigners say the incident is symptomatic of a system on the brink – at a trust already among the worst in England for A&E waits and corridor care.

Here, we examine what happened this week, why East Kent's emergency departments are under such strain and what it means for anyone who turns up at A&E tomorrow...

When and why was the coffee shop closed off?

It was shut on Tuesday, with patients on trolley beds wheeled into the main cafe area and shielded by screens, with a security officer standing guard outside.

East Kent Hospitals said the move was forced by "significant demand" for its emergency services, with some patients even diverted to other hospitals in the area.

A security guard outside the closed-off café at the William Harvey. Picture: Submitted.

But campaigners described the situation as “absolutely horrendous”, saying it highlights just how desperate the trust has become when non-clinical areas are being used to treat the sick.

The area has since reopened to the public, with the trust’s chief executive, Tracey Fletcher, promising it will not be allowed to happen again.

Has this ever happened before?

Potentially, as one staff member was overheard saying during Tuesday’s closure: “Oh, for god's sake, they've shut Costa again.”

Sources have also told KentOnline it wasn’t the first time such action has been taken, but the Trust has yet to respond to our questions about the frequency of this particular approach.

What are people saying about this?

Understandably, there has been a lot of anger towards the Trust, although just as much sympathy and support for frontline staff.

Jonathon Proctor, who has been taken into William Harvey’s A&E three times in the past year – including two visits for chest pain – says he has simply lost faith in the hospital to look after him.

He previously had to wait five hours to see a doctor and says he has complained to the Trust, describing the hospital as a “deathtrap”.

“You should never get to that situation where you have to ask for another hospital because you do not trust the care, but that is where I’m at,” he said.

Jonathon Proctor, a former patient at the William Harvey in Ashford, has called the hospital a ‘deathtrap’. Picture: Jonathon Proctor

“There needs to be an investigation – it needs to be placed into special measures because it is dangerous. Tracey Fletcher needs to go.

“Someone is going to end up dying because they just can't cope up there. It’s a deathtrap.”

Will this really cost people’s lives?

While there has been no suggestion that patients cannot be safely treated in non-clinical areas, the message it sends out can be devastating, with at least one death publicly linked to issues with A&E.

Earlier this year, a Kent coroner warned there was a “risk of future deaths unless something is done” about bed-blocking and long A&E waits.

It followed the death of 91-year-old Dorothy Reid, who refused to return to the QEQM Hosital in Margate – run by the same trust - after previously waiting there “in discomfort for hours” despite having a broken back.

She died at home from a blood clot, having told medics she would not go back to A&E because of her “poor experience”.

North East Kent Coroner Catherine Wood concluded Mrs Reid may not have died when she did had she gone to hospital, but stressed the problem was a “national, not local” crisis.

How long are the waits in A&E departments at East Kent hospitals right now?

They are among the busiest in the country, and have been for a number of years.

Last month, just 48.8% of patients were admitted, transferred or discharged within four hours of arriving at A&E. The national target is 78%.

By that metric, it was the 14th worst in England, with thousands of unwell people not receiving care as quickly as the NHS or the government says they should.



Beds filled with patients lined the corridors of the William Harvey Hospital in December – and the issues with long waits have persisted

But even after being seen, the waiting game begins again for those who need to be admitted.

Last month, 1,311 such patients faced waits of at least 12 hours for a bed on a ward at either William Harvey or QEQM – up 116 on the same month last year and the third highest in England.

With official figures only published on the second Thursday of the month, how the Trust has performed in September will not be known until October 9.

How do East Kent's A&Es compare with the rest of the country?

The Trust is consistently among the worst performers in England for emergency waiting times.

It had the highest number of 24-hour trolley waits of any NHS trust last year – with almost 9,000 – and is frequently ranked in the worst five for 12-hour waits.

While pressures are widespread across the NHS, very few areas have experienced delays on the same scale as in East Kent.

For overall performance, the Trust currently sits 101st out of 134 providers of acute care.

Why are patients ending up waiting so long on trolleys and in corridors?

The crisis is being driven by several factors.

A major problem is “bed blocking”, where patients who are medically fit to go home cannot be discharged – primarily because the right social care packages or placements are not available.

Dr John Ribchester, of the Whitstable Medical Practice, previously told KentOnline ‘people will do everything they can not to go to A&E’

This leaves wards full and prevents new admissions from A&E, forcing staff to care for patients in corridors as there is simply no room for them.

At the same time, more patients are arriving at emergency departments, often with complex conditions made worse by delays in seeing GPs or community services.

Speaking earlier this year, Dr John Ribchester, who is clinical director of strategy at Whitstable Medical Practice, said the issues in A&E impact “the whole system”.

“A lot of people will do everything they can not to go to A&E, even when they should,” he said.

“We are seeing sicker people in their own homes or in the surgery who are saying they're not going to go to A&E because of either what's happened to them before or what they fear might happen to them – it does affect the whole system.

“What used to be described as winter pressures are now all-year-round pressures, and there are no quiet months in the NHS anymore.”

How big a role does social care play in this crisis?

Social care is central to the problem. Each week, dozens of patients in East Kent are medically fit to leave hospital but cannot be discharged until care packages, nursing home places or community support arrangements are in place.

Without that support outside, beds stay full inside, and the backlog builds in A&E.

Local councils and care providers are facing their own staff shortages and funding pressures, which means they cannot always meet the demand.

Dan Watkins called social care “a complex system” when he was Kent County Council’s cabinet member for adult social care and public health – a role he lost when unseated at May’s local elections. Picture: Paul Amos.

That bottleneck has become one of the biggest reasons emergency departments remain gridlocked.

Dan Watkins described it as a “complex system” when speaking to KentOnline during his time as Kent County Council’s cabinet member for adult social care and public health – a role he lost when unseated at May’s local elections.

“The problem with beds having patients in them who are medically fit, but without a social care package, is actually a reflection of the fragility of the whole care system in Kent,” he said.

“East Kent is the most challenged region, generally speaking, because we don't have enough quality care providers with the capacity to take on an increasingly elderly population with complex health and care needs.

“The number one reason for that is that we don't have enough skilled workers able to provide that care. Now, there are other reasons as well, but that would be the number one reason.”

How is the Trust trying to ease the pressure on emergency departments?

It has invested £30 million in a three-year expansion of emergency departments at William Harvey in Ashford and the QEQM in Margate, giving more space for treatment.

Ambulance services are working with hospitals to triage patients earlier and, where possible, divert people away from A&E.

And Folkestone and Hythe has been chosen as one of six “pioneer” sites in the South East for the government’s Neighbourhood Health Programme.

The idea is to bring together doctors, nurses, pharmacists, social care staff, councils and charities into joined-up “neighbourhood teams,” helping people with long-term conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure get the right support at home and avoid unnecessary hospital visits.

The new resuscitation bays in the revamped emergency department at QEQM were part of a £30 million investment designed to ease pressure on existing services. Picture: East Kent Hospitals Trust

Pilot projects in Folkestone and Hythe have already shown results, with one scheme cutting A&E attendances for at-risk patients from 223 to 33 in just six months.

NHS leaders hope the new programme – backed by £10 million nationally – will ease pressure on hospitals like the William Harvey by tackling problems earlier and closer to where people live.

What does this mean if I turn up at A&E tomorrow?

Patients can expect to be seen quickly if their condition is life-threatening, but anyone needing a bed is likely to face a long wait.

Tens of thousands of people have spent more than 12 hours in the department before being admitted, and some have been forced to wait for days.

Space is so tight that treatment may take place in a corridor or waiting room, but hopefully not a converted café, of the Trust's chief executive is true to her word.

Non-urgent cases could be diverted elsewhere, with doctors urging people to use GPs, NHS 111 or urgent treatment centres if appropriate.

For those who do need A&E, the experience is likely to feel crowded, stressful and at times undignified.

Who is ultimately responsible for sorting this out?

The responsibility lies with several groups.

The East Kent Hospitals Trust board, led by the chief executive, is directly accountable for the way A&Es are run and for making improvements.

East Kent Hospitals chief executive Tracey Fletcher is under increasing pressure to address the issues in emergency care

NHS England and the Department of Health oversee the trust and set the performance standards it must meet, while also controlling funding.

Local councils and care providers play a vital role too, because without adequate social care, patients cannot leave hospital and new ones cannot be admitted.

MPs and campaigners continue to put pressure on ministers and hospital leaders to act, while urging the public to use emergency services appropriately.

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Southern Water illegally dumped sewage after £90m fine

The Environment Agency said it would "keep Southern Water in its sights with more inspections"

By **Nathan Bevan**

South East

- Published

28 April 2026

Southern Water has admitted further sewage pollution discharges in Kent, some of which took place weeks after it was handed a record £90m penalty for illegal dumping.

The water company had been fined in July 2021 over 6,971 unpermitted discharges across the county, along with Sussex and Hampshire, which were committed between 2010 and 2015.

But at Medway Magistrates' Court earlier in April, it pleaded guilty to five offences of sewage discharge between 2019 and 2021, the Environment Agency (EA) said.

Southern Water said it pleaded guilty to the charges relating to 2019-21 and it was "cooperating fully with the legal process in the magistrates' court".

"As this is an ongoing court matter, it would be inappropriate to comment further," a spokesperson added.

The water firm said that pollution incidents were "never acceptable" and it had been "working hard" to improve, reducing pollution incidents by 38% across the past five years.

The EA said that the firm should have "managed operations more carefully" and had the "necessary checks in place".

Southern Water plants in Whitstable discharged pollution into the sea directly or via the Swalecliffe Brook waterway in August 2021, weeks after the punishment was handed down, according to the EA.

On 6 August of the same year, investigators found that Swalecliffe Brook had about 70 dead fish in it, including eels.

Canterbury City Council also **put up signs along Tankerton and Herne Bay beaches** to warn against swimming for nearly a week following the incident due to the water quality there.

Elsewhere, Southern Water pleaded guilty after diesel got into Swalecliffe Brook and then the sea when a local wastewater treatment plant generator began leaking in July 2019.

'It's a familiar pattern'

In addition, Southern Water admitted breaches across three days from 5 March 2020 where untreated sewage was dumped into Faversham Creek after a wastewater station's pumps stopped working.

Swalecliffe Brook was also hit on the same day, with sewage carried into the sea, while another "almost identical incident" took place in October 2020, said the regulator.

Dawn Theaker, the EA's water industry regulation manager in the South East, said: "All of these pollution incidents could have been avoided had operations been managed more carefully, with the necessary checks in place to deal with problems when they occurred.

"It's a familiar pattern with water companies - they're always catching up with events."

She added that the EA would "keep Southern Water in its sights with more inspections, even tougher regulation and prosecution in the most serious cases".

Southern Water will be sentenced at Medway Magistrates' Court at a later date.

Additional reporting by PA Media.

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