

C1 Activity update

1. Operational incident
2. Building Safety prosecution

February 2025

For further information please contact:

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Operational incident

Fire in a derelict commercial building

Incident 146 – 02/12/2024

Former Debenhams department store, Canterbury



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Premises History

- Debenhams closed in 2020 and has stood vacant since.
- Four years later the units that housed the large retailer, which was uniquely divided across three buildings, remain vacant.
- Guildhall Quarter is the proposed £25million project that would transform the Debenhams site into 12 new individual retail units and 74 residential flats (planning approved).
- Difficulties getting the Guildhall Quarter project off the ground largely stem from the issue of wastewater polluting the nearby Stodmarsh Nature Reserve.
- Is a high-priority SSRI in our Dynamics Risk Management platform, with extensive interaction from both Ops and Building Safety.



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Overview and Attendance

- **Building Type:** Vacant department store (3 stories + basement) in Canterbury city centre
- **Incident Description:** A rapidly escalating fire involving a large, vacant department store
- **Attendance Time:** First call received at 20.38, first two fire engines arrived at 20.43
- **Resourcing:**
 - 8 appliances
 - 2 height vehicles
 - Technical Rescue Team
 - Command support Unit
 - Volunteer Response Team
 - Building and Customer Safety Teams
 - KFRS Fire Scene Investigators



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Operational Tactics

There was a **high risk of fire spreading to neighbouring properties**, which could have resulted in more than 30 premises becoming involved if the fire had escalated beyond the building of origin.

This potential escalation posed a significant threat.

Initial Response Strategy: Identify the fire and prevent escalation beyond the building of origin while assessing structural risks and ensuring firefighter and public safety.

Evacuation Measures: Ensure that nearby properties and public areas were evacuated, and a rest centre was identified and implemented with support from KCC and partner agencies. This affected 30 residents from 9 flats.

Despite the intense nature of the fire crews were able to limit fire spread beyond affected premises.



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Customer Engagement

Customer Safety

PIP Activity Summary: Residential customer reassurance and engagement

Team: 4 HFSV Task Force Members over two days

Activity Details:

- **Properties Door-Knocked:** 167
- **Declines:** 0 (from those who were in)
- **S&W Visits Completed:** 36

Building Safety

PIP Activity Summary: Commercial business reassurance and engagement. (no regulatory audits – engagement only)

Team: 8 Building Safety colleagues over 2 days

Activity Details:

- **Businesses engaged with:** 101
- **Declines:** 0



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Media



Rosie Duffield MP is with Kent Fire and Rescue Service and Canterbury Tails Cat Cafe.
2 days ago · 🌐

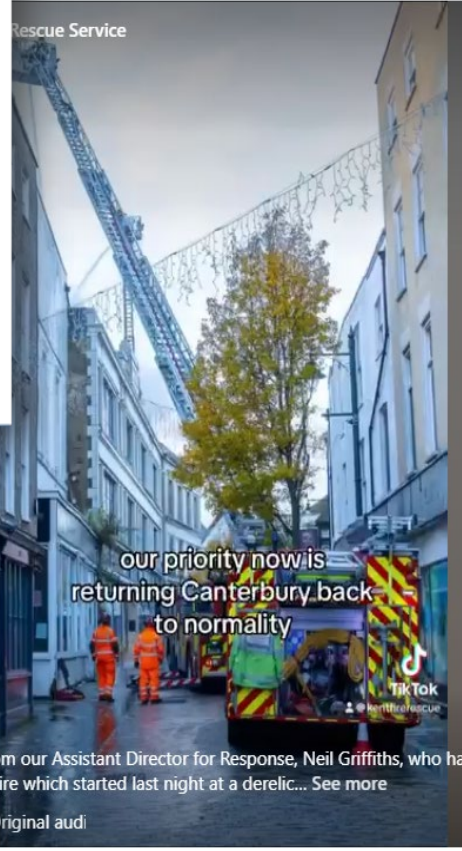
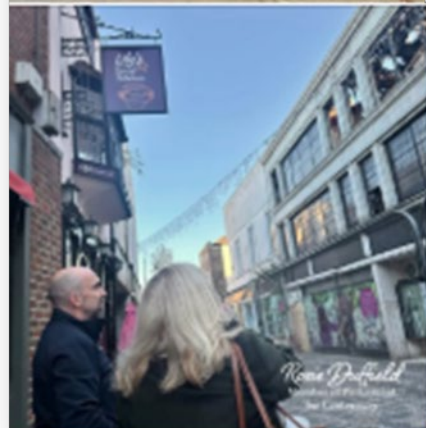
Today I visited Canterbury Fire Station to meet and thank Gold Commander Neil and his team at the [Kent Fire and Rescue Service](#).

Neil took me round the site of Monday night's fire and talked me through the response efforts. It is clear that we were incredibly lucky that our firefighters were able to get the situation under control as it could have been disastrous. Thanks to the rapid response from our fire and rescue services, lives and nearby buildings were saved.

Thanks so much to all of them for their efforts to make the site safe, evacuate the flats nearby and for working closely with local businesses and residents.

Huge thanks also to [Canterbury Tails Cat Cafe](#) for coming to say hello, and for inviting us in to meet the lovely cats that they rescue and care for and for giving us the opportunity to view the fire damage from their roof - again making it clear just how much worse the situation could have been.

I think it is important that lessons are learned from this awful incident. I will be speaking to Canterbury City Council about some of the many issues that need addressing so that Monday's fire is never repeated.



our priority now is
returning Canterbury back
to normality

Here's an update from our Assistant Director for Response, Neil Griffiths, who has been on scene at a large fire which started last night at a derelic... See more

🔊 Fire Service · Original audi



Kent Fire and Rescue Service
Published by Karen Jeal

December 2 at 10:01 PM · 🌐

🚒 Final update at 3:30pm on 4 December:
Firefighting operations have now finished at a derelict building on Canterbury High Street.
At the height of the incident, eight fire engines and two height vehicles were in attendance as well as the technical rescue unit. Crews, wearing breathing apparatus, used main jets and hose reel jets to extinguish the flames. ... See more



473



53



120



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What next?

- Initial operational learning has been gathered from colleagues, with a formal debrief scheduled for February 2025.
- The Community Insights and Partnerships Team (CIPT), the local Building Safety Office, and our Fire Engineering team are working with local authorities and responsible persons to determine the next steps for this building, following a new planning application (demolition, redevelopment, etc).
- We have an ongoing MaC-G for all identified high risk derelict buildings in Kent and Medway, chaired by AM Chisholm. Additionally, the Education Team has created the Aspire Programme, which is focused on working with young children identified as entering these premises.
- KFRS has developed a derelict and vacant building organisational process that involves the Community Insights and Partnerships Team (CIPT), Building Safety, Customer Safety, RIT, Ops, and the Education Team. This process works to address the risks associated with these premises within Kent and Medway and ensures that not only KFRS but also partner agencies work collaboratively to tackle these issues.



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Building Safety prosecution

The Swan Brasserie Ltd, West Malling



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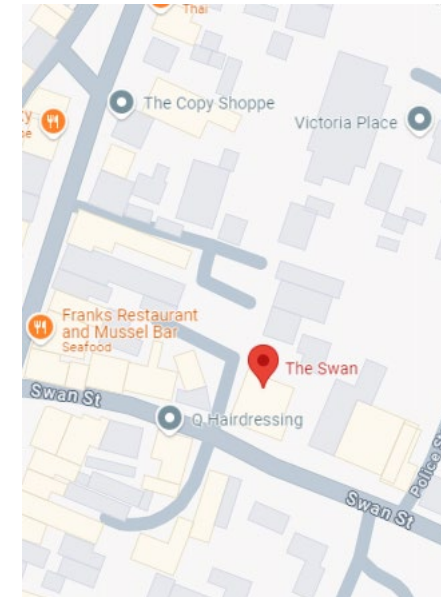
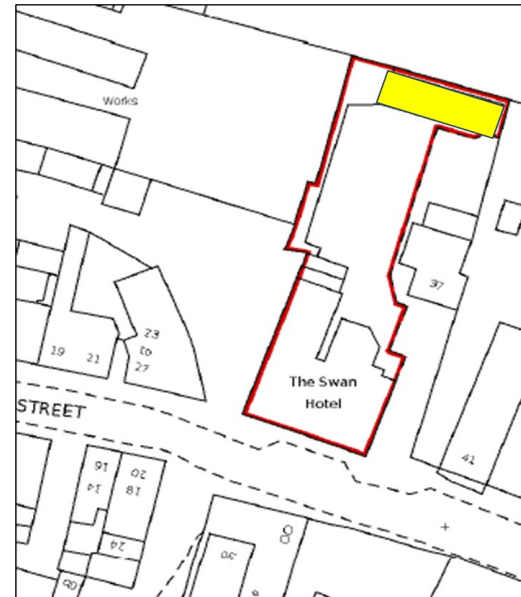
Background to case

Alleged fire safety concern

An alleged fire safety concern was received regarding potential offences committed due to the unsafe use of the sleeping/living accommodation at rear of marquee.

Premises details:

- A three-storey pub restaurant known as *The Swan*.
- Rear garden with a temporary structure (marquee) covering the full area for winter use.
- Rear garden building used for laundry, storage, toilets, and staff accommodation (highlighted as the yellow area).



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Concerns identified

- Lack of sufficient detection throughout the rear garden building and temporary structure
- Extended travel distance to the point of ultimate safety from rear garden building, specifically from sleeping accommodation
- Combustible materials stored on escape routes from the rear garden building, specifically in the storage area, kitchen and temporary structure contents



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Laundry area – ground floor



Laundry area - storage ground floor



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Accommodation escape route



Temporary structure – marquee



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Notice served

- A prohibition notice was served on 21 December 2021
- The notice restricted the use:
 - i. The ground floor
 - ii. The first floor of the rear garden building for any purpose other than storage, toilet facilities and the carrying out of remedial works



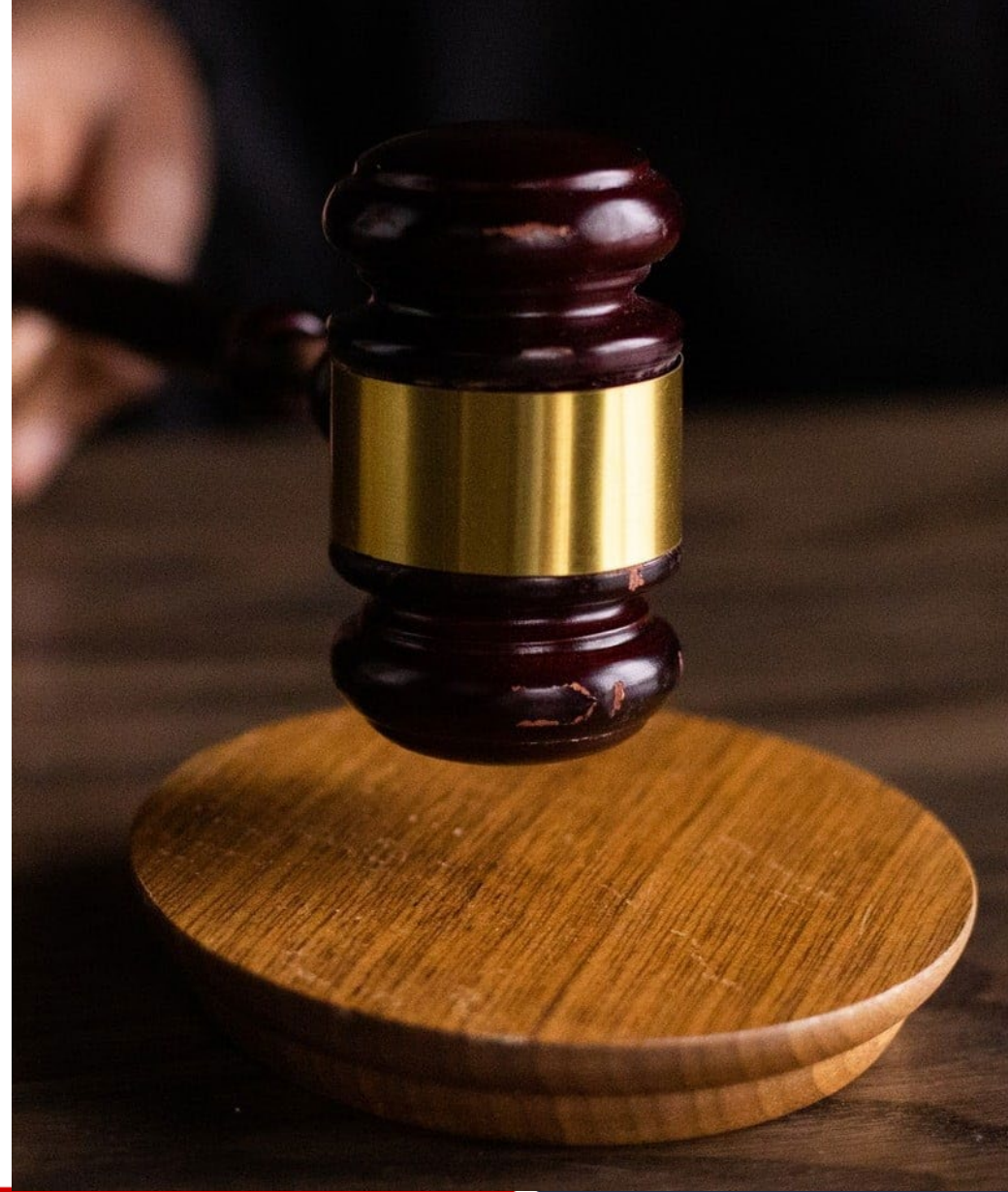
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Prosecution case

Nine offences against the Fire Safety Order taken to prosecution

- Under Articles: 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15
- The defendant pleaded guilty to 5 charges, with 4 not guilty pleas allowed for matters of lesser weight
- This resulted in a successful prosecution



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