

Violent Clashes at Epping as Protests Over Bell Hotel Asylum Scheme Deepen Local Tensions

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— Categories: General News



Protests outside The Bell Hotel in Epping, Essex, escalated over the weekend into scenes of disorder and violence, following renewed anger over the venue's continued use to house asylum seekers. Tensions have mounted since an asylum seeker residing at the hotel was charged with

sexual assault, prompting public outcry and renewed scrutiny of the government's accommodation policies.

According to organisers, approximately 500 anti-immigration activists gathered, countered by around 700 demonstrators from the group Stand Up to Racism. While the protests began peacefully, violence broke out later in the evening. Essex Police confirmed that three arrests were made during the main demonstration, and six individuals have since been charged with offences including violent disorder and criminal damage.

Police also reported that earlier protests during the week led to injuries among eight officers and acts of vandalism. Chief Superintendent Simon Anslow described the incidents as unacceptable and pledged to hold offenders accountable, while stressing that the majority of the community were not involved in the violence.

Amid growing public concern, Epping Forest District Council voted unanimously to demand the immediate and permanent closure of The Bell Hotel as a site for housing asylum seekers. Councillors criticised the lack of local consultation and warned that continued use of the hotel risked further division within the community.

In response to the unrest, Essex Police imposed restrictions under public order legislation. These included a ban on face coverings, limited protest timings, and confined routes for demonstrators. The measures aimed to reduce the potential for further disruption and protect public safety.

The presence of far-right groups such as Homeland and White Vanguard has added to fears of escalating radicalisation. Nationalist slogans like "protect our kids" were widely seen during the protests. Counter-

demonstrators have condemned such rhetoric, arguing it inflames hostility and undermines community cohesion.

The use of hotels for asylum accommodation has drawn widespread criticism. Many argue the policy creates pressure on local services, fosters resentment, and lacks accountability. Recent polling suggests a majority of voters, including those who support the Labour Party, believe immigration policies are increasing tensions within communities.

Home Secretary Yvette Cooper supported police efforts and rejected claims that authorities facilitated counter-protests. Essex Police have denied suggestions they bussed in demonstrators, insisting that escorted travel was offered solely for safety and to manage risks.

While the government has pledged to end the use of hotels for asylum seekers by 2029, the events in Epping underscore the challenge of balancing national policy with local concerns. The fallout from these clashes continues to fuel debate over immigration, public safety, and the strain placed on already stretched communities.