# Controversy erupts over housing of asylum seekers at luxury hotel in Peterborough



The housing of 146 male asylum seekers at the Dragonfly Hotel, a luxury establishment located in Thorpe Meadows, Peterborough, has ignited significant local controversy. The decision, made by the Home Office with just 48 hours' notice, has raised concerns among residents, particularly regarding the comfort and safety of women and girls using the nearby outdoor facilities, including the popular rowing course and local swimming areas.

The four-star hotel, which boasts scenic views over a 1,000-metre rowing course adjacent to the picturesque River Nene, is surrounded by a popular 2,500-acre park known for activities such as swimming, sunbathing, and various outdoor sports. However, residents have expressed feelings of discomfort, stating that the presence of a substantial number of unvetted single men has deterred many women from engaging in recreational activities.

Eighty-two-year-old Gay Marriot articulated her concerns, stating, "I know a lot of young women who are now concerned about doing sports around the River Nene and rowing area because there are a lot of single men sitting around." She further noted the potential cultural differences, saying, "a lot of them come from cultures where they perhaps aren't used to seeing a woman without her head covered," which could lead to uncomfortable situations as warmer weather brings more people outdoors.

Local authorities have already begun to act on these concerns; a small pontoon that extended into the River Nene has been removed following complaints from residents who believed that mixing male and female teenagers in close proximity could lead to complications. Concerns were echoed by Colin Webster, a 74-year-old resident and member of the Thorpe Gate Residents Association, who stated, "My fear is that this is a disaster waiting to happen. We were not consulted at all about the arrival of these asylum seekers."

The hotel, which adjoins an affluent estate with homes valued up to £1 million each, was closed to the public last November as part of the Home Office's decision. Wealthy residents reported feeling blindsided by this abrupt change and have expressed frustration over a lack of communication with local officials. This perspective is further complicated by concerns relating to public safety and propriety surrounding the interactions between asylum seekers and women in a predominantly residential area.

Kai Palmer, the manager of the Thorpe Meadows Café that overlooks the rowing area, reported more neutral experiences, indicating that the asylum seekers frequenting his café have been "very polite" and have not caused any issues thus far. He acknowledged the concerns of the residents, especially as the warmer weather approaches, which typically sees an increase in local activities.

Responses from asylum seekers themselves give another dimension to the conversation. Ahmed, an asylum seeker from Kuwait, expressed appreciation for the opportunity to see local residents enjoying themselves, saying, "There's nothing for us to do but it's nice that we can see all these local people having fun."

Community sentiment surrounding this integration remains divided. While some residents fear potential risks associated with having a large number of unvetted men in such close proximity to public spaces frequented by young women, others advocate for a focus on coexistence, pointing out that no incidents have arisen as of yet.

The Peterborough City Rowing Club, located at the rowing course that has seen increased activity during the warmer months, is preparing for upcoming regattas that will attract participants from across the country. However, local anxiety over the integration of asylum seekers into this lively community continues to simmer, fuelled by a lack of communication and consultation from the authorities.

As the situation evolves, the Home Office, Peterborough City Council, and the hotel management have been approached for comments regarding the ongoing controversy and the future implications of housing asylum seekers in such a public and active area.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.peterboroughtoday.co.uk/news/people/146-asylum-seekers-to-be-moved-into-peterboroughs-lakeside-dragonfly-hotel-4867891> - This article confirms that the Home Office decided to accommodate 146 asylum seekers at the Dragonfly Hotel in Peterborough and that such decisions are taken quickly, aligning with the claims of local residents being blindsided by the arrangement.
* <https://www.nenepark.org.uk/our-statement-on-asylum-seekers-at-the-dragonfly-hotel> - This statement supports the housing of asylum seekers at the Dragonfly Hotel and mentions that their care is managed by Serco, corroborating the role of the hotel as a temporary facility for asylum seekers.
* <https://www.nenepark.org.uk/> - The Nene Park Trust website offers information about the park's activities and facilities, supporting the description of the area as a popular recreational spot with rowing and swimming facilities.
* <https://www.peterborough.gov.uk/council-meetings/minutes/committee-minutes> - While not directly available, this link would lead to council meeting minutes, potentially providing context on how local authorities address concerns and engage with residents regarding asylum seekers.
* <https://www.serco.com/what-we-do/uk-and-europe/government-services/asylum> - Serco's website explains their role in managing asylum seeker accommodation in the UK, supporting the involvement of Serco in managing care at the Dragonfly Hotel.