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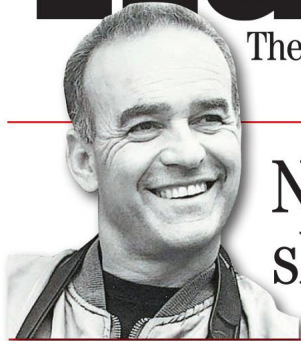
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Court bid to remove child abuse videos

Legal action is being taken to remove shocking videos from the internet in which two children describe astonishing allegations about satanic cults, serious sexual abuse and sacrifice of babies in Hampstead.

The videos, which contain highly disturbing allegations about a "sexual ritual abuse cult in north London", had been viewed by more than 226,000 people on the internet as the *Ham&High* went to press.

The *Ham&High* understands that the local authority that has custody of the children is working with the family court to try to prevent further publication of the videos, which appear to feature a brother and sister.

They make a raft of allegations concerning sexual abuse, naming a close relative and a Hampstead primary school, which cannot be named for legal reasons.

It is understood that the allegations first came to light in August last year when the children confided in their mother on a family holiday. Reportedly the matter was passed to Barnet police last September and investigations carried out.

The children are understood to have been taken into care shortly afterwards and remain the subject of care proceedings.

A petition, with 1,200 signatures, has been set up calling for home secretary Theresa May, justice minister Chris Grayling, and the chief executive of the local authority involved in care proceedings to investigate.

This week the Hampstead primary school sent a letter to parents which said: "In relation to the recent allegations the police and social services were immediately notified. The investigation that was undertaken concluded that there was no substance to the allegations so no further action will be taken.

"The school is currently working with the Camden legal team and the police on the difficult task of removing the information from the internet."

The local authority involved in care proceedings declined to comment when contacted by the *Ham&High*.

Our struggle for survival

Traders dismiss data showing 'thriving' high street

Imogen Blake

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Struggling independent shopkeepers battling to survive have dismissed new figures revealing that Highgate has the fewest number of empty shops in the country, saying they do not reflect reality.

Highgate is classed as one of the top town centres in England for boasting a 0 per cent vacancy rate, according to statistics released by retail data organisation the Local Data Company (LDC) last week.

However, the lines of empty shops in Archway Road and the struggles of independent business owners to keep doors open paint a starkly different picture.

Raj Kara-Rajani, owner of The Corner Shop in Highgate High Street, fears he will have to close after 35 years due to a £33,000 rent hike.

The increase would hit him doubly hard because it would mean he would also have to pay higher business rates.

The 64-year-old said: "I would be devastated if I had to close and in a way I wouldn't know what to do. I would have worked for 35 years for nothing.

"I would lose all my personal property, the banks and the landlords would take it all.

"You would probably see me on the streets, that's the worst case scenario."

Highgate is tied with Debden in Essex as the top town centre in England for its zero per cent vacancy rate.

The pair score above third-



Raj Kara-Rajani fears he will be forced to close after 35 years

placed Beaconsfield in Buckinghamshire with a 0.9 per cent rate. London meanwhile has a vacancy rate of 8.7 per cent.

The LDC figures refer only to Highgate Village, and exclude Archway Road and Swain's Lane, where empty shops line the streets.

Among the newly vacant stores in Archway Road is landmark furniture emporium Richardson's of Highgate, which has closed after decades in business.

A stone's throw away, there is a bailiff's notice in the window of 202 Bar.

In Swain's Lane, popular butcher's Elite Meats lies empty after its owner Martin Leahy closed the shop on Saturday after 30 years because of spiralling rents.

And many shopkeepers suspect it will be only a matter of time before more succumb to closure.

Jay Patel, co-owner of popular newsagents Northwood Dairy in Northwood Road, says that ever since a Sainsbury's Local arrived in nearby Archway Road nearly three years ago, he has seen his profits drop by 50 per cent.

The 59-year-old, who has run the store for 30 years, is now seriously considering closing the shop which once counted comedian Les Dennis as a regular.

"They said a Sainsbury's would increase footfall," he said. "Well it has, but only for them."

Several independent business owners in Highgate said the high street is far from thriving, despite having no empty shops.

Allan Rapley, 64, who opened veterinary practice Highgate Vets in Highgate High Street last month, said shopkeepers come to Highgate for its character, not because they want to make a large turnover.

He said: "Despite the higher rents and business rates here, still the shops never seem to stay empty for long. It's a popular place to be. There's a perception that it's a good place to have a shop, though I'm not sure all the shops would agree with that.

"I came here because it's a nice place to live and to have a business as well."



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