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Storm Eunice causes workmen's cradles to batter side of new hotel

DRIVING winds caused by Storm Eunice lifted workmen's cradles to batter the side of Woking's new Hilton building, damaging windows and denting panels.

Video of a metal cradle swinging untethered circulated on social media and residents' forums over the weekend, raising widespread concerns.

"The safety of residents and construction workers is of utmost importance and the sight of an untethered workmen's cradle was alarming," acknowledged leader of Woking Borough Council, Ayesha Azad.

"We raised this incident as an urgent matter with Sir Robert McAlpine (SRM) and they confirmed that ahead of Storm Eunice, significant preparations across the construction site were put in place. This



UNTETHERED - One of the cradles at the Hilton included checking and securing all materials and equipment. On-site works were suspended in specific areas and teams were on standby to react where necessary.
"Despite this, the severity of the storm dislodged two workmen's cradles that had

been grounded and secured on the southern roof terrace beside the hotel development."

Friday's red weather warning had seen the section of Victoria Way close to the Hilton building temporarily shut, due to a "wind action plan" agreed between SRM and the Health and Safety Executive which requires the highway to be closed during excessive wind speeds while work to the hotel's exterior continues.

The road had only reopened the previous week, having been closed since 20 October while temporary fixings were installed after exterior panels fell from the Hilton.

On this occasion, Victoria Way was only closed until Saturday afternoon, once the winds subsided. No panels were dislodged as a result of the storm.

"All other preparations proved effective, with only minor damage as a result," said Cllr Azad.

Liberal Democrat group leader Ann-Marie Barker said she had written to Cllr Azad and WBC's chief executive, Julie Fisher, asking if the incident will impact on the opening of the new development.

"There are serious questions to be answered as to why this happened," said Cllr Barker. "The public need to be reassured that there will be no further cost to the public purse from these incidents."

It is thought the Hilton hotel will not now open as part of the Victoria Square development, until all aspects of the building are fully settled.

● STORM damage - see page 3.

Indoor skydiver qualifies for world cup

by Stuart Flitton

A 13-YEAR-OLD Horsell girl has won the right to compete in the indoor skydiving world cup after finishing first in the juniors and fourth overall in the recent British championships.

Emily King took up the sport when she was four because she wanted to "fly like Tinkerbell".

Within three years she was winning local competitions as a freestyle soloist - and when she was 10, she finished third in the national championships.

Freestyle skydiving involves complex acrobatic routines to music in a vertical wind tunnel that allows the athletes to float and "fly".

Emily's mum, Sharon, said: "I really don't know where she's got it from. It was something that she just took to from the moment she went in the tunnel."

"She always wanted to go back there for birthdays or other special occasions. The instructors loved taking her in because she was so smiley and loved it all the time."

Her success in Basingstoke means Emily could compete in the world cup in Belgium in April this year. But she has decided to wait until the 2023 championships in Slovakia to give her more time to train and because of schoolwork.

"Due to disruption caused by COVID, the British nationals came very close to the world championships in Brussels and it left only 50 days to train, which isn't much when you have to do



HIGH-FLIER - Horsell indoor skydiver Emily King, aged 13. Left, Emily in action

these very complicated routines to music," said Sharon.

"They're judged not only on the technical capability but how it corresponds to the music."

Emily said she thoroughly enjoyed the competition in Basingstoke.

"It was great because everybody is lovely and you get to go against people in a different age group, with different styles and levels of experience," she said.

"Indoor skydiving means you're able to fly. It's a very rare occurrence to defy gravity and a fun thing to do."

Emily participates in a wide range of sport, including golf, skating, acrobatics, netball and lacrosse.

She intends to compete for as long as she can and to become a professional instructor.

Emily is planning to add outdoor skydiving to her skills and when she is 16, hopes to jump with the Red Devils, the British Army's official parachute display team.

"Because I'm a capable flier indoors, I'll be quite a good flier outdoors," she said.

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