

PASTOR'S THOUGHTS

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Strangers in a strange land

The debate over immigration in the UK has intensified, with Epping Council's failed bid to block asylum seekers from hotels becoming a flashpoint. Despite the Court of Appeal overturning a High Court injunction against housing asylum seekers at The Bell Hotel, several councils remain determined to pursue legal action.

Epping Forest District Council had argued the hotel posed risks to safety and planning rules, but Lord Justice Bean dismissed the injunction as "seriously flawed in principle," warning that objections citing protests could fuel further disorder.

Reform-controlled councils, including West Northamptonshire and Broxbourne, confirmed they will continue their legal challenges. A full High Court hearing is scheduled for mid-October, while Epping considers an appeal to the Supreme Court. Protests and counter-demonstrations were reported nationwide, including in Warrington, Portsmouth, Skegness, and Falkirk, with minor injuries and arrests near Heathrow and in Epping.

Politically, Reform UK has urged all 12 of its councils to resist hotel use, with support from Conservative figures such as Kemi Badenoch. By contrast, Dame Angela Eagle, Minister for Home Office and Border Security, pledged to end hotel reliance by the end of this Parliament. Critics, including the Refugee Council's Enver Solomon, argue the ruling ignores deeper systemic issues, warning hotels remain "flashpoints for community concern and far-right targeting."

As of June 2025, 32,059 asylum seekers were housed in hotels which is a 8% rise on last year, though well below the September 2023 peak of 56,042. In total, 106,075 people received asylum support: 30% in hotels, 67% in dispersal housing, and 3% with subsistence only.

Pending asylum cases dropped to 70,532 by June 2025, down from a record 134,046 in 2023. That year, 51,997 individuals were granted refugee protection, 24% fewer than in 2024. The grant rate fell from 58% to 48%, with Afghan approvals plunging from 96% to 40%, Turkish from 51% to 19%, while Syrian and Sudanese cases stayed at 98%. In protest to these statics, the Union Jack and the St George's Cross flags cane be seen flying in public places across the country which demonstrates the tension across the country concerning this issue.

From a biblical perspective, there is a dual argument. In Psalm 146:9, "The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow", yet in Exodus 23:33 states, "Do not let them live in your land or they will cause you to sin against me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you."

As a church, remember that these seeking asylum are human beings made in the image of God and therefore must be treated with dignity and covered in prayer.
