

Questions From MP's office

Asylum Centre in Bexhill

Expected and received questions from constituents:

1. How many people will be housed at the asylum centre in Bexhill?

If a decision is made to progress using the site for non-detained asylum accommodation, we will undertake works at the site and only after the site is legally compliant and ready for use would we start to accommodate asylum seekers. We would increase capacity in phases over several months to reach an operating capacity of c.1200 people, regularly reviewing the numbers and use of the site.

2. What will be the exact use of the site?

Our initial proposal is to utilise this site to accommodate asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute. Under sections 95 and 98 of the Immigration Act 1999, the Home Secretary has a statutory obligation to provide destitute asylum seekers with accommodation.

3. Why was this particular site chosen?

This Government is taking action to address the unacceptable costs of housing migrants in hotels, which is costing the taxpayer around £6 million a day. Bexhill has been identified as an alternative to hotels as a site that is suitable for the purposes of asylum seeker accommodation. Alternative large sites such as surplus military land and this site at Bexhill are not only more affordable for taxpayers than hotels, but also more manageable and orderly than hotels for communities, thanks to healthcare and catering facilities on site, 24/7 security and purpose-built basic accommodation. The sites will open up jobs and investment to local areas through employment roles on site, for example through catering and maintenance roles.

These sites on their own will not end the use of hotels, but they will relieve pressure on communities and manage asylum seekers in a more appropriate and cost-effective way, reducing incentives for people to travel through safe countries and bringing us in line with the approach being taken by other countries around Europe

4. Is it subject to planning permission or change of use permission being granted?

Our intention at this time would be to obtain temporary planning permission for the site via Class Q of part 19, Schedule 2 to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended)

5. Are building works required on the site?

As the site is still under survey we do not as yet have the full scope of any refurbishment or confirmed timelines. These surveys are extensive as we want to make sure this site is suitable for the community, area and asylum seekers. As you will understand these results will inform our plans and allow us to then share further detail with the community.

6. Will there be a public consultation?

No, but the site will be designed to minimise the impact on local communities and services, e.g. catering facilities and basic primary care will be available on site.

- The Home Office are committed to working with the Local Authority, Police and local services through sub-groups to understand the impact and mitigate these where possible.
- For all sites, we are considering the impact on local services including the NHS, police and fire services and working with local partners to develop bespoke plans that take account of local environmental issues, heritage and any risks associated with each site. This includes basic on-site healthcare to limit pressures on local NHS services. All sites will have 24/7 security.

7. Will there be the public meetings?

Yes; the Home Office will meet with the local community leaders and key local service providers

8. When will the asylum seekers start to arrive?

As the site is still under survey we do not as yet have confirmed timelines. We would intend that any arrivals were phased upwards and with a view to eventually accommodating up to 1200 people once the site was fully operational. The phases and timelines are, until we have the full suite of any plans, subject to change but we will share these with the community once we have that certainty.

9. What age and gender will these people be?

The vast majority of those arriving via small boat are single adult males with the government under a legal obligation to accommodate those who would otherwise be destitute. However, because we do not as yet have a confirmed suite of plans, no decision has been made on any cohort for any site at Bexhill other than these would be asylum seekers. Whoever is accommodated will have been through security checks that includes safeguarding and Police checks and checks against international databases

10. What countries will they have come from?

Those being accommodated are likely to come from various countries, and already in the asylum system, having been through initial screening and checks.

11. How have they come to the UK?

Through various routes including small boats.

12. Do they have a right to claim asylum?

Anyone accommodated at this site would have claimed asylum. That is why we are standing up these alternative sites as under sections 95 and 98 of the Immigration Act 1999, the Home Secretary has a statutory obligation to provide destitute asylum seekers with accommodation

13. How do we know who these people really are and if they have criminal backgrounds?

Full screening of people's identity, security checks, initial asylum screening and processing is undertaken at the Western Jet Foil in Dover and Manston, Kent. They will have had their fingerprints and identities recorded by the Home Office prior to being securely moved to suitable accommodation locations as quickly as possible. They will, have been through extensive security checks that includes safeguarding and Police checks and checks against international databases. Information captured during screening will be used to assess the suitability of individuals for our sites.

14. How long will they stay at the asylum centre?

As proposals for the site develop, we are assessing how long asylum seekers should be accommodated there.

15. How long will each asylum case take to process?

This depends on the complexity of the case. Asylum claims will continue to be considered on a case-by-case basis against published immigration rules, policy guidance and country information.

We're increasing the number of caseworkers to 2,500 by September 2023, streamlining interviews, shortening decision letters and introducing specialist caseworkers by nationality.

16. What happens if they are granted asylum?

They would be allowed to stay in the UK for any permitted period and we will work closely with Local Authorities, particularly through Strategic Migration Partnerships to manage any impacts.

17. What happens if they are refused asylum?

An asylum seeker will be asked to leave the UK if they do not qualify for refugee status. They can appeal against this decision.

18. Will they be allowed to come and go as they please?

Those living on site would not be detained but we would expect overnight absences to be pre-arranged with the site service provider.

Proposals for the sites include providing onsite recreational and cultural activities to occupy residents to minimise impact on existing facilities within the local area.

Our accommodation providers are experienced at managing the security of non-detained asylum accommodation across the country and will be on site 24/7.

19. How will they travel if allowed outside into the community as there are no good public transport links?

We will work with local stakeholders to minimise the impact on local services including transport.

20. Will there be any type of curfew?

Those living on site would not be detained but we would expect overnight absences to be pre-arranged with the site service provider.

If a resident was not back on site by 11pm the team would make a call to the individual to ascertain their whereabouts. This would not be under curfew conditions; it would be based on following up on the safety and welfare of the individual.

21. What can local people do if they feel intimidated by groups of them hanging around schools, parks, town centres and beaches?

By designing the site to be as self-sufficient as possible, we would minimise the impact on local communities and services.

Proposals include providing onsite recreational and cultural activities to occupy residents.

As proposals develop, we continue to work closely with local political leaders and their officials and other local partners to manage any impact on the local area.

22. How will community tensions be managed?

The Home Office and provider will work closely with and consider any suggestions from the Local Authority and Police with regard to community cohesion.

23. How can you ensure that local residents will be safe?

To ensure security forms an integral part of the proposed site, a specialist security provider will be working on site, introducing measures such as mobile CCTV units.

The project is committed to working together with the Sussex Police team to ensure appropriate security measures are in place as part of operational delivery.

24. Have you carried out any risk assessments of placing 1200 men on one site in a predominantly residential community? Can we see the risk assessments?

The cohort for the site has not yet been decided, The Home Office understands the concerns of the community and wants to work with key stakeholders to manage the impact of using these sites, this will include liaising with local police to make sure appropriate arrangements are in place.

A specialist security provider would be working on site 24/7, introducing measures such as mobile CCTV units to deter and identify any vandalism, criminal, or anti-social behaviour. We are working with local police to ensure appropriate policing for the site and local community.

25. How will you ensure the safety of women and girls in Bexhill and surrounding areas from an influx of hundreds of young men in the town?

The Home Office will continue to work with the police, local authorities and other key partners who are involved in managing community relations to ensure that any issues that may arise are handled appropriately and concerns addressed. To help us work with partners Home

Office have set up regular meetings and will engage locally with impacted communities and residents.

26. The population of Bexhill is predominantly aged over 65 and there is a high proportion of over 80s compared to the rest of the country. Is the Home Office aware of these demographics and was this taken into consideration?

This site at Bexhill has been assessed on a number of factors to determine suitability. These assessments continue. When looking at proposals for new sites, the Home Office takes into account the impact on the local community, and that is why we are working with local partners through the Multi Agency Forum, and will hold regular meetings with a wide range of different representative groups within the community – from elected officials, town councillors, local residents groups and those with, business and commercial interests, as well as charities and community organisations.

27. What will they do with their time?

There would be indoor and outdoor recreational spaces, catering, laundry, and basic healthcare facilities which will be provided by the Service Provider. Transport off the site would be provided by the Service Provider to ensure the orderly flow of people.

28. Will they have access to education, skills and leisure facilities at the centre?

The level of provisions which could be provided are in the early scoping phase.

29. How will the people living on this site be looked after - what internal infrastructure will be put in place such as hospitals, mental health teams, security, maintenance teams etc?

We will be working closely with the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), NHS England (NHSE), the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), and the local NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB) as part of developing proposals for healthcare provisions on the site.

We will be holding regular meetings focusing on health and primary care provision smaller sub teams will work on some of the specific areas of concern.

30. Will they be taught about British customs, values and respect for women?

We would propose running an orientation service when asylum seekers arrive on site, which would be provided by third-party suppliers ensuring that people understand how best to integrate with the community.

We are working with local police to ensure appropriate policing for the site and local community.

On arriving, asylum seekers would receive an induction pack, briefing and orientation about the site and engage in education on the wider locality and community. This would inform them of how to access the services they will need on and off site, as well as their responsibilities and what is expected of them as good neighbours.

31. How much money will they be given to spend?

Where meals are provided the asylum seekers would receive £9.10 per person per week

32. Have you considered or evaluated the likely impact on the local business and tourism sector?

We are currently accommodating asylum seekers in hotels. There is the potential for some of these hotels to take valuable assets away from communities and place pressure on local public services, including local tourist trades and the councils who have had their resources diverted to manage them.

These sites will not on their own end the use of hotels. But they will relieve pressure on communities and manage asylum seekers in a more appropriate and cost-effective way, reducing incentives for people to travel through safe countries and bringing us in line with the approach being taken by other countries around Europe

The site would create new jobs and could bring new investment into the area.

33. How much is it costing local taxpayers?

The use of contingency accommodation for asylum seekers (plus Afghan families on resettlement schemes), such as hotels, is costing the taxpayer £6 million a day.

Plans to develop these large-scale sites that include the proposed site at Bexhill would ensure more suitable and more cost-effective accommodation is provided for people seeking asylum.

34. What benefits or resources will be provided to local community to support the migrants?

By designing the site to be as self-sufficient as possible, we would minimise the impact on local communities and services.

In developing our plans, for the site, the Home Office will assess the additional support measures required, to mitigate the potential impacts on local services.

35. Will homeowners be compensated for the loss of property value?

The Home Office understands the concerns of the community and want to continue to work with key stakeholders to lessen the impact of using these sites on the local community.

36. The direct neighbours of Northeye feel their properties will become worthless and they, their children and homes will become unsafe. How will they be supported or compensated?

The Home Office understands the concerns of the community and wants to continue to work with key stakeholders to lessen the impact of using these sites on the local community

To ensure security forms an integral part of the proposed site, a specialist security provider will be working on site 24/7.

We are working closely with Sussex police to ensure appropriate security arrangements are in place. The safety and security of the local communities, those asylum seekers on the sites and the sites themselves are of the utmost importance.

37. Will they be using local services/NHS?

We will be working closely with the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), NHS England (NHSE), the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), and the local NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB) as part of developing proposals for healthcare provisions on the site.

We will be holding regular meetings focusing on health and primary care provision smaller sub teams will work on some of the specific areas of concern.

38. How long is the site expected to be used for? Is it permanently going to be used for this purpose?

The future of the site will be reviewed on a regular basis.

39. Will there need to be building work completed on the site?

As the site is still under survey we do not as yet have the full scope of any refurbishment

40. Will asylum seekers at this site have a direct contact point at the Home Office to answer queries on their asylum cases?

Asylum seekers would be able to call Migrant Help UK.

41. Exactly what sort of new investment does the Home Office consider this site will bring?

Hotels are expensive and inappropriate forms of accommodation that we have to reduce our dependency on. That is why the Government is bringing forward an arrangement of alternative accommodation sites in the form of disused military sites-and the site at Bexhill-that are cheaper and more suitable than hotels. The accommodation sites and vessels will create jobs and investment to local areas through employment roles on site, for example through catering, security and maintenance roles.

42. What new jobs will be provided?

The site would create new jobs and will bring new investment into the area. These roles could include maintenance, catering and security roles