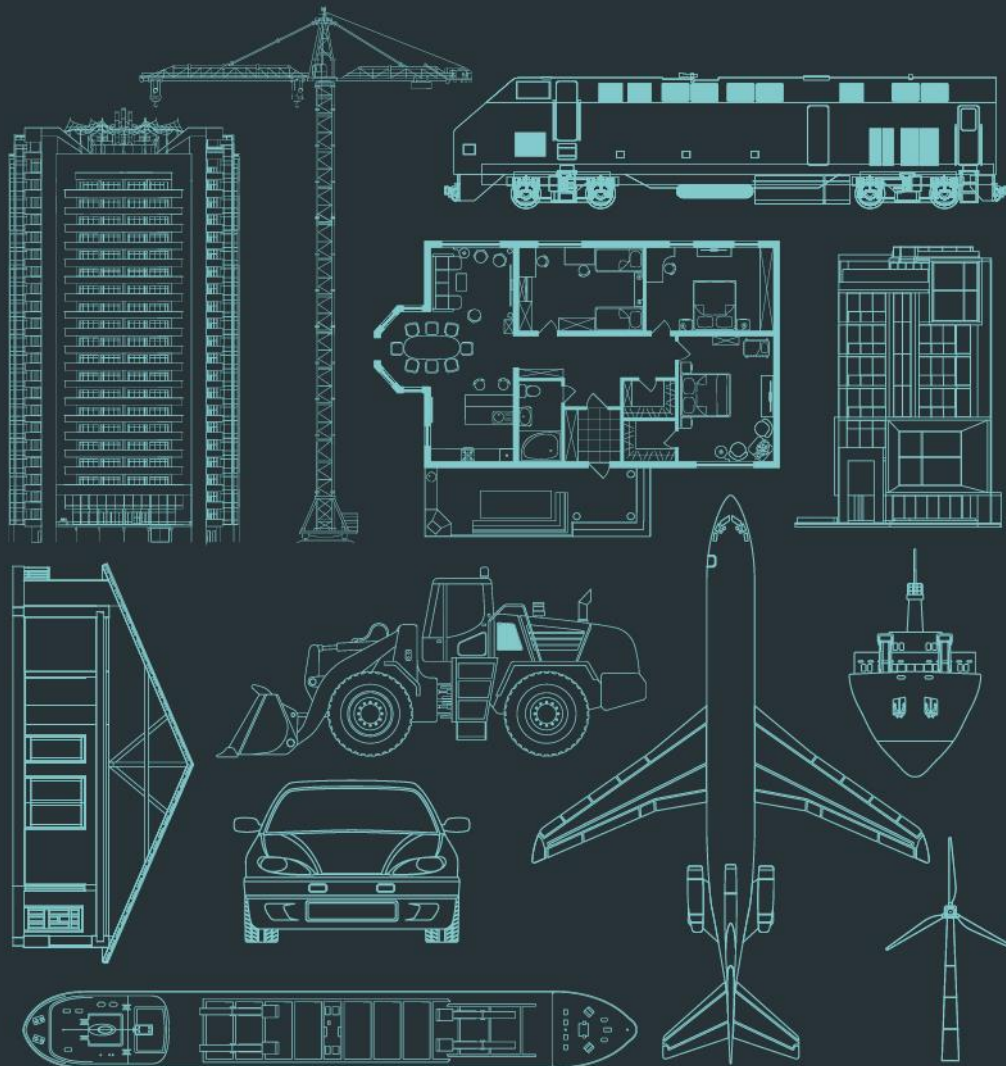


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Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) – Stafford Court, Weston Road, Beaconside

Created for Serco

March 2022

The ideas and information contained within this report and any other associated documents are of a confidential nature and must not be passed on to any third party without the prior written consent of BECG.

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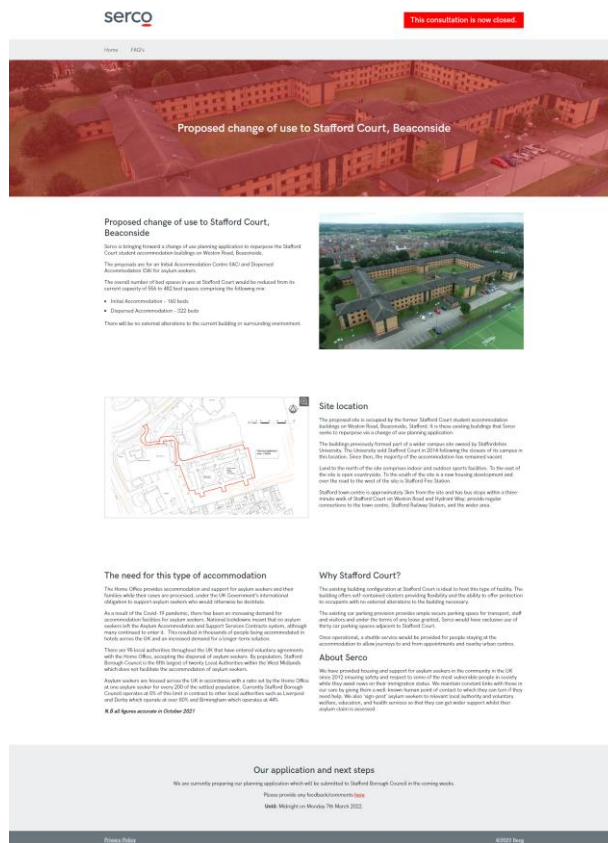
Executive Summary

Serco is committed to consulting with the local community regarding its proposals for a change of use planning application, to repurpose the Stafford Court student accommodation buildings on Weston Road, Beaconside, Stafford.

Residents and stakeholders were given the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the proposals via an online feedback form included on the virtual consultation website.

A four-page booklet was sent to over 440 near neighbours and to local stakeholders and third party groups on Thursday 24 February 2022.

The virtual public consultation was available from **Friday 25th February to Monday 7th March 2022**. The virtual consultation was viewed by 1,877 local residents and stakeholders in this period. An online feedback form was available as part of the virtual consultation for attendees to record their views.



A virtual consultation website, providing information regarding Serco and their proposal for Stafford Court, was available between Friday 25th February to Monday 7th March at <https://staffordcourt.consultationonline.co.uk/>

Serco has carefully reviewed all the feedback received to date. As the application is for a change of use only, Serco was not legally obliged to undertake consultation. However, Serco felt it was important to allow the community the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposals, prior to the application being submitted.

Serco remains committed to engaging with the local community and following the submission of the application, will ensure that interested parties and key stakeholders remain informed and updated regarding the proposals.

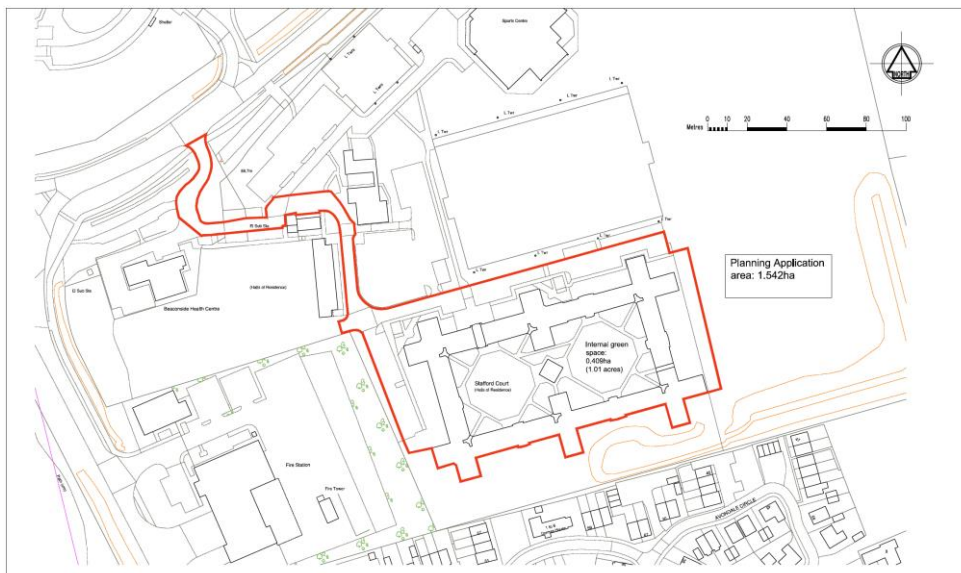
1. Introduction

- 1.1 Serco, the leading provider of public services, is bringing forward a change of use application to repurpose the Stafford Court student accommodation buildings on Weston Road, Beaconside.
- 1.2 Serco is committed to consulting with local residents on their views regarding this change of use application. This document has been produced with the aim of clearly and concisely highlighting the community consultation undertaken by Serco in respect of its proposal for the site.
- 1.3 This document provides a chronological account of the consultation activity that has been undertaken within the pre-application stages of the planning application.
- 1.4 In order to assist with the community consultation and communication, Serco appointed BECG, a specialist communications consultancy, to form part of its wider project team for the proposed repurposing of the building.
- 1.5 All feedback received is accounted for and represented within this document.

2. Background

2.1 Proposal site

- 2.1.1 The proposal site is the existing Stafford Court building on Weston Road, Beaconside, previously used as student accommodation.
- 2.1.2 The proposed development would meet the national need to provide accommodation facilities for asylum seekers, especially due to increased demand after the Covid-19 pandemic. Stafford Borough Council is the fifth largest Local Authority in the West Midlands that does not currently facilitate the accommodation of asylum seekers.



Proposed site plan as displayed on the virtual consultation website from Friday 25th February to Monday 7th March 2022

Existing building

- 2.1.3 The proposal site is the existing Stafford Court student accommodation buildings on Weston Road, Beaconside. There will be no external alterations to the building, or its surroundings. Some internal changes to the layout will be implemented to repurpose the building.



Elevated image of Stafford Court, as displayed on the virtual consultation website from Friday 25th February 2022 to Monday 7th March 2022

Car parking and access

- 2.1.8 Vehicular access to the site will be provided via the existing access point on Weston Road, Beaconsfield.
- 2.1.9 Stafford Court will retain its existing car parking provision, providing ample secure parking space for transport, staff and visitors. Under the terms of any lease granted, Serco would also have exclusive use of thirty car parking spaces adjacent to Stafford Court.

Landscaping and trees

- 2.1.10 There will be no changes to the design of the building, or its nearby surroundings. As such, the existing foliage, landscaping, and trees near the Stafford Court accommodation will remain.

3. Pre-application Consultation

3.1 Statement of Community Involvement

The Localism Act 2011

- 3.1.1 Section 122 of the Localism Act 2011 outlines that a person proposing to make a planning application on land in England should carry out consultation on the proposed application. This should include publicity considered likely to bring the application to the attention of a majority of the persons who live at, or otherwise occupy, premises in the vicinity of the land.

National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

- 3.1.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's policies for England and outlines how these policies should be applied.
- 3.1.3 Serco has had regard to the NPPF at Paragraph 39 when it states that *“early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties.”*
- 3.1.4 It goes on to highlight at Paragraph 40 that *“Local planning authorities have a key role to play in encouraging other parties to take maximum advantage of the pre-application stage. They cannot require that a developer engages with them before submitting a planning application, but they should encourage take-up of any pre-application services they offer. They should also, where they think this would be beneficial, encourage any applicants who are not already required to do so by law to engage with the local community and, where relevant, with statutory and non-statutory consultees, before submitting their applications.”*
- 3.1.5 Paragraph 41 outlines that the Local Planning Authority should encourage other parties to take maximum advantage of the pre-application stage, noting that *“the more issues that can be resolved at pre-application stage, including the need to deliver improvements in infrastructure and affordable housing, the greater the benefits.”*
- 3.1.6 Stafford Borough Council's adopted SCI encourages planning applicants to engage with local communities, prior to making a formal application, specifically in section 10.19 and 10.20.

10.19 *Applicants are encouraged, but not required by the National Planning Policy Guidance, to consult with local communities before submitting a Planning Application.*

10.20 *The Borough Council's Local Validation Criteria requires applicants on larger applications to consult with local communities and businesses prior to submitting Large Scale Planning Applications. This is to give local people an opportunity to be involved in the planning process at an early stage, and help the application to be determined more quickly, by identifying and resolving issues as soon as possible.*

3.1.9 Government guidance and the Stafford Borough Council SCI encourage pre-application discussions and community involvement. As a result, Serco's consultation programme had a number of key objectives including:

- To encourage as much input as possible from the local community, including residents, interest groups, councillors and businesses
- To provide the community with a genuine opportunity to provide feedback on the plans
- To identify and address any issues raised by the local community and stakeholders

3.1.10 Therefore, prior to submitting the formal planning application for the site, Serco undertook a programme of community consultation, as outlined in this Statement of Community Involvement.

3.1.11 It has to be noted that as the application is for a change of use only, there was no legal requirement on Serco to consult with the local community.

3.2 Stakeholder contact

3.2.1 Serco felt it was important to raise awareness of its preliminary proposals for the site's development with local stakeholders as part of the wider community consultation.

3.3.2 A copy of the booklet with a covering letter was distributed to identified stakeholders on 24th February 2022. The covering letter contained email and telephone contact details and was sent to the following:

- Stafford Borough Council's Leader – Councillor Patrick Farrington
- Stafford Borough Council's Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning and Councillor for Milwich – Councillor Frances Beatty
- Councillor for Milwich – Councillor Andrew Harp
- Staffordshire County Council's Leader – Councillor Alan White
- Staffordshire County Council's Portfolio Holder for Communities and Culture – Councillor Victoria Wilson
- Councillor for Stafford Trent Valley Division – Councillor John Francis
- Staffordshire County Council's Senior Commissioning Manager – Mr Joseph Sullivan
- Member of Parliament for Stafford – Theo Clark MP

- Staffordshire Commissioner (Police, Fire, Rescue and Crime)
- Staffordshire Fire Station
- Stafford and Surrounds Clinical Commissioning Group
- Staffordshire and District Friends of Faith

3.2.3 The initial correspondence outlined the proposed plans for the repurposing of the site. It also included details of the freephone information line number and project email address. A copy of covering stakeholder letter can be found at **Appendix 1**.

3.3 Virtual Consultation Booklet

3.3.1 Due to the ongoing impact of Covid-19, Serco held a virtual consultation to display its proposals for the repurposing of Stafford Court, from Friday 25th February until Monday 7th March 2022. The virtual consultation was hosted online, on a dedicated project website and can be found at <https://staffordcourt.consultationonline.co.uk/>

3.3.2 The purpose of the virtual consultation was to present the proposals to the wider community and gain additional feedback prior to submitting a planning application.

3.3.3 A booklet and covering letter were distributed to circa 440 households and businesses in the local area providing information about Serco, the proposals and details of how to record feedback via the dedicated project website. These were distributed by first class post on Thursday 24th February 2022. The below map illustrates the distribution area:



Image depicting the residential and business addresses targeted in the consultation invitation booklet distribution area

3.3.4 The four-page A4 booklet contained the following:

- Background to the site
- Site layout plan and details of the site
- Details of the virtual consultation
- An overview of the proposals
- Information about Serco
- Answers to Frequently Asked Questions on the proposals

Proposed change of use to Stafford Court, Beaconside



This booklet provides more information about a change of use planning application, being brought forward by Serco, to repurpose the Stafford Court student accommodation buildings on Weston Road, Beaconside.



Who is Serco?

Serco is a renowned service and outsourcing company that has been delivering essential public services to governments around the world for more than 40 years. In 2012, Serco was awarded the COMPASS contract (subsequently renamed the Asylum Accommodation Support Services Contracts (AASC)) by the Home Office to provide accommodation and transport services for asylum seekers in the North West. In 2019, Serco was re-appointed to deliver services under the new AASC in the North West and was additionally awarded the contract for the Midlands and East of England.

In delivering support to asylum seekers, Serco works alongside Migrant Help, a charitable organisation, appointed by the Home Office, which operates an independent national service called Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility (AIRE). Migrant Help can provide asylum seekers with independent advice and guidance on the asylum process and also direct them to other services available in the UK.

What is being proposed?

The proposals are for an Initial Accommodation Centre (IAC) and Dispersed Accommodation (DA) for asylum seekers.

Initial Accommodation is urgent accommodation (usually for around three to four weeks) for asylum seekers who are waiting for their support applications to be assessed in order to arrange longer term accommodation. Dispersed Accommodation is longer term accommodation for asylum seekers to stay until their asylum claim has been fully determined.

The overall number of bed spaces in use at Stafford Court would be reduced from its current capacity of 556 to 482 bed spaces comprising the following mix:

- Initial Accommodation – 160 beds
- Dispersed Accommodation – 322 beds

There will be no external alterations to the current building or surrounding environment.

The virtual consultation booklet

3.3.5 A copy and the covering letter to residents and the community booklet can be found at Appendix 6.2 and Appendix 6.3.

3.3.6 The invitation also displayed details of Serco's dedicated project website address to allow people to access further information.

3.4 Media Coverage

3.4.1 The local media published articles about the proposals and provided information on how the local community could take part in the consultation.

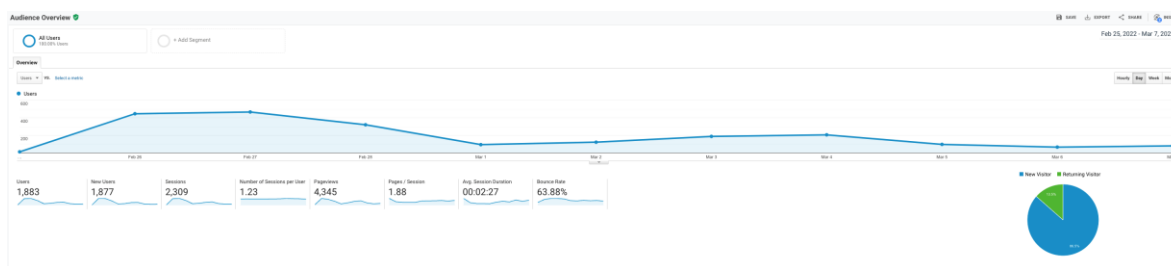
3.4.2 A copy of the media coverage can be found in Appendix 6.4.

3.5 Virtual Consultation Website

3.5.1 A virtual consultation website was created to display information about the proposals. The website was hosted at <https://staffordcourt.consultationonline.co.uk/>.

3.5.2 The website address was printed on the booklet and other relevant correspondence.

3.5.3 Between Friday 25th February and Monday 7th March 2022, 1,877 unique members of the public viewed the virtual consultation.



3.5.4 The virtual consultation displayed details about the proposal ahead of submitting a planning application, which included information about:

- An outline of the proposals for Stafford Court
- Information around the need for this type of accommodation
- Information about Serco
- Answers to frequently asked questions

3.5.5 Screenshots of the virtual consultation can be found in Appendix 6.5.

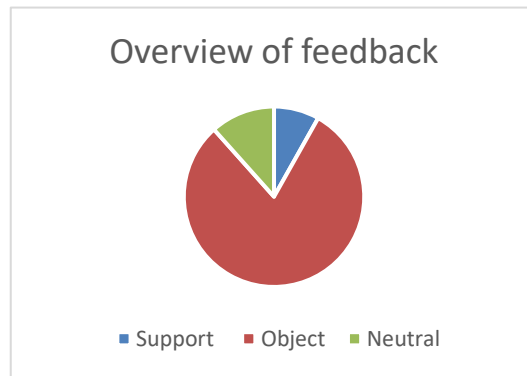
3.5.6 The virtual consultation also provided an online feedback form, which allowed visitors to the website to provide feedback on the proposals for the repurposing.

4. Review of Comments

4.1 Overview

4.1.1 The deadline for feedback from the online feedback forms, was midnight on Monday 7th March 2022.

Total no. of responses	Supportive, including outright support and support with comments	Objection, comments raising primarily concerns	Unsure/neutral stance or no comments
319	26	256	37
(100%)	(8%)	(80%)	(12%)



4.1.2 Of the 319 responses to the virtual consultation, 8% of respondents outlined their support for the proposals and 80% raised primarily concerns and objections to the scheme.

4.1.3 The majority of positive comments received expressed that this proposal would help provide accommodation for vulnerable asylum seekers, especially in the light of the situation in Ukraine. People also said it was a good use of the building

4.1.4 Those who objected to the plans primarily raised concerns regarding the impact this would have on the infrastructure in Stafford, such as schools and the NHS.

4.1.5 Other objecting respondents speculated that the potential asylum seekers housed in the building would [REDACTED]. There were also views expressed on [REDACTED].

4.1.6 Below is a top-line breakdown of comments received from the virtual consultation feedback forms.

NB: The table below summarises the comments and concerns of feedback received up to Monday 7th March 2022. The total number for the analysis of the responses below will add up to more than the total number of actual responses received. This is because respondents were able to raise more than one reason for their response, and these were counted as separate for the analysis.

Analysis of all feedback responses

Theme	Total
Good use of an existing building: Helping Vulnerable People	4
Ukraine Crisis: Importance of helping Ukrainian Refugees	4
Homeless people: Should be used to house local homeless people	20
Security: Concerns expressed over national security	25
Safety: Concerns expressed over safety	37
Devaluing Properties: Potential for value of properties to reduce due to proximity to the facility	47
Pressure on NHS: Risk of increased number of residents in the area putting a strain on the local NHS	61
Too close to local schools: Perceived danger to schoolchildren going to and from school and overcrowding in classrooms.	101
Increase in Crime: Potential for asylum seekers to increase the level of antisocial behaviour and crime in the area	137

- 4.1.8 Visitors to the site were asked to give their general feedback or comments on the proposals. Specific questions were not asked, which allowed respondents the opportunity to provide their personal views.
- 4.1.9 Of the 319 respondents to the online feedback form, 26 stated that they generally supported the provision of asylum seekers accommodation in Stafford Court, with 11 specifying that they wished to do so to provide help to vulnerable people or were moved to do so by the scenes coming out of Ukraine.
- 4.1.10 Of the 256 respondents who were opposed to the plans for accommodation for asylum seekers, there were a number of justifications and included fear of a rise in crime, impact on property values and the potential stress on the local infrastructure systems.

4.2 Feedback comments

4.2.1 Below is a table with a selection of comments from the feedback form:

Positive comments	Road
<p><i>"I think it's an absolutely brilliant idea. The building has been left empty and needs to be used for something! It will create jobs for local people in terms of running the centre, it will mean there are more people in Stafford using local shops which can only be a good thing. How can people see what is going on in the world today, especially the Ukraine, and not want to help?!"</i></p>	Dewsbury Crescent
<p><i>"I think this is a good idea. It will help to house asylum seekers in something other than hotels, providing them with a safe space while their application is being assessed. It will also be making good use of an otherwise abandoned facility that is purposely built as accommodation."</i></p>	Tedder Road
<p><i>"I wholeheartedly support the proposals. This facility stands empty and does not serve any purpose at the present time. It would be good to see it put to use for such a worthy reason. As a parent of two young daughters, I also welcome the opportunity to bring my children up with a greater understanding of the lived., cultures and difficulties of others from other parts of the world where life is different to our own."</i></p>	Winton Vale
<p><i>"Please rush this through and let this be used for our Ukrainian friends. Watching what is happening in Eastern Europe is heart-breaking: We can't take their pain away but we can have compassion. Please, let us do this."</i></p>	Dickson Road
Objection comments and concerns	Road
<p><i>"Ridiculous idea that shouldn't even be considered, Stafford is overcrowded as it is. Given how many residential areas and schools are nearby, housing complete unknowns is dangerous"</i></p>	Melbourne Crescent
<p><i>"Completely inappropriate location, no services in the area in walking distance, 3 schools on the doorstep, located in a residential area, local people do not want this on their doorstep, disgraceful lack of regard for local people, but I guess you'll do whatever you want and force it through anyway! This will ruin our town and compromise house prices!"</i></p>	No Address Given
<p><i>"This is a completely unsuitable location; it is rural with no facilities for the potential occupants. This location is also near to two schools and we know that a number of 'residents' will be single young men, so this again is an unsuitable location. It is also near residential housing. The local facilities can't cope with the current number of residents never mind in</i></p>	Holden Park

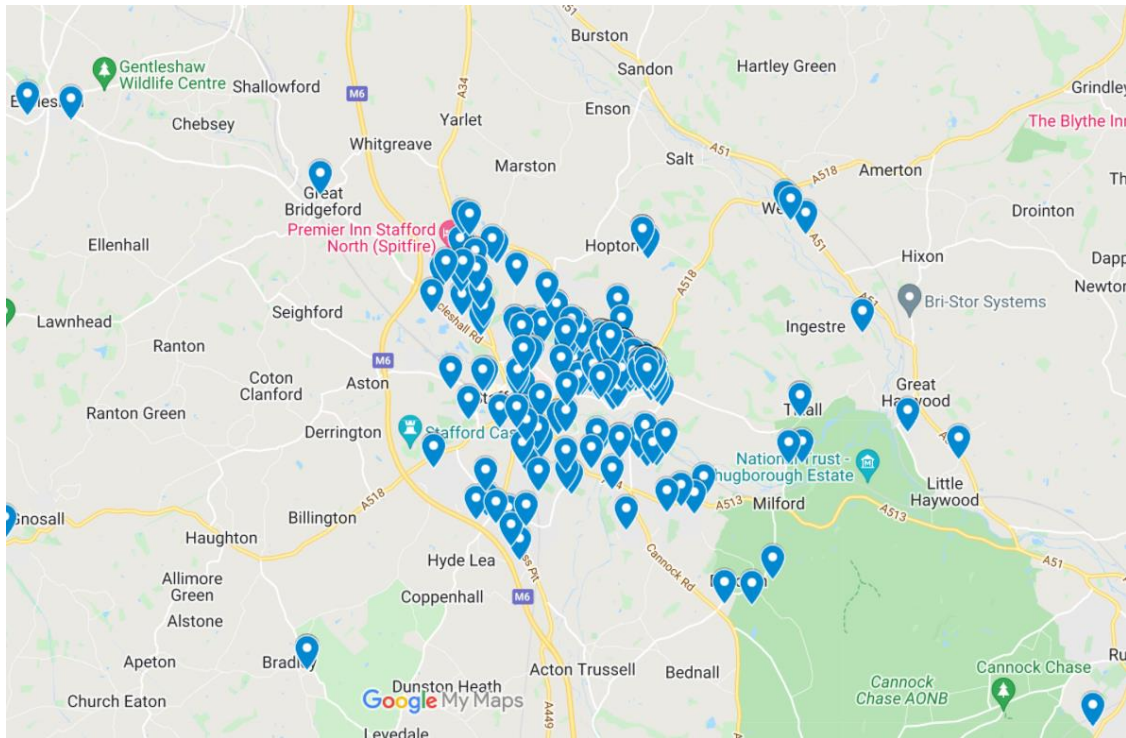
<p><i>upwards of 500 more. While you say they will 'stay on site', evidence from other sites of this type says otherwise. I am entering my very strong objection with our local councillor at Stafford borough Council. To finish, I don't want this accommodation change within my Parish in a clearly unsuitable area."</i></p>	
<p><i>I am very concerned about the potential for this to increase crime rates in the area. There are 2 schools close by and children walking home from weston road may be subjected to criminal activity and feel unsafe. Whilst I do understand that the majority of people housed will be law abiding citizens. The statistics show that crime rates, particularly theft, burglary and violence are higher in areas housing asylum seekers. For the safety of my children, I would oppose these plans. Additionally it would devalue homes in the area if crime rates were to increase.</i></p>	<p>No address given</p>
<p><i>This is unfair the students at Staffordshire university are medical students, whom are all studying to work in the NHS whether that is nursing or paramedic work, the change in the location of where these students live could make it difficult for us to attend university and travel further to our placements. We need this accommodation.</i></p>	<p>Freville Close</p>

4.3 Email responses

- 4.3.1 There were two email enquiries received during the consultation period. One from a respondent asking for information on how to access the website and another raising concerns about national security and the close proximity of the building to a Ministry of Defence facility. Both emails were responded to by a member of the project team.

4.4 Response areas

4.4.1 The vast majority of the responses came from the ST16 to ST18 post code areas, with some responses coming from as far afield as Edinburgh. The below maps shows where the most frequent responses were sent from:



5. Next Steps

5.1 Planning application

- 5.1.1 Serco has reviewed the comments received and is grateful for the feedback received. A planning application will shortly be submitted to Stafford Borough Council, which will address the concerns raised as part of this consultation.

- 5.1.2 There will be further opportunities for the local community and stakeholders to make their views known as part of the planning process

6. Appendices

- 6.1 Covering stakeholder letter
- 6.2 Covering neighbouring resident letter
- 6.3 Consultation invitation booklet
- 6.4 Media clippings
- 6.5 Screenshots of the virtual consultation

6.1 Covering stakeholder letter

Dear «Salutation»

Proposed change of use to Stafford Court, Beaconside

Serco, the leading provider of public services, is bringing forward proposals for a change of use planning application to repurpose the Stafford Court student accommodation buildings on Weston Road, Beaconside, Stafford. Our proposal is to provide an Initial Accommodation Centre (IAC) and Dispersed Accommodation (DA) for asylum seekers. The Home Office has a statutory requirement, under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, to arrange accommodation for asylum seekers and their dependents who would otherwise be destitute.

Given your role in the local community I am writing to make you aware of the proposal and to provide more detail about our plans. Serco believes that Stafford Court is well suited to support the proposed facility. This is due to the configuration of the building to provide self-contained clusters allowing for flexibility and protection.

The centre will be comprised of Initial Accommodation (IA) and Dispersed Accommodation (DA). Initial Accommodation is urgent accommodation (usually for around four-to-six weeks) for asylum seekers who are waiting for their support applications to be assessed in order to arrange longer term accommodation. Dispersed Accommodation is longer term accommodation for single (male and female) asylum seekers to stay until their asylum claim has been fully determined.

We will shortly be commencing a programme of pre-application engagement with the local community and have appointed communications agency BECG to support us with this. We have issued a letter and information booklet to local residents outlining our proposals and inviting them to provide their feedback via our website www.staffordcourt.consultationonline.co.uk.

I hope that you find this update useful, but should you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact Emily Grisewood at emily.grisewood@becg.com or on 0161 359 4106.

Yours sincerely,



Property Director, AASC
Serco

6.2 Covering neighbouring residents letter

Dear resident,

Proposed change of use to Stafford Court, Beaconside

We are writing to inform you of proposals by Serco, the leading provider of public services, for change of use planning application to repurpose the Stafford Court student accommodation buildings on Weston Road, Beaconside, Stafford. We are inviting you to comment on the proposals during a 10-day period of local engagement which will run until **midnight on Monday 7 March 2022**.

Our proposal is to provide an Initial Accommodation Centre (IAC) and Dispersed Accommodation (DA) for asylum seekers. The Home Office has a statutory requirement, under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, to arrange accommodation for asylum seekers and their dependents who would otherwise be destitute. Serco believes that Stafford Court is well suited to support the proposed facility. This is due to the configuration of the building to provide self-contained clusters allowing for flexibility and protection.

The centre will be comprised of Initial Accommodation (IA) and Dispersed Accommodation (DA). Initial Accommodation is urgent accommodation (usually for around four-to-six weeks) for asylum seekers who are waiting for their support applications to be assessed in order to arrange longer term accommodation. Dispersed Accommodation is longer term accommodation for single (male and female) asylum seekers to stay until their asylum claim has been fully determined.

We have enclosed an information booklet outlining our proposals and explaining how to view them online and provide feedback via our consultation website www.staffordcourt.consultationonline.co.uk.

Yours faithfully,



**Property Director, AASC
Serco**

6.3 Consultation invitation booklet

Proposed change of use to Stafford Court, Beaconside



This booklet provides more information about a change of use planning application, being brought forward by Serco, to repurpose the Stafford Court student accommodation buildings on Weston Road, Beaconside.



Who is Serco?

Serco is a renowned service and outsourcing company that has been delivering essential public services to governments around the world for more than 40 years. In 2012, Serco was awarded the COMPASS contract (subsequently renamed the Asylum Accommodation Support Services Contracts (AASC)) by the Home Office to provide accommodation and transport services for asylum seekers in the North West. In 2019, Serco was re-appointed to deliver services under the new AASC in the North West and was additionally awarded the contract for the Midlands and East of England.

In delivering support to asylum seekers, Serco works alongside Migrant Help, a charitable organisation, appointed by the Home Office, which operates an independent national service called Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility (AIRE). Migrant Help can provide asylum seekers with independent advice and guidance on the asylum process and also direct them to other services available in the UK.

What is being proposed?

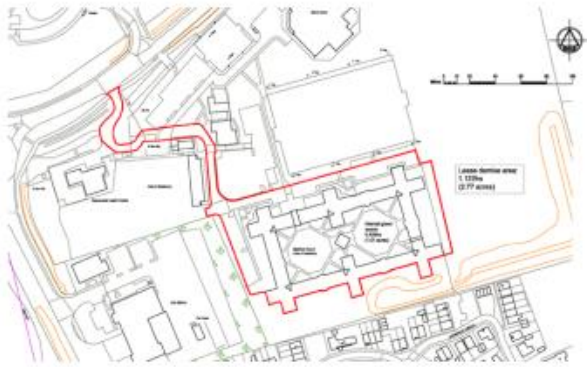
The proposals are for an Initial Accommodation Centre (IAC) and Dispersed Accommodation (DA) for asylum seekers.

Initial Accommodation is urgent accommodation (usually for around three to four weeks) for asylum seekers who are waiting for their support applications to be assessed in order to arrange longer term accommodation. Dispersed Accommodation is longer term accommodation for asylum seekers to stay until their asylum claim has been fully determined. Stafford Court will be used to accommodate single men and women only.

The overall number of bed spaces in use at Stafford Court would be reduced from its current capacity of 556 to 482 bed spaces comprising the following mix:

- Initial Accommodation – 160 beds
- Dispersed Accommodation – 322 beds

There will be no external alterations to the current building or surrounding environment.



Site location

The proposed site is occupied by the former Stafford Court student accommodation buildings on Weston Road, Beaconside, Stafford. It is these existing buildings that Serco seeks to repurpose via a change of use planning application.

The buildings previously formed part of a wider campus site owned by Staffordshire University. The University sold Stafford Court in 2014 following the closure of its campus in this location. Since then, the majority of the accommodation has remained vacant.

Land to the north of the site comprises indoor and outdoor sports facilities. To the east of the site is open countryside. To the south of the site is a new housing development and over the road to the west of the site is Stafford Fire Station.

Stafford town centre is approximately 3km from the site and bus stops within a three-minute walk of Stafford Court on Weston Road and Hydrant Way provide regular connections to the town centre.



Stafford Court

The need for this type of accommodation

The Home Office provides accommodation and support for asylum seekers and their families while their cases are processed, under the UK government's international obligation to support asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute.

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been an increasing demand for accommodation facilities for asylum seekers. National lockdowns meant that no asylum seekers left the Asylum Accommodation and Support Services Contracts system although many continued to enter it, resulting in thousands of people being accommodated in hotels across the UK and an increased demand for a longer-term solution.

Stafford Borough Council, which is the fifth largest area in the country by population, has not engaged with the Home Office on this issue and therefore does not currently provide any accommodation for asylum seekers.

Asylum seekers are housed across the UK in accordance with a ratio set by the Home Office at one asylum seeker for every 200 of the settled population. Currently Stafford Borough Council operates at 0% of this limit in contrast to other local authorities such as Liverpool and Derby which operate at over 80% and Birmingham which operates at 44%.

N.B all figures accurate in October 2021

Why Stafford Court?

The existing building configuration at Stafford Court is ideal to host this type of facility. The building offers self-contained clusters providing flexibility and the ability to offer protection to occupants with no external alterations to the building necessary.

The existing car parking provision provides ample secure parking space for transport, staff and visitors and under the terms of any lease granted, Serco would have exclusive use of thirty car parking spaces adjacent to Stafford Court.

Once operational, a shuttle service would be provided for people staying at the accommodation to allow journeys to and from nearby urban centres.

Our application and next steps

Thank you for taking the time to read through our information booklet.

We are currently preparing our planning application which will be submitted to Stafford Borough Council in the coming weeks.

You can view the plans on our website and provide any feedback you have. Our website is available at: www.staffordcourt.com/siteplanonline.co.uk

Until: Midnight on Wednesday 9 March 2022



Stafford Court

Bringing service to life



We have highlighted some common questions that people have raised in response to similar proposals below. Further FAQs can be found on our website where you can also ask questions that we have not answered here.

How will Serco ensure the health, safety and well-being of the asylum seekers and the local community?

The health, safety and well-being of our asylum seekers and the local community is of the utmost priority. Serco will closely engage with the police and fire authorities to ensure any concerns are addressed in an open and transparent forum. Serco has a dedicated Partnership team who are responsible for any safeguarding issues. The team also engages with local community groups and 3rd sector and faith groups to facilitate mutual understanding through workshops, drop-in groups and activities. All of the above agencies, including police and fire, meet on a regular basis at the Multi Agency Forum (MAF), which Serco will also attend.

What will the asylum seekers do every day?

Asylum seekers are free to come and go and there are no restrictions placed upon their day-to-day whereabouts. There are a number of appointments they are required to attend with the Home Office. In addition, our Partnership team will facilitate on site leisure activities.

Are the asylum seekers able to work and/or have access to benefits?

No, the asylum seekers are not allowed to work whilst their claim for asylum is being assessed. Nor do they have access to any benefits that would be afforded to a UK citizen. They do however receive a daily payment of £5.00 per person.

What influence do the local community have in this process?

There is no requirement to consult the local community on a change of use planning application, however, Serco is undertaking this engagement exercise to provide more information to the local community. Stafford Borough Council will consult local residents and statutory consultees as part of its determination of the planning application.

Do you envisage any site access safety issues - in vehicles or on foot?

No. Serco briefs all our asylum seekers on the basics of road safety as part of their induction. We will be using existing entrance and exit points for vehicular access.

We do not anticipate traffic to significantly increase as only Serco authorised vehicles will be using the site.

Do you have crime statistics for similar establishments?

Through our close engagement with local police authorities, we are advised that crime has not increased in areas where any of our properties are located.

Will asylum seekers hang around on the streets outside Stafford Court?

Serco advises people staying at our accommodation not to congregate in groups, as we are mindful that some members of the local community could perceive this as unsettling.

What steps will be taken to minimise noise from Stafford Court?

We do not anticipate noise levels to be significantly high and as the property will be staffed 24 hours a day, this will be closely managed.

Are records maintained to ensure asylum seekers do not "disappear"? What happens if they do?

If any of our asylum seekers do not obtain prior notification before leaving the accommodation for more than 24 hours, Serco will report any absences to the Home Office for further action.

How many asylum seekers are currently located in Stafford?

Serco does not currently accommodate any Asylum seekers in Stafford.

When would Stafford Court be open for use by asylum seekers?

If planning is successful, we would hope to open the accommodation centre by the end of 2022.

How long will Stafford Court be used to house asylum seekers?

The term of the AASC contract between Serco and the Home Office expires on 31st August 2029 and so it is anticipated that the use of Stafford Court will continue until that date.

6.4 Media coverage

Former student halls could accommodate asylum seekers providing hundreds of beds

By [Kerry Ashdown](#) | [Stafford](#) | Published: Mar 2, 2022

Hundreds of asylum seekers could move into former student accommodation in Stafford.



Stafford Court Beaconside Stafford. From Google

The Stafford Court buildings at Beaconside are being considered for temporary accommodation by Serco, which manages asylum accommodation on behalf of the Home Office.

Stafford Court was sold off by Staffordshire University in 2014 and most of the accommodation has remained vacant since, a consultation website stated.

If a planning application for the change of use is approved by Stafford Borough Council, up to 482 beds would be provided at the Weston Road facility.

There would be 160 initial accommodation beds, providing urgent short term places for asylum seekers needing somewhere to stay before their support applications can be assessed. A further 322 places would provide "dispersed accommodation" for a longer term while applicants wait for their asylum claim to be fully determined, which could range from months to years.

The website said: "As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been an increasing demand for accommodation facilities for asylum seekers. National lockdowns meant that no asylum seekers left the Asylum Accommodation and Support Services Contracts system, although many continued to enter it.

"This resulted in thousands of people being accommodated in hotels across the UK and an increased demand for a longer-term solution. There are 95 local authorities throughout the UK that have entered voluntary agreements with the Home Office, accepting the dispersal of asylum seekers.

"By population, Stafford Borough Council is the fifth largest of 20 local authorities within the West Midlands which does not facilitate the accommodation of asylum seekers. Serco does not currently accommodate any asylum seekers in Stafford.



Stafford Court Beaconsdale Stafford. From Google

"The existing building configuration at Stafford Court is ideal to host this type of facility. The building offers self-contained clusters providing flexibility and the ability to offer protection to occupants with no external alterations to the building necessary.

"The existing car parking provision provides ample secure parking space for transport, staff and visitors and under the terms of any lease granted, Serco would have exclusive use of 30 car parking spaces adjacent to Stafford Court.

"Once operational, a shuttle service would be provided for people staying at the accommodation to allow journeys to and from appointments and nearby urban centres."

The application is due to be submitted to the council in the coming weeks and if it is passed, the accommodation could open by the end of this year.

Residents can have their say on the proposals by [visiting the consultation website](#), before midnight on Monday, March 7.

6.5 Screenshots of the virtual consultation

serco

This consultation is now closed.

Home FAQ's



Proposed change of use to Stafford Court, Beaconside

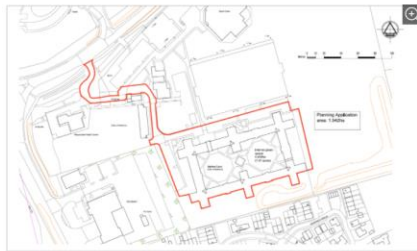
Serco is bringing forward a change of use planning application to repurpose the Stafford Court student accommodation buildings on Weston Road, Beaconside.

The proposals are for an Initial Accommodation Centre (IAC) and Dispersed Accommodation (DA) for asylum seekers.

The overall number of bed spaces in use at Stafford Court would be reduced from its current capacity of 554 to 482 bed spaces comprising the following mix:

- Initial Accommodation - 160 beds
- Dispersed Accommodation - 322 beds

There will be no external alterations to the current building or surrounding environment.



Site location

The proposed site is occupied by the former Stafford Court student accommodation buildings on Weston Road, Beaconside, Stafford. It is these existing buildings that Serco seeks to repurpose via a change of use planning application.

The buildings previously formed part of a wider campus site owned by Staffordshire University. The University sold Stafford Court in 2014 following the closure of its campus in this location. Since then, the majority of the accommodation has remained vacant.

Land to the north of the site comprises indoor and outdoor sports facilities. To the east of the site is open countryside. To the south of the site is a new housing development and over the road to the west of the site is Stafford Fire Station.

Stafford town centre is approximately 3km from the site and has bus stops within a three-minute walk of Stafford Court on Weston Road and Hydrant Way, provide regular connections to the town centre, Stafford Railway Station, and the wider area.

The need for this type of accommodation

The Home Office provides accommodation and support for asylum seekers and their families while their cases are processed, under the UK Government's international obligation to support asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute.

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been an increasing demand for accommodation facilities for asylum seekers. National lockdowns meant that no asylum seekers left the Asylum Accommodation and Support Services Contracts system, although many continued to enter it. This resulted in thousands of people being accommodated in hotels across the UK and an increased demand for a longer-term solution.

There are 95 local authorities throughout the UK that have entered voluntary agreements with the Home Office, accepting the dispersal of asylum seekers. By population, Stafford Borough Council is the fifth largest of twenty Local Authorities within the West Midlands which does not facilitate the accommodation of asylum seekers.

Asylum seekers are housed across the UK in accordance with a ratio set by the Home Office at one asylum seeker for every 200 of the settled population. Currently Stafford Borough Council operates at 0% of this limit in contrast to other local authorities such as Liverpool and Derby which operate at over 80% and Birmingham which operates at 44%

N.B all figures accurate in October 2021

Why Stafford Court?

The existing building configuration at Stafford Court is ideal to host this type of facility. The building offers self-contained clusters providing flexibility and the ability to offer protection to occupants with no external alterations to the building necessary.

The existing car parking provision provides ample secure parking space for transport, staff and visitors and under the terms of any lease granted, Serco would have exclusive use of thirty car parking spaces adjacent to Stafford Court.

Once operational, a shuttle service would be provided for people staying at the accommodation to allow journeys to and from appointments and nearby urban centres.

About Serco

We have provided housing and support for asylum seekers in the community in the UK since 2012 ensuring safety and respect to some of the most vulnerable people in society while they await news on their immigration status. We maintain constant links with those in our care by giving them a well-known human point of contact to which they can turn if they need help. We also 'sign-post' asylum seekers to relevant local authority and voluntary welfare, education, and health services so that they can get wider support whilst their asylum claim is assessed.

Our application and next steps

We are currently preparing our planning application which will be submitted to Stafford Borough Council in the coming weeks.

Please provide any feedback/comments [here](#)

Until: Midnight on Monday 7th March 2022.

Privacy Policy

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FAQ's

- How will Serco ensure the health, safety and well-being of the asylum seekers and the local community?
- What will the asylum seekers do every day?
- Are the asylum seekers able to work and/or have access to benefits?
- What influence do the local community have in this process?
- Do you envisage any site access safety issues - in vehicles or on foot?
- Do you have crime statistics for similar establishments?
- Will asylum seekers hang around on the streets outside Stafford Court?
- What steps will be taken to minimise noise from Stafford Court?
- Are records maintained to ensure asylum seekers do not "disappear"? What happens if they do?
- How many asylum seekers are currently located in Stafford?
- When would Stafford Court be open for use by asylum seekers?
- How long will Stafford Court be used to house asylum seekers?
- What's the difference between IA and DA?
- How long will the asylum seekers be housed in the student accommodation?
- Does that mean that people from the IA will automatically move to the DA at Stafford Court?
- What experience of accommodating asylum seekers does Serco have?
- Will there be any children in the accommodation and will they be attending local schools?

Our application and next steps

We are currently preparing our planning application which will be submitted to Stafford Borough Council in the coming weeks.

Please provide any feedback/comments [here](#)

Until: Midnight on Monday 7th March 2022.