

REBUTTAL PROOF OF EVIDENCE

Mr Mark Jackson MRTPI, Partner, Planning,
Development & Strategic Advisory,
Cushman & Wakefield

Appeal PINS ref. APP/Y3425/W/23/3315258

CHANGE OF USE FROM STUDENT
ACCOMMODATION TO ASYLUM SEEKER
ACCOMMODATION

Former University Halls of Residence,
Stafford Education and Enterprise Park,
Weston Road, Stafford, Staffordshire, ST18 0A

Town & Country Planning Act 1990
(as amended)

Serco Limited

May 2023

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 In response to matters raised in the Proof of Evidence of Mr Wedderburn (CD/F1) I provide further information and clarification in order to assist the Inquiry.

- Site Security - the appellants position in relation to the design recommendations of the Designing out Crime officer.
- Site Staffing Levels
- Existing provision of IA and DA in Stafford Borough
- On site provision of activities for asylum seekers
- Operational Management Plan
- Health care impacts

1.2 In Mr Wedderburn's proof, he refers to an email (CD/F1), which sought additional information from the appellant. The request was made during the time of drafting proofs of evidence, and I consider that the appellant's proofs address each of the questions (7 in total) as far as possible at the time. This rebuttal proof provides further clarification, which I consider would be helpful having read Mr Wedderburn's proof of evidence.

1.3 I should point out that this Rebuttal addresses a number of salient points in the Council's evidence and not intended to constitute agreement with those issues that I have not addressed directly.

2 POINTS OF CLARIFICATION

Site Security and Fear of Crime

- 2.1 Referring to the Staffordshire Police Designing Out Crime consultee's response dated 19 April 2022 (CD/B8) I confirm the appellant intends to introduce a pass-controlled gate within the archway into the courtyard to restrict open access into the internal courtyard of the site. I also confirm communal entrance doors have the recommended certification and all doors have auditable access control.
- 2.2 I refer to Katy Wood's proof (CD/E2, Sections 4 and 6), which confirms on site management and safeguarding meets with the recommendations as recommended by Staffordshire Police.
- 2.3 I confirm the appellant does not consider the installation of a 1.8m welded mesh fence is necessary, as the property and internal areas of the site are secure and the site will be actively managed 24 hours per day and this is considered to appropriate. However, the appellant is agreeable to install the recommended fencing if the Inspector considers it is necessary. The location, detail and timing of provision of such fencing can be secured by an appropriately worded planning condition.
- 2.4 Accordingly, with the exception of additional fencing I consider that all other security recommendations made by the Designing Out Crime Officer have been accepted and implemented, contrary to the statement in Cllr Beatty's evidence (CD/F2, paragraph 10).
- 2.5 I consider that Staffordshire Police are best placed to judge if there is likely to be an increase in crime. I have referred to the Designing out Crime Officer's response in my proof and I note that there has been no change in advice from Staffordshire Police following the protests in Cannock town centre.

Staffing Levels

- 2.6 Mr Wedderburn's Proof (CD/F1, paragraph 4.55) refers to the number of staff to be employed at the appeal site being 12. I refer to Lisa Dysch's evidence (CD/E3) which confirms the number of FTE staff on site will be at least 30. The number of staff of site

is anticipated to change over time in response to the operational requirements of the site. It is anticipated that the following roles will be provided on site and will allow Stafford Court to operate satisfactorily. The staffing levels are a similar ratio to the appellant's existing sites. Therefore, there is no reason to suggest the staffing provision will not work at the appeal site.

Administrator / Support	1
FOM	2
Facilities Manager	1
Housekeeping	9
Maintenance	4
Housing Officer	8
Electrician	1
Housing Officer - 24	6

Existing Provision of IA and DA in Stafford Borough

- 2.7 The Home Office announced on 13th April 2022 (appendix 1) that all local authorities will be expected to be asylum dispersal areas. The announcement confirmed that Local authorities will not be expected to accommodate asylum seekers beyond 0.5% of their total population. ONS data estimated the population of the administrative area of Stafford Borough in 2021 to be 136,800¹. Applying this number, Stafford Borough will not be expected to accommodate more than 684 asylum seekers in dispersed accommodation (DA). IA provision does not count towards the cluster limit.
- 2.8 Referring to Cllr Beatty's evidence (CD/F2, paragraph 18) I note that 77 IA asylum seekers are being accommodated in Bridgewood House located in Stafford town centre. I have referred in my evidence to the Government's 2023 asylum statistics which identifies Stafford Borough as providing accommodation for two IA and two DA asylum seekers. I understand the Bridgewood House site is entirely for IA provision, which does not count towards the cluster limit I have referred to in my proof.

¹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censuspopulationchange/E07000197/>

2.9 I, therefore, conclude that the asylum accommodation proposed within the appeal scheme would not result in Stafford Borough exceeding its dispersal area limit.

On-site activities for asylum seekers

2.10 Mr Wedderburn's proof of evidence (CD/F1, paragraph 4.19) states that *"Unless the accommodation provides sufficient facilities and activities on-site to occupy their time the concern therefore clearly arises that groups of asylum seekers may gather in the vicinity of the facility."* Whilst the appellant has already confirmed that asylum seekers will be encouraged to not gather in groups in the vicinity of the site and behaviour will be managed, it is important to note that there is nothing illegal about meeting up in groups. Nor is there any evidence that asylum seekers who meet up in groups are a cause of crime or anti-social behaviour.

2.11 In paragraphs 4.20 and 4.21 Mr. Wedderburn identifies the absence of a specific site layout plan showing where activities can be undertaken, and details of activities proposed to be organized.

2.12 I have already addressed how the appellant proposes to manage groups of asylum seekers gathering near the appeal site in my proof. In relation to activities, I confirm that whilst there is no specific requirement for the appellant to provide activities, such provision is made on an informal basis on other sites managed by the appellant. The appellant envisages the following activities being made available to people living at the appeal site, as these activities are provided on other sites:

- Children's play area (Laverstoke Court)
- Library (Laverstoke Court)
- Adults Arts and Crafts and Children's Arts and Crafts (Liverpool Greenbank)
- Liverpool FC Drop-in football session (all Liverpool sites)
- Asylum Drop-in session ran by the paster of the church (Liverpool Greenbank)
- Red Cross Drop-in session (all Liverpool sites)
- PT outdoor Classes (Liverpool Greenbank)
- Islamic Society Food Drop off and Chat (all Liverpool sites)
- Women support group (Birley Court, Liverpool)

- Social inclusion drop in (all Liverpool sites)

2.13 The appellant also considers the appeal proposal to provide a greater opportunity for on site activities due to the amount of internal open space available compared to the other sites listed above.

2.14 If the inspector considers it necessary for the appeal scheme to provide a specific list of activities and a scheme showing where these activities will be provided on site, the appellant is prepared to agree to provide a scheme indicating how the open space could be used flexibly to provide activities, as well as multi-functional indoor space that would result in a small reduction in the accommodation capacity of the site.

2.15 I consider the appeal site to have significant qualitative benefits over hotel sites that are used to accommodate asylum seekers, as it has been designed to accommodate people over a longer period of time than a typical hotel and has the physical capacity to provide space for a wider range of activities. I also consider the location of the adjacent sports pitches to be a benefit, as it would be possible to hire the facility to enable sport for asylum seekers and the wider community. I refer to Lisa Dysch's proof of evidence (CD/E3, paragraph 7.11) and I consider this a good way to encourage and support social integration and cohesion.

Questions Raised by Knights (CD/F1 appendix 2)

2.16 I acknowledge that some of the questions were not answered in advance of the exchange of proofs of evidence. I summarise below where the questions raised were answered within proofs of evidence submitted by the appellant.

Q1 – Confirm location of similar IA operations

2.17 This question is answered in Lisa Dysch's proof of evidence (CD/E3, paragraph 6.3). In addition, I confirm that Burrows Court in Nottingham is operated by the appellant and provides both IA (104 places) and DA accommodation (24 places).

2.18 The table below summarises similar facilities managed by Serco in addition to those mentioned in Lisa Dysch's proof of evidence (CD/E3, paragraph 6.3) and examples of larger IA properties.

Site Location	Operator	Capacity
200 Western Avenue, London	Clearspring Ready Homes	678 (hotel)
65 Holmes Road, London	Clearspring Ready Homes	620 (hotel)
Didsbury, Britannia Hotel	Serco	397 (hotel)
Sutton Coldfield, Ramada Hotel	Serco	340 (hotel)
Stockport	Serco	340 (hotel)
Daresbury Park Hotel, Cheshire	Serco	337 (hotel)

Q2 – Will on-site health care being extended to occupants in DA?

2.19 This question is answered in Katy Wood's proof of evidence (CD/E2, paragraph 7.9).

Q3 – Confirm the demographic mix of occupants.

2.20 The demographic mix of asylum seekers accommodated on site will vary over time. The Government publishes asylum statistics which explain how the demographic mix of asylum seekers has shifted over time. I am not aware of any evidence that asylum seekers of a particular demographic are more inclined to commit crime.

Q4 – Provide details of a normal daily routine for occupants.

2.21 This question is answered in Lisa Dysch's evidence (CD/E2, section 7) and Katy Wood's evidence (CD/E3, Section 5).

Q5 – Provide an example of an operational management plan.

2.22 I refer to the section below.

Q6 – Provide examples of local community forums.

2.23 This question is answered in Katy Wood's proof of evidence (CD/E2, paragraph 5.4).

Q7 – Is a planning obligation proposed?

2.24 This question is confirmed in the Statement of Common Ground (CD/C7).

Operational Management Plan

2.25 Referring to Mr. Wedderburn's criticism of a lack of an operational management plan, I note that the operation of the appeal site is covered within the evidence of Katy Wood and Lisa Dysch. Further, the operational management requirements for the appeal site are set out in the Statement of Requirements (SoR) published by the Home Office and, therefore, it was not considered necessary to provide an Operational Management Plan for the purposes of a planning application given that it would lead to duplication.

2.26 Mr. Wedderburn refers to a Security Management Plan (SMP) submitted with a planning application for Laverstoke Court (CD/F1, paragraph 4.55). I consider the points covered within the SMP are covered by the appellant on all the facilities they manage. I confirm that if the Inspector considers it necessary to provide a management plan, then the example from Laverstoke Court would be agreeable.

Healthcare Implications and Funding

2.27 The provision of a health care facility on-site is a requirement of the Home Office. Therefore, responding to Mr. Wedderburn's proof of evidence (CD/F1, paragraph 4.71) I do not consider it necessary for a planning mechanism to be in place to ensure the facility.

2.28 Responding to Mr. Wedderburn's proof of evidence (CD/F1, paragraph 4.80) I confirm that health assessments are provided to all asylum seekers when placed in IA. Asylum seekers in DA have already had a health assessment.

2.29 The funding of DA healthcare provision is explained in Katy Wood's proof of evidence (CD/E2).

- 2.30 I consider the appellant has fully addressed the questions raised within the NHS consultee response (CD, B1-3), which I have already noted was not an objection to the appeal proposal.
- 2.31 I note the correspondence regarding healthcare provision contained with appendix 8 of Mr. Wedderburn's proof highlighting concerns specifically linked to the use of hotels to accommodate asylum seekers. I consider there to be significant qualitative benefits to the appeal proposal over the examples cited in Dr Richard Harling's letter dated 18th November 2022. Dr Harling makes specific reference to the hotels providing 'contingency accommodation' and suggests the properties have been quickly purchased with little consideration to suitability and points to the lack of facilities for cooking on site. The appeal proposal is the opposite and this is precisely why the property was identified. It provides a qualitative improvement in accommodation for asylum seekers to best meet their needs and reduce impacts on the health service.

Declaration

The evidence which I have prepared and provide for this appeal is true and has been prepared and is given in accordance with the guidance of my professional institution and I can confirm that the opinions are my true and professional opinions.