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Promotional material

Wethersfield: community update newsletter

Updated 16 November 2023

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This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asylum-accommodation-factsheets/wethersfield-community-update-newsletter>

November 2023

Key information to update the local community about Wethersfield asylum accommodation centre.

This newsletter has been developed to help provide you, the local community, with updates and future developments on the site, answers to questions you may have and provide reassurances to your concerns.

Who and when

The cohort at the Wethersfield site is single adult male asylum seekers between the ages of 18 years and 65 years. The maximum length of stay at the site is currently set to between six and nine months, except where the Secretary of State is unable to find suitable onward dispersed accommodation despite reasonable efforts to do so.

How long will the site be used for?

The Home Office have always been clear that the site would be used on an initial period using emergency Class Q rights, while we consider both longer term needs and the potential to secure ongoing planning permission.

Under Class Q, the Home Office is permitted to use the site for non-detained asylum accommodation for a 12 -month period.

The Home Office now intends to extend the temporary use of the site, via a Special Development Order (SDO), for a duration of three years from the start of the order

The Home Office remain committed to working with key stakeholders to facilitate their vision for the site. This will ensure that the Home Secretary can continue to fulfil her statutory obligations to accommodate the large number of asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute in a manner which reduces the use of inappropriate hotels.

When will cohorts be arriving at Wethersfield?

Asylum seekers are now on site at Wethersfield (currently about 430). We continue to use a phased approach, gradually increasing the number of asylum seekers accommodated at the site over time and with the site under constant review. The site can accommodate 1,700 individuals when fully operational.

The asylum seekers currently on site are being accommodated in refurbished existing buildings on site. Further accommodation is currently being built on site in the form of modular accommodation, with around 50% of this currently occupied and popular with residents.

What are people told when they arrive?

On arrival, those resident at the site will receive a briefing and orientation about the site and the local community. In addition to information about how to access services on and off site, the briefing explains what constitutes appropriate behaviour. It sets out acceptable and unacceptable behaviours as well as their responsibilities as individuals to act as good neighbours.

Safety and security

We take your safety and security seriously which is why all those being accommodated at Wethersfield undergo robust security checks and biometric tests before they arrive. Full screening of someone's identity is checked against UK and international police databases. If anyone fails these checks, they are detained. Anyone transferred to the site will have been through these checks.

An allocation policy and suitability criteria ensure that no one is housed in accommodation that does not suit them or their needs. If, during their stay, it emerges that an asylum seeker is no longer suitable for the site, they will be moved to more appropriate accommodation.

What kind of security measures will be put in place?

The safety and security of the local community, the staff and those accommodated on the sites are of the utmost importance. A specialist and experienced security provider is working on site 24/7, with measures such as mobile CCTV units. We have liaised with Essex Police around the security of

the site. A police constable dedicated to the area has already been appointed and many of you may have met him already.

If any criminal activity or major incident does occur, our providers have robust processes in place to report them to the police.

Can asylum seekers leave the site?

Asylum seekers at the site are not detained and are able to come and go. The site is self-contained, and we are providing essential services on site to minimise their need to leave the site.

A formal register is being kept at the front gate so that we know who is on and off-site. There is no curfew, but asylum seekers are expected to be back on site by 11pm, with those who do not return being contacted to ascertain their whereabouts. The process for leaving the site is the same as the rest of our asylum accommodation.

Health and safety checks on site

All necessary health and safety checks (including water testing) are delivered at the Wethersfield site to ensure that our accommodation is fit for purpose.

Local community impact

Wethersfield has been designed to be as self-sufficient as possible in order to minimise the impact on local communities, services, and the need to leave the site. This includes providing accommodation with basic on-site medical provision, catering, communal space, plus faith and worship facilities. The site has a large gymnasium which will allow for recreational and sporting facilities to be used all year round.

Health

On arrival at Manston, individuals are offered a diphtheria vaccination and prophylaxis vaccination in line with current UK Health Security Agency

(UKHSA) recommendations.

The welfare of individuals at the site is of the utmost priority. All appropriate protocols are being followed in accordance with UK Health Security Agency guidance to manage the health of asylum seekers at Wethersfield, including medical care and isolation where appropriate.

Extensive work has been undertaken with local and national health partners to work through the specifics of healthcare provision being provided on the site and to reduce the impact on local health services and facilitate primary health care on site which has now been established.

The site has on-site primary healthcare delivered by a local healthcare provider Monday to Friday. This is run by healthcare professionals, a doctor and nurses, who are able to prescribe medication.

Transport

To minimise the impact on the local services, and to ensure the orderly flow of people onto and off the site, a regular transport service is in place to take residents to larger local cities. This transport service is being provided by our service provider and will allow those residents on site, to visit nearby cities and amenities.

This has been developed following consultation with key stakeholders. If off-site services are needed, transport services will be available by the Home Office's provider.

Traffic mitigations have been put in place to space out vehicle movements to minimise disruption as works on the site continue.

Our support provider

The service provider, Clearsprings Ready Homes, is running the site on behalf of the Home Office and they are responsible for the safeguarding of service users.

Our service provider is experienced in managing asylum seeker accommodation in an orderly and secure manner.

Additional support

The Home Office continue to work with voluntary sector organisations to establish what support can be provided at the site. We are aware that members of the local community have offered to lend support to residents of the site. We are extremely grateful for this offer and the support of the local community.

English language classes

Over the past couple of weeks, residents at Wethersfield have been visited by members of the local community who have been providing English classes to the asylum seekers.

Conversational English classes began on 16 October 2023 and have been running weekly on Mondays and Tuesdays (10:30am to 12pm) since.

The activity has received positive feedback onsite from both those conducting the sessions and those attending, with 50 to 100 residents attending every session.

The welfare team has received really positive feedback from residents about the sessions who have expressed their thanks for this opportunity and seeing their proficiency improve with every session.

Q&A

On 25 August, we invited valued members of your community to visit the Wethersfield site, all of the local Ward and Parish Councillors. Questions were raised following this visit and the Q&A was provided in October's newsletter. For those who did not have chance to see this Q&A, this has been provided at the bottom of the newsletter for ease.

Contact us

We understand the community may have various questions and concerns relating to these plans. We endeavour to keep you updated however, if you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact us:

Home Office
Direct Communications Unit
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Email: public.enquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk

Telephone: 020 7035 4848

You can also find additional information on the [Wethersfield factsheet](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asylum-accommodation-factsheets/factsheet-mod-wethersfield-asylum-accommodation) (<http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asylum-accommodation-factsheets/factsheet-mod-wethersfield-asylum-accommodation>) which is updated on a regular basis now the site is live and as and when real time updates regarding the site need to be communicated.

Community Q&A

Question 1

“ I asked this one on the day to one of the Home Office representatives, which he said he would ‘take it back (to the department)’. The question was ‘Why just single men at Wethersfield?’ - His initial answer was ‘that apart from there being more single men arriving, the needs of families and single women are different.’ Saying that Wethersfield couldn’t meet families’ needs. I pointed out that it has housed families, single men and women for decades together, right up until very recently. I also pointed out that part of the fear and resistance to the centre was the ‘single men’ decision. By doing this the Home Office is saying ‘they need separating and segregating’?! In my opinion Wethersfield is the perfect opportunity to house all asylum seekers, men, women, children without segregating. There is a selection process before acceptance to Wethersfield which could be used to assist this.”

The majority of people entering the UK on small boats are young men.

Different cohorts of asylum seekers are not mixed at accommodation sites as each cohort has different needs.

Question 2

“ Second question (not asked on the day) I know they are encouraged to volunteer on the base when they arrive, but I have been asked by 2 people since returning, offering potential opportunities, if they are allowed to volunteer off the base?”

Yes, asylum seekers are permitted to undertake voluntary opportunities, we are working with the local authority and voluntary sector to facilitate this.

Question 3

“ It was unclear whilst we were there - was there going to be ‘on site’ help with applications? I mean official help, e.g. from HO representatives or immigration services/charities. Having potentially so many asylum seekers all in one place, seems silly not to? I have heard that it takes 3 hours to get through to the immigration helpline! It might help to speed the speed the application process.”

Migrant Help attend the site routinely to assist with asylum applications and offer a 24/7 telephone service.

Question 4

“ Finally, would the immediate area around the base be less resistant if there was ‘something in it for them’? i.e. Increased public transport option which would serve those on the base as well, or access to a NHS dentist as it’s a service still to be obtained at the base? Just a thought.”

Braintree District Council are receiving £3500 per bedspace for the use of the Wethersfield site. The Home Office is providing additional funding for policing, and to the NHS to support an on-site primary health service to reduce the impact on local services.

Question 5

“ You said that the current policy is to introduce not more than 30 new residents at a time and that the current population is 108 residents. The intention is that the site is suitable for up to 1700 residents and that whilst the aim was to get that population by end of October is not a goal in itself and attendance would be increased marginally to keep an eye on developments on the site. It would be good to get clarification of that please.”

The site capacity is 1700 and our plans are to increase the numbers on site in a phased manner through the autumn and winter.

Question 6

“ Wethersfield, Finchingfield and surrounding PC’s a small rural community is being expected to pick up quite a bit of the national problem. The residents we saw all appeared to be young, 20 -40 and not Caucasian European, probably more north African. The person that spoke on the day Mohamed from Libya had very moving experiences which one wanted to assist with. It would help to manage that to know the geographic origins, vocational backgrounds and ages of residents and to have updates on future incoming residents?”

Please see below link to quarterly illegal migration arrivals statistics.

[Irregular migration to the UK statistics - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/irregular-migration-to-the-uk-statistics)
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/irregular-migration-to-the-uk-statistics>)

Question 7

“ One reads in the press that illegal immigrants frequently destroy their papers so that their age or identity is not verifiable. It would be very useful to know more about the Home Office vetting procedures for health and identity. How you handle these situations and how sure you can be that you’ve got a correct identity and useful health and other relevant information?”

Migrants arriving in small boats are taken to facilities in Dover to begin processing. Searches are undertaken at Western Jet Foil followed by robust security checks and biometric tests at Manston. This includes checks against UK and international police databases. If anyone fails these checks, they are detained.

Anyone transferred to the site will have been through these checks.

Question 8

“ Generally what we saw was good, especially the medical support and the lunch seemed reasonable. However, several of us had been warned beforehand that the menu is burger, chips and salad every lunch time. This was the offering on the day we were there, but it wouldn’t be

reasonable to expect anyone to survive on this as standard daily item. Can you update us on the menu?"

A food safety audit of catering services at Wethersfield was carried out, which concluded that food service provided to guests meets the appropriate nutritional standards and satisfies relevant dietary, cultural, or religious requirements.

Question 9

" Things for residents to do in the day. There may be issues over ground pollution but it might be useful if residents could be encouraged to have allotments growing their own food. It would provide a bit of variety, save a very small part of the overall budget but mostly give people something to occupy them. We understand that though immigrants can travel, they are not allowed to work and there wouldn't be much work in the community anyway, but any other issues for them to pass the time constructively would be welcome. Is this possible?"

We will explore this suggestion.

Accommodation and onsite facilities at Wethersfield are designed to ensure the essential needs of those accommodated there are met. This includes the provision of catering facilities, primary healthcare provision and recreational space.

Question 10

" What is the timescale for these people to be processed and what becomes to those whose application is not successful?"

We aim to make a decision on asylum claims within 6 months, but this is not always possible and there may sometimes be delays. We will however seek to prioritise claims based on individual circumstances.

Where an asylum claim is refused and a subsequent appeal is dismissed, they will be processed for removal. We would expect those who have no basis of stay in the UK to return voluntarily to their home country and we help those who choose to do so by actively promoting the Home Office Voluntary Return Service.

To increase the number of applications being processed, we have already doubled our decision makers over the last 2 years, and we are continuing to recruit more. This will take our expected number of decision makers to 1,800 by summer and 2,500 by September 2023.

Question 11

“ Indeed, given that many appear to move off site – it would be good to know where they go to, how they are located and contact retained.”

Asylum accommodation is offered on a no choice basis and it is offered to individuals who would otherwise be destitute.

A formal register is kept at the front gate so that we know who is on and off-site. There is no curfew, but asylum seekers are expected to be back on site by 11pm, with those who do not return being contacted to ascertain their whereabouts.

The service provider, who is running the site on behalf of the Home Office, is responsible for the safeguarding of migrants. Our service providers are experienced in managing asylum seeker accommodation in an orderly and secure manner.

Question 12

“ An article in the Telegraph 26th August produced government figures stating that of 122,213 asylum seekers awaiting a decision in June 22, that had now arisen to 175,457 in June 2023. Currently the traffic is all one way. What happens to those whose asylum application is unsuccessful and what percentage of asylum seekers is that expected to be?”

Where an asylum claim is refused and a subsequent appeal is dismissed, they will be processed for removal. We would expect those who have no basis of stay in the UK to return voluntarily to their home country and we help those who choose to do so by actively promoting the Home Office Voluntary Return Service.

To increase the number of applications being processed, we have already doubled our decision makers over the last 2 years, and we are continuing to recruit more. This will take our expected number of decision makers to 1,800 by summer and 2,500 by September 2023.

Please see below link to statistics on asylum application outcomes in the UK.

[Immigration system statistics quarterly release - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/immigration-statistics-quarterly-release)
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/immigration-statistics-quarterly-release>)

Question 13

“ For those whose application is successful are they then entitled to migrate their family to be with them?”

Please see link below to family reunion policy.

[Indefinite leave to remain \(permission to stay as a refugee, humanitarian protection or Discretionary Leave\): Family reunion - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\) \(https://www.gov.uk/settlement-refugee-or-humanitarian-protection/family-reunion\)](https://www.gov.uk/settlement-refugee-or-humanitarian-protection/family-reunion)

Question 14

“ How long is Wethersfield going to be expected to be an asylum centre? We’ve heard figures of 1 year and 5 years. Perhaps as no-one knows the future it could be much longer term.”

Currently, the Home Office has a Class Q order in place until April 2024. The use of the site will be kept under constant review. We are updating the community through important local stakeholders.

Question 15

“ Once you’d got 1700 in the centre are you expecting to increase this?”

Currently, we do not have plans to increase the maximum number of bedspaces at Wethersfield beyond 1700.

Question 16

“ We understand that some residents have already left Wethersfield to return to their previous UK occupation address. Can you confirm that this is so, residents have the right to return to a previous place, and if so does this mean that immigrants to Wethersfield who have only just come in to the country can elect their preferred government supplied residence location?”

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A formal register is being kept at the front gate so that we know who is on and off-site. There is no curfew, but asylum seekers are expected to be back on site by 11pm, with those who do not return being contacted to ascertain their whereabouts. The process for leaving the site is the same as the rest of our asylum accommodation.

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