

Chester Road: temporary accommodation

Issues raised, and responses from the project team

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The building at 2 Chester Road is already a homeless hostel, why does it need to be changed?

The hostel is currently designed to house single homeless people. Camden has built new provision for single homeless people elsewhere in the borough, so the hostel is being re-developed for families. Temporary family accommodation is the most sought after accommodation in the borough.

Is there still a need for a hostel on this site?

At present many of Camden's homeless families are placed in temporary accommodation out of the borough. This is often in less suitable but more expensive private sector accommodation. This also puts them far from their established networks and support services: schools and childcare, GPs, extended family, council support workers.

The aim is to provide good quality temporary accommodation for homeless families that is located in Camden, and managed by Camden. Every unit of temporary accommodation that we can provide in Camden offers a better outcome for a vulnerable family.

How can I find the planning application?

Go to the [Camden.gov.uk](https://www.camden.gov.uk) website. Go to 'search for planning applications' and enter the application reference: 2020/3461/P

Why are you proposing to demolish and rebuild, rather than refurbish, especially given that the current building is considered by many to be a classic design, worth preserving?

A full review was undertaken to appraise the possibility of refurbishing and reusing the existing building. Key findings of this review were that:

- The current building needs structural repair, which means that refurbishing could be as expensive as demolishing and rebuilding.
- While the original design may be admired by some, the building itself is no longer fit for the purpose.
- Refurbishing the existing building would not maximize the use of the site, and could not provide enough units of family accommodation to justify the high cost of bringing the current building in-line with building control regulations and fire safety requirements.
- The existing layout of the accommodation in the building would not achieve the level of design quality or acceptable conditions for family living that the Council expects. The design needs to offer families an improvement on the temporary accommodation that they would be offered in the private sector.

Additionally, the proposed design offers greatly improved environmental and sustainability benefits.

How is the council proposing to fund this project?

Camden currently spends substantial sums paying for less suitable temporary accommodation for families in the private sector. Long-term savings could be achieved by housing families in better quality temporary accommodation within Camden, and run by Camden. These savings are central to the business case for rebuilding the hostel.

If the business case has been agreed, does that mean that a decision has effectively been made to go ahead with the project?

No. It means that the project team are able to progress their work and submit a planning application. The project still needs to receive planning consent from the Local Planning Authority before it can go ahead.

The council is deciding on its own proposal – how can that be fair?

The Local Planning Authority (LPA) is a separate statutory authority that reviews planning applications independently. It will assess the planning application for the development at 2 Chester Road by taking into account local, London-wide and national planning policies and guidelines.

The process is the same for any other application that comes before it. Any decisions made are based on legal criteria, and a consideration of policies and guidelines – regardless of whether the applicant is Camden, or a private developer.

How are the views of residents taken into account?

Part of the role of the Local Planning Authority is to ensure that appropriate ‘checks and balances’ are in place to safeguard the interests of residents and stakeholders when planning decisions are made.

The planning application should include a document called the Statement of Community Involvement. This describes how the design team went about engaging with the community regarding their views on the proposals, and how the views were considered as the design developed.

Once the planning application is validated, the LPA undertakes its own (statutory) consultation. The planning officer has been consulting local residents and others about the application for 2 Chester Road. Any matters that have been raised will be considered when the planning application is discussed at planning committee.

What about the views of Islington residents?

The invitations for the first consultation event initially went to Camden residents, however once it was discovered that the Islington addresses had been omitted a second consultation event was organised specifically to include the neighbouring Islington addresses.

Comments on the Stage 1 design made by Islington residents have been taken into account in the design development.

Both Camden and Islington residents were invited to comment on the developed design before the planning application was submitted, and details of the design have been publicly available on the We Are Camden website.

What about the councillors? If they have already approved the project how can they make a ‘disinterested’ decision at planning committee?

There is legal guidance that governs the behaviour of councillors on the planning committee. For example councillors can be in agreement with of the overall aims of a project, but cannot show support for a specific design proposal. If a councillor

expresses support for the development before it is brought to planning committee they cannot be involved in the decision-making on that application.

- The Planning Committee receives a report about the application for each development from the planning officer.
- This report must set out the extent to which the development complies with local, London-wide and national planning policies and guidelines; and make a recommendation based on these policies.
- Councillors must consider this report before making a decision.

What role have councillors had in the design? How can councillors behave impartially at Planning Committee if they have already approved the design?

The project team develops the design independently of the councillors. Cabinet members are briefed on the overall aims, scope and progress of a project, and the financial/business case is approved by councillors. This allows money to be spent on developing the design to a point where it can be submitted for planning. However, this approval has no influence on whether the design submitted in the planning application will receive consent.

These two decision-making processes are legally separate.

- Councillors who have publicly expressed support for a specific design or application must not take part in the decision on that planning application.
- A councillor being in support of the aims of a proposal is not sufficient to exclude them from the decision.

What is the brief for the project?

The temporary accommodation at Chester Road is one of two buildings that are currently used as temporary accommodation. The brief for the architects on both sites was to look at the opportunities to extend and remodel the existing buildings to accommodate family units:

1. The designs must provide a better quality of family accommodation than is currently available at Englands Lane Residence (the existing hostel for homeless families which is being closed) to help provide a better quality of life for families. Temporary accommodation for families ideally needs to be self-contained to protect privacy and help safeguarding.
2. The development must provide a **sufficient number** of family-sized units to
 - a) help meet the demand for it from families in Camden who are or who become homeless; and
 - b) generate sufficient long-term savings to pay for the scheme over time – primarily by enabling Camden to avoid having to pay for expensive, less suitable, out of borough provision.

More detail about the brief can be found in the Design and Access Statement in the planning application (ref 2020/3461/P).

Why is the size of the proposed building larger than the current building?

The Camden proposals are designed to maximize the usefulness of the building – providing the largest number of units for families, while maintaining a high quality of provision and without over-developing.

The planners will assess the building and the area, and the impact of the increased height in line by referencing planning policies and guidelines. They also carry out their own consultation with residents and will consider the comments about the impact of the increased height both on residents and on the conservation area.

The design team has discussed the design with independent 'Design Review panels' and consulted the planners for pre-application advice to check whether the height of their design might be considered acceptable.

However this doesn't mean that it will receive planning consent; this will only be decided at the planning committee when the application is discussed.

The proposed units don't meet National Housing Standards. How can these small spaces be appropriate for families, who may stay there for more than 12 months?

There are no National Housing Standards that apply to temporary accommodation, as – by definition – the accommodation is for short-term use.

The designs provide significant improvement on existing provision for families:

The proposed units are at least 25m² and are self-contained, with a kitchen, bathroom and laundry facilities. The units are also double-aspect, with windows and natural light from two sides.

Previous accommodation at Englands Lane hostel was mostly single aspect and 18m² with facilities for laundry and cooking often provided on a shared/communal basis.

We believe the designs represent a good quality of interim living accommodation until a more permanent housing solution is available.

How does the design – for example the use of materials such as green tiles – respond to the Conservation Area? Who decides?

A Heritage report prepared by an independent consultant is included in the planning application. This considers the impact of losing the original building and the contribution of the proposed design on the Conservation Area.

A specialist planning officer with responsibility for conservation areas will review the report, consider the impact of the proposals, and consult with the Conservation Area Committees. The recommendations of this officer will also be included in the report that goes to the planning committee.

The planning committee will ask to be supplied with samples of the proposed external materials – such as the green tiles. Members of the committee will assess these when the application is heard and can object to any materials they feel are inappropriate.

Residents living around the hostel are concerned about the impact of the new building on their homes. In particular the increase in height and massing and the impact on daylight and sunlight.

The impact of the design will be closely considered at the planning committee. The planning application contains an independent technical report into the changes to daylight and sun light on adjacent properties.

This study of daylight and sunlight uses agreed standards of assessment and measurement. The planning officer will use the national guidelines for daylight and sunlight to judge whether the impact on neighbouring properties is acceptable, and this data will form part of the report produced for planning committee.

A larger number of residents could occupy the site given the increased capacity in the new design. How is the impact of this being assessed? Isn't it an over-development?

The planning officer will assess the impact of the larger number of residents using the existing guidelines and policies.

The pre-planning application advice indicated that the proposed increase in height and density (number of residents) was likely to be acceptable; though this will be considered in more detail in the report to the planning committee. The planning committee can accept or reject any recommendation of the planning officer, but the decision needs to be based on the existing policies and guidelines.

The building is likely to be intensively used, with families living close together in small units. Will local services (such as GPs, transport) be over-run?

A report about the impact on services of the change of use was put together by the Camden and Islington Commissioning team. This is included in the planning application.

Camden is already investing millions into the facilities of the nearest community provider, Highgate Newtown Community Centre. This voluntary sector organisation provides a great offer for local families and will be a welcome resource for the families staying in temporary accommodation at Chester Road.

How has the fire safety risk been considered?

Camden employs a Resident Safety team, and a fire strategy has to be agreed with these specialist officers for every building that Camden develops. This team has already been consulted about the design of the hostel.

- If planning permission is granted, work on the hostel building will not be able to start until independent assessments of fire safety have been carried out.
- The finished building cannot be occupied until fire safety tests have been successfully completed and a certificate of compliance issued.

The fire strategy report is reviewed by the London Fire Brigade as part of the Building Control process. The building control application has been submitted for Chester Road and a response is currently being awaited.

How will any extra noise and nuisance created by the families in the new building be handled to avoid disturbing neighbouring residents?

The team that will be based on site are committed to liaising with local residents with the aim of managing any nuisance that may arise.

We believe that homeless families are less likely to create a nuisance for residents than the previous cohort of single homeless people. This view is shared by police officers from Safer Neighbourhoods who have experience of dealing with anti-social behaviour across the Camden/Islington border.

Families are more likely to engage with nurseries and play projects, schools, community centres, and leisure and library facilities in the area.

How has the environment – trees, green corridors, wildlife habitats – been taken into account?

There is an Arboricultural Impact Assessment (trees) and an Ecological Appraisal included in the planning application. These reports have been prepared by independent professionals who specialize in these areas.

How will Camden minimize disturbance to neighbouring residents and ensure that residents' issues are listened to and acted upon?

If planning permission is granted, Camden officers and the contractors will meet with neighbouring residents before and during the construction of the new hostel.

The hostel managers will also attend meetings with neighbouring residents and establish good communications with those living around the premises. This will enable residents to raise any issues directly with the people responsible, as soon as issues occur.

This should make it easier to prevent and tackle any nuisance or disturbance, and get a swift resolution if there are issues.