

INTERNATIONAL HOUSE, STUBBS GATE, NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME
NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

24/00475/DEEM3

The application seeks full planning permission for the change of use of an existing office building to a Homeless Hub and HMO shelter for homeless people.

The site lies within the Town Centre of Newcastle as defined on the Local Development Framework Proposals Map and is within a Town Centre Housing Area in the Newcastle Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document.

The statutory 8-week period for the determination expires on 22 August 2024.

RECOMMENDATION

Permit, subject to conditions relating to the following: -

- 1. Time limit**
- 2. Approved plans**
- 3. installation of glazing and ventilation**
- 4. Mitigation of mechanical plant noise**
- 5. Details and provision of mechanical ventilation**
- 6. Details of security measures**

Reason for Recommendation

The proposed use within a highly sustainable location at the edge of the town centre is considered appropriate. The application raises no highway safety issues and it is not considered that there is any sound justification for objecting to the application on the grounds of the potential effect on the incidence of crime and disorder.

Statement as to how the Local Planning Authority has worked with the applicant in a positive and proactive manner in dealing with this application

Additional information was sought and received, and the proposed development is now considered to be a sustainable form of development that complies with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework.

KEY ISSUES

The application seeks full planning permission for the change of use of an existing office building to a Homeless Hub and HMO shelter for homeless people. It would involve a transfer of existing services which run at the Salvation Army, Bridge Street, Newcastle (Homeless Hub) and Merrial Street, Newcastle (residential accommodation).

The site lies within the Town Centre of Newcastle as defined on the Local Development Framework Proposals Map and is within a Town Centre Housing Area in the Newcastle Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document.

External changes to the building would be minimal and therefore, there would be no impact on the character and appearance of the area. Issues raised by objectors regarding the potential impact on the trade of the nearby public house and the impact on property value are not material planning considerations. Therefore, the key issues for consideration in the determination of this application are:

- The principle of the proposed use
- Impact on residential amenity
- Parking and highway safety

The principle of the proposed use

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Town Centre Housing Areas as defined in the Newcastle Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document are areas where housing still predominates. The purpose of the classification is intended to prevent further penetration of business uses into those areas.

The proposed use would comprise two elements. A Homeless Hub would be open during the day, providing hot meals, showers and laundry facilities along with visiting services for homeless people to access in one place. Services include Citizens Advice Bureau, supported housing providers and mental health services. In addition, residential accommodation would be provided in the form of a House of Multiple Occupation (HMO) with 12 bedrooms and shared lounge and kitchen facilities.

The residential accommodation is a suitable use within the Town Centre Housing Area and the location of the Hub within a highly sustainable location at the edge of the town centre is considered appropriate. The use would serve the needs of the local population and the principle of the development is considered acceptable.

Impact on residential amenity

Paragraph 96 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places and beautiful buildings which are safe and accessible, so that crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion.

A number of objections have been received from local residents expressing concern about the location of the use within a residential area and the potential impact of antisocial behaviour and crime.

As set out above, the Homeless Hub would provide hot meals, showers and laundry facilities along with visiting services for homeless people to access in one place. This proposal would provide dedicated facilities to improve the existing service in the town centre so both the cohort for the building and the services themselves are already in the town. The service would be managed by the Borough Council Rough Sleeper and Homelessness Team who have provided information setting out that at the existing Homeless Hub in Bridge Street, the number of homeless people using the service ranged from 63 to 143 per month during 2023. It is anticipated that a similar number of people would use the service in its new location.

The hub would have 6 members of staff and the proposed hours of opening are 9am – 5pm, Monday to Friday. The applicant has advised that it is likely that it would be open for a maximum of 2 hours per day but the longer opening hours requested are to allow for some seasonal flexibility as needs can change depending on the weather.

In addition, residential accommodation would be provided in the form of a House of Multiple Occupation (HMO) with 12 bedrooms and shared lounge and kitchen facilities. The accommodation would have 2 members of staff on site at all times with security present at night. Access would be controlled both at the external gate and at the building entrances and residents would have to call security prior to being permitted to enter. The building would have CCTV in all communal areas, both indoor and outdoor, which would be monitored by the staff.

The applicant considers that the building is in an ideal location with good parking and secure boundary walls. The existing building plan is also well suited to the proposed use with separate areas for the hub and the residential use. It is stated that the high boundary wall and extensive proposed CCTV coverage would protect neighbouring residents and also users of the building.

Staffordshire Police has stated that from a practicality/functionality perspective, there are a large number of positives with the proposals including the fact that the site is well-enclosed by high walls and adjacent gates and that there are a limited number of windows particularly at ground floor level. The intention to provide clear separation between the ground floor homeless hub element and the first-floor HMO accommodation is welcomed as is the well-positioned staff office to aid site supervision. The proposed security measures including CCTV, staff/security-controlled access to residential areas and the presence of security personnel at night in addition to staff members is acknowledged. It is concluded that essentially, from a building/site practicality/functionality perspective, there would appear to be very

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little that could be viewed as negative, and indeed there are potentially a large number of positive aspects that would appear to be well suited to the proposed function of the building/site.

There appears to be no evidential basis for residents' concerns and given the positive comments of the Police, it is not considered that there is any sound justification for objecting to the application on the grounds of the potential effect on the incidence of crime and disorder.

Residential areas have been laid out to situate bedrooms where they have access to natural light and opening windows. Disabled bedrooms are situated on the ground floor. The application is accompanied by a Noise Impact Assessment and further to the submission of additional information at the request of the Environmental Health Division, no objections are raised on noise grounds subject to the imposition of conditions.

Parking and highway safety

Paragraph 115 of the NPPF states that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.

The site is served by an existing access and there is a car park with spaces for 10 vehicles. One of the spaces would be used for a bin store so 9 spaces are proposed. There are no parking standards in the Local Plan for HMOs but given the circumstances of the future occupants and the town centre location of the site, with sustainable transport links and public car parks nearby, the car parking provision is considered appropriate.

Reducing Inequalities

The Equality Act 2010 says public authorities must comply with the public sector equality duty in addition to the duty not to discriminate. The **public sector equality duty** requires **public authorities** to consider or think about how their policies or decisions affect people who are **protected** under the Equality Act. If a public authority hasn't properly considered its public sector equality duty it can be challenged in the courts.

The duty aims to make sure public authorities think about things like discrimination and the needs of people who are disadvantaged or suffer inequality, when they make decisions.

People are protected under the Act if they have protected characteristics. The characteristics that are protected in relation to the public sector equality duty are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

When public authorities carry out their functions the Equality Act says they must have due regard or think about the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't
- Foster or encourage good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't

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With regard to this proposal and the matters that can be addressed, it is considered that it will not have a differential impact on those with protected characteristics.

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APPENDIX

Policies and proposals in the approved development plan relevant to this decision: -

Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Core Spatial Strategy (CSS) 2006-2026

Policy SP3: Spatial Principles of Movement and Access
Policy ASP5: Newcastle and Kidsgrove Urban Neighbourhoods Area Spatial Policy
Policy CSP1: Design Quality

Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan (NLP) 2011

Policy T16: Development – General Parking Requirements

Other material considerations include:

National Planning Policy Framework (2023)

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) (as updated)

Supplementary Planning Guidance/Documents

Newcastle Town Centre SPD (2009)

Relevant Planning History

None relevant.

Views of Consultees

The **Environmental Health Division** has no objections subject to conditions regarding installation of glazing and ventilation, mitigation of mechanical plant noise and details and provision of mechanical ventilation.

Staffordshire Police acknowledge that there are statutory obligations placed upon local authorities to put in place matters to tackle homelessness and the proposals are part of the response to that obligation. Indeed, the proposals aim to provide bespoke provision replacing the existing Bridge Street Salvation Army homeless hub and some Merrial Street accommodation. From a practicality/functionality perspective, there are a large number of positives with the proposals including:

- Site well-enclosed by high walls and adjacent gates;
- No ground floor windows facing the street;
- Only two high-level windows facing the rear alley (south-west elevation);
- No windows in the south-west and south-east elevations at first floor;
- No buildings immediately opposite on Stubbs Gate;
- The intention to provide clear separation between the ground floor homeless hub element and the first-floor HMO accommodation.
- Well-positioned staff office to aid site supervision, and potentially coming and going;
- A fairly well enclosed courtyard area to reduce noise spill;
- Centrally located entrance into the homeless hub element;
- Route between the building and No.12 Stubbs gate blocked off, and only one way into and out of the site;
- Security controlled access to new external pedestrian gate and site (outside of open day hours), the pedestrian gate being fitted with an intercom - *NB. It is recommended that this is audio/visual;*
- Staff/security-controlled access to residential areas;
- One security personnel at night plus 2 staff members;
- 24/7 staff presence;
- Centrally located cycle parking;

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- Well enclosed bin store;
- Extensive proposed CCTV camera coverage with well-positioned screen in office to allow for staff monitoring.

At face value, these practical aspects of the proposals appear to indicate the building could serve its proposed purpose well.

A number of security recommendations are made but it is concluded that essentially, from a building/site practicality/functionality perspective, there would appear to be very little that could be viewed as negative, and indeed there are potentially a large number of positive aspects that would appear to be well suited to the proposed function of the building/site.

In terms of the facility's suitability in the wider context, the Local Policing Team state that they have been made aware of the proposal and that they work in partnership with the Local Authority and all partners to mitigate threat and harm and to help reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.

Representations

36 letters of objection have been received. Objections are made on the following grounds:

- Strain on local services.
- The area is already plagued with antisocial behaviour and petty crime, and it will increase as the building will become a hub for drug dealers, users and alcoholics.
- Impact on the peace of the area.
- The neighbouring pub's trade will suffer.
- Impact on property value.
- Impact on mental health of existing residents.
- Should be in either the town centre or a quieter area away from residential areas.
- Should be away from temptation rather than in close proximity to a public house.
- The building is opposite a nunnery.
- Lack of communication from the Council regarding the application.
- Roads are unsuitable for access by emergency services.

One letter of support has been received stating that the town centre needs to get the homeless into the care system instead of them wandering and breaking into empty properties for overnight shelter.

Applicant/agent's submission

The submitted documents and plans are available for inspection on the Council's website by searching under the application reference number 24/00475/DEEM3 on the website page that can be accessed by following this link: -

<http://publicaccess.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/online-applications/PLAN/24/00475/DEEM3>

Background Papers

Planning File
Development Plan

Date report prepared

2 August 2024