

High Peak Borough Council Planning Department
Case officer: James Stannard

By email:

20th July 2023

Dear Mr Stannard,

RE: HPK/2023/0189 Application for a Lawful Development Certificate for a proposed Occupation of non-self-contained residential accommodation (bedsits) by non-students.

I wanted to write to you to express my concerns and those of local residents have in relation to the proposal put forward by the University of Derby to convert High Peak Halls to an Asylum Disposal Centre in Buxton.

I understand that there is a national dispersal policy in place, however I must express my own concerns about the proposal of an Asylum Dispersal Centre in the rural town of Buxton, in the High Peak Borough of Derbyshire despite concerns being raised by both the Local Authority, as well as Derbyshire Constabulary, about the risk and complexity of issues it would present.

I understand that Derbyshire Constabulary have submitted their own objections to these plans through the Safer Derbyshire Partnership. I write to inform you that Derbyshire Constabulary are currently undertaking a multi-agency operation to deliver the first Home Office – Clear, Hold and Build pilot in the East Midlands, within the Buxton area. Buxton has been identified as being at significant risk of County Lines and Exploitation criminality due to its geographical location and high number of drug dependant residents who are all located in a concentrated vicinity, very close to the proposed site of the Asylum Dispersal Centre, University of Derby, High Peak Halls. There is shared clear and obvious concern that the introduction of 270 new residents within the halls, who be significantly vulnerable to exploitation, will impact on any response to tackling criminality in the area and making the High Peak a hostile environment for Serious Organised Crime and Exploitation.

Buxton has been chosen as the first Home Office – Clear, Hold and Build scheme in the East Midlands due to a significant number of high harm County Lines which have sought to operate in the area bringing with them an increased threat of violence and risk to our communities. Derbyshire Constabulary have identified more than 26 different county lines and illicit substance suppliers operating within the small rural area.

Clear, Hold and Build is a framework introduced by the Home Office for bringing the tackling of serious and organised crime threats into neighbourhood policing. It also

involves partner services and the community in delivering and sustaining reductions in serious organised crime. The core aim of Clear, Hold and Build is to:

Reclaim and rebuild communities persistently affected by organised criminal groups.

Restore the relationship between residents, the police and statutory agencies.

The police cannot tackle serious and organised crime alone. It requires the local community, community organisations and statutory partners to work together. The success of the scheme will be reliant on all partners playing their part and High Peak Borough Council will certainly be a key partner in this.

It is vital Derbyshire Constabulary, the local authorities and local health services have robust and well-established support services in order to ensure that we are able to tackle serious and organised crime to protect our communities. There is clear evidence that the support structures required for migrants at the chosen location are not available, this is on top of the pressure felt by already stretched services including Local Authority, Policing and Care in the area.

I am sure you can appreciate that community and support services' concerns are significant but that is just one of the challenges that this proposal would present.

Whilst I appreciate that the University of Derby's application for a Lawful Development Certificate does not specify the intended use, it is public knowledge that the intention is to convert the facility for the purpose of housing asylum seekers. This would constitute a change of use from the present student halls of residence.

I am asking therefore that High Peak Borough Council reject this position and were the University to pursue with their plans, require that they submit a full planning application, at which formal objections can be made in a fair way by all parties who will be affected.

Finally, I would be happy to discuss this matter further with you. Could you please note my objection in the first instance and keep me up to date in the applicants progress.

Kind regards,

Commissioner Angelique Foster
Police and Crime Commissioner for Derbyshire

