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Dear Joey,

Thank you for your email of 19 October 2023 sent on behalf of Democratic Services at Bexhill-on-Sea Town Council. Please accept my apologies for the delayed response from your previous correspondence regarding Bexhill-on-Sea Town Council Residents' Northeye Response. Your email has been passed to the Asylum Support, Resettlement and Accommodation Hub at the Home Office for a reply.

We are unable to respond to any questions directed to your local Member of Parliament, Mr Huw Merriman.

Under the Immigration & Asylum Act 1999, the Home Office has a statutory obligation to house asylum seekers, who would otherwise be destitute, whilst their claim is under consideration. Eligible asylum seekers are ordinarily placed in housing accommodation; however, the unprecedented number of small boat arrivals has simply overwhelmed our asylum system, placing the Home Office's asylum support infrastructure and accommodation services under immense pressure. This has forced the Home Office to consider alternative accommodation options to ensure that we meet our statutory obligations.

The legacy of asylum claims has risen to over 170,000 with the asylum system now costing the British taxpayer £4 billion a year. Since 2018, over 100,000 people have illegally entered the UK by small boat – 46,000 of them in 2022 alone. All travelled through safe countries in which they could and should have claimed asylum. There were more than 50,000 asylum seekers in hotels as of the end of June 2023, costing £8.3 million a day. Including all contingency accommodation, the numbers accommodated are more than 52,000.

The Home Office is committed to making every effort to reduce hotel use and limit the burden on the taxpayer. This is why we are delivering a range of alternative accommodation sites, maximising hotel space, operationalising the Illegal Migration Act and continuing our hard work to clear the asylum backlog by the end of the year.

Aside from the huge cost to the British taxpayer and every crossing attempt being a

potential tragedy, the immense pressure these arrivals place on our system diverts our finite resources away from those in genuine need.

Large asylum seeker accommodation sites are not only more affordable for taxpayers than hotels, but also more manageable and orderly than hotels for communities, as they have healthcare and catering facilities onsite, 24/7 security and purpose-built basic accommodation.

The Home Office is undertaking site assessments at various locations to establish those which can be most easily converted into safe, secure and fit for purpose accommodation. These site assessments included consideration of the land and location of the site, accessibility of services and utilities, the current use of the site and existing buildings and value for money.

The Illegal Migration Act amended the law so that people who come to the UK illegally are not able to stay. Instead, they will be detained and then promptly removed, either to their home country or a safe third country.

The Home Office is therefore looking to expand the capacity of the detention estate. As part of this, the Home Office is exploring the use of the Northeye site for detention purposes. We are carrying out surveys and assessments to determine the feasibility of the site for detained facilities, however no final decision has been made. A detained facility would be self-contained, with all relevant facilities such as healthcare onsite, and with appropriate security regimes.

Furthermore, the site would create jobs and investment to the area through employment opportunities on site, for example through security, services and maintenance roles.

The Home Office recently completed on the purchase of the Northeye site. The Home Office will carry out any necessary works to ensure the remediation of the site and removal of any contamination that is identified.

As we investigate the suitability of the site for detained purposes, we will seek to minimise the impact on the local community. This includes consideration of impacts during both construction and operational phases.

We appreciate the need to listen to and understand concerns about the local impact of any facility, and as site plans develop we will hold regular discussions with local political leaders and local authorities and statutory partners.

Further information will be shared with local partners and the broader community as plans are developed. Once we have carried out these assessments and surveys, we would be keen to meet with Town Councillors to discuss plans and understand how we can best communicate these to the local community.

I trust this addresses the concerns of the residents of Bexhill-on-Sea.

Yours sincerely,

G P Church
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