

MEMORANDUM

To: Simon Ellis
Development and Conservation Manager

From: Martin Lawrence
Strategic Housing Manager

Your Ref: 22/00170/FP

Date: 1 September 2022

**Full Planning Permission : Change of Use from Hotel (C1) to Sui Generis (accommodation with support) and associated external alterations (as amended by plans and additional information received on 6 May 2022)
The Lord Lister Hotel, 1 Park Street, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG4 9AH**

Dear Simon,

thank you for your memo of 17 August 2022 in respect of the above application for full planning permission for change of use of the premises.

The preparation and review of all policies should be underpinned by relevant and up-to-date evidence. This should be adequate and proportionate, focused tightly on supporting and justifying the policies concerned, and take into account relevant market signals, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Paragraph 62 of the NPPF says "Within this context, the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community should be assessed and reflected in planning policies (including, but not limited to, those who require affordable housing, families with children, older people, students, people with disabilities, service families, travellers, people who rent their homes and people wishing to commission or build their own homes)".

The council has a statutory duty to secure accommodation for unintentionally homeless households who are in priority need and a wider legal duty to work with people to prevent and relieve homelessness.

The Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2019-2024
<https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/housing/housing-strategies-and-plans/housing-and-tenancy-strategies> (see section 5):

"The Council has a duty to review homelessness in the district and to formulate a homelessness strategy based on the results of that review. The government's Rough Sleeping Strategy published in August 2018 further introduces the requirement that all local authorities explicitly consider how to tackle the problem of rough sleeping, producing homelessness and rough sleeping strategies by winter 2019."

The provision of this accommodation would specifically help us to meet our stated priority of improving accommodation provision for single homeless people, especially those with complex support needs (para 5.37). Paras 5.14-5.19 specifically mentioning single homeless people and rough sleepers and the issues they face in securing decent suitable accommodation.

The 2016 Stevenage and North Hertfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) update identified a need for additional accommodation for single homeless people with support needs, people in need due to alcohol misuse and people with mental health problems. The latter two groups being a primary reason for homelessness:

[Housing need in North Herts | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/housing-need-in-north-herts)

There is a great need in the district for this type of accommodation; the SHMA indicates that the number of vulnerable people is expected to grow over the period of the emerging Local Plan. By 2031 in Stevenage and North Herts there will be approximately 360 (220 in North Herts.) single homeless people with support needs, 740 (440 in North Herts.) people aged 18-64 in need due to alcohol misuse and a further 470 (290 in North Herts) people aged 18-64 in need due to mental health problems.

In addition, the Government introduced a directive to local authorities to accommodate all rough sleepers and homeless applicants in hotels to ensure people were not living on the streets or in unsuitable accommodation during the pandemic.

The pandemic revealed a large, previously hidden cohort of single people in the district who are living unstable, often chaotic lives. Many are moving in and out of informal accommodation arrangements including enduring spells of 'sofa surfing' with friends or relatives or periods of rough sleeping. The Council placed over 150 single households into hotels (with limited support and facilities) over 2021/22, the majority approaching from unsettled accommodation arrangements. Almost one-third were of no fixed abode, whilst 13% were sleeping rough and a further 8% were homeless on departure from prison or hospital. 10% had been living in temporary or supported accommodation, highlighting a core of clients who have repeatedly lost placements made for them by the Council due to challenging behaviours and unmet support needs.

Support needs amongst this cohort are extremely high. Of the single households placed in temporary accommodation over the past year, 80% had at least one identified support need with over 60% having two or more. Poor mental health was by far the most common, with over half of households reporting this. Almost one-third had poor physical health, with a similar proportion being at risk of or having experienced some form of abuse, including domestic abuse. Alcohol and/or drug dependency was also prevalent (23% of households) whilst 18% had an offending history. Over one-third of households had a history of repeat homelessness or rough sleeping, again reflecting the instability of individuals' lives and entrenched, unmet support needs. Following a recent report in July 2022 of the apparent suicide of a rough sleeper, it appears that three people,

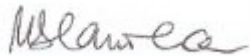
who approached the Council as homeless, have taken their own life since May 2021.

The applicant, Keystage Housing, is an established service provider that provides a holistic "pathway" out of homelessness including accommodation with support to develop independent living skills in order to resettle residents and prevent homelessness recurring.

All units will be let via the Council where it has a legal duty to provide accommodation.

I hope these comments are useful, but please contact me if I can provide any further information/assistance.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Lawrence', is centered on the page. The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Martin Lawrence
Strategic Housing Manager