

Brook Lane Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why are the Council using properties on Brook Lane to house homeless people?

The Brook Lane properties will become supported housing for people who have experienced homelessness. The demand for supported accommodation is very high especially since the outbreak of COVID19. The Council is currently accommodating around 120 households in hotels but at its peak in May 2020, there were over 200 households in hotels. The Council is focussed on reducing the numbers of people in hotels by moving them into their own home. Actions include increasing the number of properties with support so that individuals can be supported to gain the skills they need to maintain their own tenancy. The properties on Brook Lane are considered suitable, the right size and in a good location for this purpose.

2. Why has the Council chosen Brook Lane for a homeless shelter when an Article 4 Direction is in place to manage the number of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in the area?

The properties will not become a homeless shelter but will provide supported accommodation. The Article 4 Direction that came into force on 2 May 2016, allows the Council to assess, on a case by case basis, whether applications for the creation of new HMOs are acceptable or not in planning terms. This does not affect existing HMOs, but helps to control the number of new HMOs created. We plan to change the properties on Brook Lane into supported staffed residential accommodation rather than HMOs and some of the units will be self-contained and some have shared facilities.

3. Who is being consulted and when?

Consultation is underway, starting with a letter from the Housing team to 59 neighbouring properties on 11th September. The Planning department then sent letters to immediate neighbours who are statutory consultees on the 18th September and erected signs outside of both properties on 24th September. Planning have a statutory requirement to consult for 21 days but will still accept comments after that 21 day period. The 21 day period ends on 15th October, however comments will be accepted until midnight on Sunday 18th October to give neighbours time to respond. A total of 59 letters were posted to residents in Newry Park, Brook Lane and Heathfields Close as well as the owners of student accommodation on these roads.

4. Have local Councillors been informed?

Yes, two meetings between Councillors and Officers took place before the planning application was submitted.

5. How many people will the properties on Brook Lane accommodate?

No 26 and 27 Brook Lane will accommodate 13 people and No 28 Brook Lane will accommodate 8 people.

6. Who will manage the properties on Brook Lane?

The properties will be managed by the Council's commissioned homeless support

provider 'forfutures'.

7. Will the properties be supported and staffed 24/7?

The properties will be staffed 24/7. During the day, there will be a minimum of two support staff and at night there will be 1 support staff and 1 concierge plus access to an on-call Manager. Support staff provide a wraparound support service. Handovers take place between day and night staff to ensure the continuity of safe and effective working and a smooth transition.

8. Will there be rules about drinking alcohol?

Like other supported housing projects there will be rules around occupation. For example, residents will be allowed to drink alcohol in their own rooms but not in communal areas or outside the building.

9. Will residents be allowed there during the day or just at night?

The properties on Brook Lane will be the home of up to 21 people who will all have access to their rooms and the building 24 hours a day and will not be expected to vacate during the day or only stay there at night.

10. Will residents at the properties on Brook Lane pay Council Tax?

Residents will be charged rent and service charges to cover payments such as council tax, heating, and lighting.

11. How will the project impact parking and traffic in the area?

Staff will use the private gated parking area at the rear of 26/27 Brook Lane – there will only be 4 staff on site at any one time (at shift handover). There is space for more than 4 cars to park in this dedicated parking area. Not all staff will use cars and the vast majority of residents will not own a car. This proposal should not have a negative impact on parking and traffic.

12. How will drug misuse be managed in the area?

Any illegal behaviour or existing issues around drug taking or drug dealing in the area should be reported to the Police. Some residents at the Brook Lane properties may have substance misuse issues but they will be living in managed accommodation with ongoing support to address all their support needs. Every individual accommodated will sign an occupancy agreement outlining the rules and conditions of their stay.

13. Is there a telephone number for the properties on Brook Lane for the local community should any concerns arise?

The telephone number (to be confirmed) will be a 24-hour number that local residents can ring to report issues or concerns. Forfutures also have a dedicated email address which is hello@forfutures.co.uk. The service manager will address any issues and contact people directly when appropriate.

14. Why are smaller projects away from residential areas not being considered?

Different types of supported accommodation are needed across the Borough. Forfutures currently manage properties that provide homes to 188 people in a range of locations across the Borough including larger supported housing schemes housing more than 30 people, shared houses with 3 or 4 residents sharing and single flats. The Mulberry Centre recently opened on Sealand Road which houses up to 30 residents in their own room with shared bathroom facilities. There is a need for more accommodation in Chester and the surrounding residential areas.

15. Why is Hamilton House not being used or reopening?

Shelters such as Hamilton House were closed across the country in March due to the risk of COVID infection in these communal settings. The Government wrote to all Councils on 3 July advising that all communal shelters should remain closed at the present time to ensure that the virus does not spread.

16. Will this accommodation be like Richmond Court that closed?

Richmond Court was a different style of project managed by a different organisation. Richmond Court provided 36 supported housing flats and 12 emergency 'safe seats' to rough sleepers who often queued outside whilst waiting to be offered a bed for the night. This provision was stopped when the service was recommissioned and replaced with accommodation allocated through the current Outreach service.

The properties on Brook Lane will not be a hub or night shelter. It will provide supported accommodation to residents for several months whilst support staff assist them to move-on to a more permanent home. The properties will not provide drop-in services to other homeless people or emergency beds. The services provided at the centre will be for residents only. The referrals will be controlled by Forfutures and the Council.

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