Engagement Report – Town and Country Planning (Crown Development) (Urgent Applications) (Procedure) (England) Order 2025

October 2026

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1. Introduction

1.1 This Engagement Report has been prepared by the Home Office in support of a submission under the Town and Country Planning (Crown Development) (Urgent Applications) (Procedure) (England) Order 2025; for the continued temporary use of Crowborough Training Camp ('the Site') as non-detained asylum accommodation. The proposal would grant temporary planning permission, subject to conditions, to authorise continued use of the Site after the expiry of the current Class Q permission on 22 January 2027 and until 22 January 2030. This reflects the period for which the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has agreed continued use of the Site by the Secretary of State for the Home Department (SSHD).

1.2 The report summarises the engagement undertaken by the SSHD with elected representatives, statutory partners, technical stakeholders, community organisations and members of the public in relation to the use of Crowborough Training Camp. The Home Office intends to maintain engagement with key stakeholders and will continue to do so after submission of the planning proposals and during the lifetime of the development.

1.3 It should be noted that engagement was undertaken alongside, and with due regard to, ongoing litigation relating to the site, including that initiated by a community interest group, Crowborough Shield. While legal proceedings necessarily constrained the level of detail that could be shared at certain points, the SSHD continues to engage with stakeholders throughout, within legal and operational boundaries.

2. Background

2.1 The SSHD has a power to provide support, including accommodation, to asylum seekers and their dependants who would otherwise be destitute or likely to become destitute under section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. Government policy is to reduce reliance on hotels by maintaining a range of alternative accommodation options, including large sites where appropriate.

2.2 In managing the continued need for suitable asylum accommodation, the Home Office identifies secure, appropriate sites for asylum accommodation. Crowborough Training Camp was selected for this purpose.

2.3 In October 2025, the Home Office reached an agreement with the Ministry of Defence to utilise Crowborough Training Camp for asylum accommodation. In June 2026, the Home Office confirmed that the Ministry of Defence had agreed to offer continued availability of the Site until January 2030, subject to the necessary planning permissions, approvals and assessments being obtained.

3. Pre-opening engagement

3.1 The Home Office has engaged with a range of stakeholders including statutory partners, elected officials, technical stakeholders and members of the local community in advance of the site opening.

3.2 Initial confidential pre-announcement engagement began in October 2025. This included engagement with Wealden District Council, East Sussex County Council, Sussex ICB, Sussex Police and East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service, alongside site visits with local authority and health partners before the first Operational Working Group on 23 October 2025.

Engagement with elected officials

3.3 Crowborough Training Camp falls within the Sussex Weald constituency, held by Nusrat Ghani MP. The Home Office met with her on five occasions between October 2025 and 21 January 2026 to discuss the potential use of Crowborough Training Camp as asylum accommodation. The Home Office and Nusrat Ghani MP also exchanged correspondence regularly over that period.

3.4. Two of the meetings with Nusrat Ghani MP also involved other stakeholders, including Mims Davies MP (East Grinstead and Uckfield), Councillors, the Mayor of Crowborough, and former Home Office Minister Kevin Foster. One of these meetings, held on 10 November 2025, was open to the public. The Home Office also met separately with Helena Dollimore MP (Hastings and Rye) and corresponded with several other Members of Parliament.

3.5. Nusrat Ghani MP expressed concern that the Training Camp had previously been considered unsuitable for use as asylum accommodation for reasons including the site's layout, its remoteness, and costs. She asked that the Home Office consults on its plans and for early notification of progress. She also raised concerns about pressures on the police and on health services, including GP practices, dental practices, and the ambulance service.

3.6. The Home Office also met with Councillors from Wealden District Council and East Sussex County Council on five occasions. One of these meetings, held on 11 November 2025, was a site visit organised for the Leader and Deputy Leader of Wealden District Council, Councillors James Partridge and Rachel Millward, supported by Wealden District Council Chief Executive Trevor Scott. The Home Office attended the Council Scrutiny Committee on 10 November 2025 answering questions posed by Councillors. Another of these meetings, held on 13 November 2025, was a community event open to the public.

3.7. Councillors were concerned about public safety and the risk that those accommodated at Crowborough Training Camp might disrupt the local community or abscond. Councillors were also concerned that the site would increase pressure on local services, such as GP practices or Sussex Police, and sought assurances around funding. Councillors also sought assurances that the site would not be used for more than 12 months for the purpose of asylum accommodation.

Engagement with statutory partners

3.8. On 23 October 2025, the Home Office hosted the first of ten Operational Working Group meetings with statutory partners to support operational preparedness. These meetings were attended by representatives from Wealden District Council, East Sussex County Council, the South-East Strategic Migration Partnership, Sussex Integrated Care Board, the South-East Coast Ambulance Service, Sussex Police, East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service, and the Local Resilience Forum. The Ministry for Housing, Communities, and Local Government was represented at the meeting of 30 October 2025. These meetings were the primary forum for the Home Office to deliver updates and for partners to share thoughts and feedback. The

Home Office also arranged site visits and hosted two onsite tabletop exercises, held on 8 and 19 January 2026.

3.9. Outside Operational Working Group meetings and the two tabletop exercises, the Home Office also met individually or in groups:

- 25 times with officials from Wealden District Council or East Sussex County Council, including as part of a series of weekly meetings with Wealden District Council communications team
- 14 times with Sussex Police
- Six times with the Sussex Integrated Care Board
- Five times with the South-East Strategic Migration Partnership
- Three times with the East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service
- Twice with the [redacted]
- Twice with the UK Health Security Agency
- Once with the South-East Coast Ambulance Service
- Once with Crawley Town Council to inform that we were using their local authority area as a drop off point for service users
- In addition, operational working-level discussions happened on-site regularly with health, police and fire service.

3.10. Most conversations with statutory partners were operational in nature. For instance, the Home Office discussed with Wealden District Council how best to communicate publicly to prevent the spread of mis- or dis-information and with Sussex Police how to mitigate risks of disruption to the operation of the site and how best to protect staff working on site.

3.11. Statutory partners raised concerns about community cohesion around the site and in the wider community. The engagement with health partners was primarily focussed on the preventing the spread of communicable disease due to the dormitory style accommodation. The Home Office discussed evacuation plans and fire hydrants with the East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service.

Engagement with technical stakeholders

3.12 Engagement included a range of technical compliance partners who supported mobilisation and ensured the site met statutory and safety requirements. [redacted] undertook regular wastewater sampling via [redacted] to monitor effluent quality.[redacted] supported by the Sussex Integrated Care Board and UKHSA, provided clinical mobilisation advice and delivered the new on-site medical centre. East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service and Sussex Police completed regular familiarisation visits.

3.13. A summary of the role and relevance of other technical stakeholders engaged is below:

- [redacted] –technical assessments to support planning permission
- [redacted] – commissioned healthcare provider working in partnership with ICB and UKHSA on screening/clinical pathways
- [redacted] – acting on behalf of [redacted] who are acting on behalf of MOD/DIO, providing pollutant analysis
- [redacted] – site plans, technical assessments to support planning permission

- [redacted] – day-to-day operational management of the site
- Crown Premises Fire Safety Inspectorate (CPSFI) – checks compliance with fire safety legislation
- [redacted] – legacy strategic advisory support
- Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) – landowner/estate stakeholder
- Department for Education (DFE) - support any engagement requests with local educational facilities
- Environment Agency – consulted by MOD as landowner on environmental matters including water discharge and foul water management
- Health and Safety Executive (HSE) – statutory body consulted for health and safety compliance
- Homes England – strategic advisory support
- Integrated Care Board (ICB) – ensuring that on-site health services are in place and that the appointed health provider is fully engaged with established operational processes
- [redacted] – responsible for the day-to-day facilities management of the site, including coordinating and overseeing subcontractors
- [redacted] – support with effectively accessing healthcare for service users
- Ministry of Defence (MOD) – duty holder for legacy issues and risks which informed future works on site
- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) – acting as the independent competent authority for EIA screening decisions
- [redacted] – planning consultants providing town planning support and other relevant technical advice to the Home Office
- Natural England – statutory consultee on HRA and EIA matters
- [redacted] – water supplier/permit flow advisory (on behalf of MOD)
- [redacted] – permit holder for drainage (on behalf of MOD)
- Sussex Fire and Rescue Service – statutory fire-related assessments/feasibility work
- UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) – provided advice on TB screening and infectious disease pathways; engaged via ICB during mobilisation and clinical risk planning
- Various Sub-contractors – completed necessary remedial works across the site (e.g. lead paint) and installed generators and catering infrastructure, installed by [redacted]

3.14. [redacted] and [redacted] were commissioned by the SSHD to produce the initial technical planning documents to support the use of the site under its current extant permission under Class Q, Part 19 of Schedule 2 to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (“2015 Order”) (which expires on 22 January 2027). [redacted] were subsequently commissioned by the SSHD to prepare further technical assessments in line with planning requirements for use beyond January 2027. These assessments encapsulated previous legacy material produced by [redacted] and [redacted]. Items covered included environmental as well as heritage. Assessments have indicated the development would not significantly affect the environment either alone or cumulatively.

3.15 The HRA and EIA were formally shared with Natural England on 31 July 2026. On 5 August 2026, the Home Office met with Natural England to brief them on the extension proposals. On the same date, a formal response was received from Natural England concurring with the SSHD’s view that there are likely to be no significant effects.

3.16. On the 14th August 2026 a request was made for a formal screening direction to the

Competent Authority MHCLG under 5(6) of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (S.I. 2017/571) ("the 2017 Regulations") for the Secretary of State's screening direction on the matter of whether the development proposed is 'EIA development' within the meaning of the 2017 Regulations.

Engagement with the community

3.17. The Home Office attended three public events related to the proposed use of Crowborough Training Camp as asylum accommodation. On 10 November 2025, Nusrat Ghani MP convened two community public meetings for her constituents. Senior Home Office officials provided an update on the rationale that led to Crowborough Training Camp being shortlisted as a potential site for asylum accommodation and answered questions from the public. The conversation notably covered timelines, compliance requirements, recruitment, community impact, funding, and health.

3.18. On 13 November 2025, Wealden District Council held a facilitated Community Event attended by over 250 members of the public, alongside Nusrat Ghani MP and representatives from Wealden District Council, East Sussex County Council, Crowborough Town Council, and Uckfield Town Council. The event was also live streamed with over 800 people dialling in. Senior Home Office officials attended the event remotely and answered both pre-sent questions from Wealden District Council and live audience queries.

3.19 On 10 November 2025, the Home Office attended a Scrutiny and Performance Committee hosted by Wealden District Council, with officials answering questions posed by local councillors. The event was open for the public to dial-in to, but the public were unable to ask questions. The meeting was recorded and posted on the Wealden District Council website.

3.20. Between October 2025 and 21 January 2026, the Home Office received over 80 pieces of correspondence from members of the public sharing views on the potential use of Crowborough Training Camp as asylum accommodation. Many raised concerns about security in and around the site, safeguarding, pressures on local services, effects on the housing market, and health screening. Many asked for ongoing engagement and for clarifications on how many people would be accommodated on site and whether they would be detained.

3.21. The Home Office listened and responded to these letters. To address the concerns of the community, the Home Office also published a factsheet on 31 October 2025, a revised version of which was published on 22 January (see Annex). The factsheet covers frequently asked questions and explains the purpose of using the site as part of the government's commitment to stop using hotels to accommodate asylum seekers and provide more suitable, managed accommodation.

4. Post-opening engagement

4.1. On 21 January 2026, a decision was made to use Crowborough Training Camp for asylum accommodation. Stakeholders were immediately notified, including Nusrat Ghani MP, Wealden District Council, East Sussex County Council, the South-East Strategic

Migration Partnership, Sussex Police, East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service, the Sussex Integrated Care Board, South-East Coast Ambulance Service, the Ministry of Defence, and the Department for Health and Social Care.

4.2. Crowborough Training Camp opened its doors to the first 30 service users on 22 January 2026. An Operational Working Group meeting was held that day in the presence of the usual attendees. A public statement was issued, alongside the publication on GOV.UK of a revised factsheet (see Annex). The Local Government Association was notified, as well as local and national Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations.

4.3. The Operational Working Group was subsequently replaced with a Multi-Agency Forum (MAF) chaired by the South-East Strategic Migration Partnership and subject-focused subgroups, including communications and engagement, health, community cohesion, site operations, and VCS. The MAF met for the first time on 5 February 2026. The Home Office intends to continue engaging with all partners represented in the forum, under the leadership of the Strategic Migration Partnership.

4.4 The Crowborough MAF continued for a fortnightly basis from February to June 2026 and now meets monthly. It is supported by the Communications and Engagement Sub-group, Operations and Community Cohesion Sub-group, Health Sub-group, monthly NGO Forum, monthly Voluntary and Community Sector Forum, monthly Parish and Town Council Forum, monthly calls with the local MP, regular local resident site visits and quarterly factsheet updates on GOV.UK.

4.5. The Home Office also continues to meet directly with relevant stakeholders wherever appropriate. For instance, senior Home Office officials have continued meeting with Wealden District Council and have sought their feedback on how best to approach ongoing engagement while the site is running. This includes, for instance, an offer to meet regularly with local councillors and with residents who share a boundary line with the site , there is also a monthly engagement with the Brookworth Homes developer, who built a development adjacent to the site boundary. The Home Office on-site team has regular engagement with operational 999 responder stakeholders.

4.6. Ahead of the proposed continuation of the site beyond the current temporary planning position, further targeted engagement took place between 17 June and 2 July 2026. This included engagement with NPoCC, Sussex Police, the South-East Strategic Migration Partnership, Wealden District Council, East Sussex County Council, Nusrat Ghani MP, the Local Government Association, Asylum and Resettlement Council representatives, the Crowborough MAF, parish and town council representatives and local residents. This engagement provided updates on the proposed continuation of the site and helped identify operational and local issues to continue managing through the established governance arrangements.

5. Outcomes of Engagement

5.1. The Home Office also acted promptly on the feedback received from elected officials, statutory partners, technical partners, and the community.

5.2. The primary concern of external stakeholders was to be kept informed and to be consulted. The Home Office provided regular updates to all partners at an early stage of consideration of the site for asylum accommodation, as detailed earlier in this report.

5.3. Partners asked for confirmation whether the site had previously been assessed as unsuitable for asylum accommodation. While Crowborough Training Camp and other sites have been assessed by successive ministers in the past, those assessments reflected the circumstances and priorities at the time. The current position is based on today's operational needs and the outcome of refreshed feasibility assessments.

5.4. Partners asked how long the site would be used for asylum accommodation. The Home Office confirmed that this was a temporary arrangement and that its intent was to eventually return the site to the Ministry of Defence, at which point the site would cease to be used as asylum accommodation.

5.5. Partners were concerned about the impact that the site could have on local services and infrastructures. The Home Office confirmed that the site is designed to be as self-sufficient as possible, with onsite ablutions, full board, a multi-faith room, interview rooms, and indoor and outdoor recreation. The Home Office worked closely with local health partners to minimise the impact on the community and deliver routine healthcare services directly on site, reducing reliance on local GP practices and wider NHS resources.

5.6. Partners were concerned about public safety and community cohesion. The Home Office worked closely with Sussex Police to ensure the correct level of policing support. Following this engagement additional security measures were implemented. The site is fenced and the Home Office installed CCTV monitoring and recording. The Home Office appointed 24/7 security on site, alongside safeguarding staff who can respond swiftly to concerns. Everyone entering or leaving the site is required to sign in and out at the front gate. Mandatory security checks are conducted on all people seeking asylum through linking their biometric data to immigration, security, and criminality databases. This includes criminality checks for, amongst other things, convictions, pending prosecutions, wanted or missing reports, as well as fingerprints and photographs.

5.7. Partners were concerned about how service users would pass their time. The Home Office has worked with local voluntary organisations and faith groups to broaden on-site activities, now providing an environment that encourages people to remain on site. The service provider contracted by the Home Office also runs regular, shuttle bus services into the nearby large urban centre of Crawley, reducing the pressure on the Crowborough community and providing enrichment for service users.

5.8. Partners were concerned about biodiversity and environmental hazards, such as the presence of asbestos, legionella, radon gas, or lead paint onsite. The Home Office worked closely with technical partners and undertook surveys and remedial works where appropriate and continues to engage with relevant technical stakeholders to address any environmental concerns.

6. Conclusions and next steps

6.1 Engagement undertaken to date has been thorough and proportionate with elected representatives, statutory bodies, technical stakeholders, and the local community. Engagement has been continuous, iterative and informed operational planning, ensuring that key concerns, particularly around safety, health provision, environmental compliance, and community impact have been considered.

6.2 Statutory partners were engaged through ten Operational Working Group meetings, replaced after opening with Multi-Agency Forums led by the South-East Strategic Migration Partnership which continue. Alongside this, regular bilateral engagement took and continues to place with Sussex Police, East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service, the Sussex Integrated Care Board, Wealden District Council and East Sussex County Council. Technical engagement supported mobilisation, including detailed assessments of wastewater infrastructure (which is ongoing), building safety, fire hydrants, hazardous materials and health pathways.

6.3 Technical partners, including [redacted], [redacted], [redacted], [redacted], [redacted], [redacted], the Crown Premises Fire Safety Inspectorate, and UKHSA played a central role in identifying and mitigating any potential legacy risks such as surface water ingress, drainage defects, lead paint, asbestos, legionella, and fire safety. This collaborative approach ensured that the site could open safely and that an evidence base now exists to support future decision-making regarding operational delivery as well as to support responses to any technical issues arising.

6.4 Engagement work has also identified issues that require continued monitoring during business-asusual (BAU) operation. The Home Office will continue to engage with the relevant authorities to support the ongoing appropriate managing of wastewater at site. It will continue to coordinate with the DIO and [redacted] to ensure progress of these matters; and it will continue to engage with Sussex ICB and on-site health partners to develop the appropriate pathways for service users to access appropriate healthcare.

6.5 Next steps therefore include:

- Maintaining regular engagement, ensuring operational issues are discussed transparently with all statutory partners
- Continuing community facing engagement, including with local councillors, nearby residents (particularly the Warren), MPs, and the voluntary sector, supported by uptodate information on GOV.UK
- Ensuring ongoing health pathway development, including TB screening, Primary Care provision, prescription logistics and embedded clinical governance, in partnership with Sussex ICB and [redacted]
- Sustaining compliance monitoring, including wastewater sampling, fire safety obligations and hazardous material controls, with clear escalation routes through FM governance
- Providing clear audit trails for operational compliance, wastewater monitoring, technical advice, alongside continuous technical engagement where applicable.

6.6 The Home Office remains committed to transparent, collaborative engagement throughout operational lifecycle of Crowborough Training Camp and will continue to work closely with all partners to ensure the safe and compliant operation of the site.