



Crowborough Training Camp: Statement on National Importance and Urgency

Proposed Use of Crowborough Training Camp: for Urgent Crown Development

Purpose of this Statement

This Statement is submitted by the Secretary of State for the Home Department (SSHD) to support proposals at Crowborough Training Camp. It demonstrates that the development is (i) of national importance and (ii) required as a matter of urgency. It also explains the proposed planning route under the Urgent Crown Development procedure to secure long-term operation. The statement is intended to cover both requirements of Article 6(1)(iv) of the Town and Country Planning (Crown Development) (Urgent Applications) (Procedure) (England) Order 2025.

Summary of the Proposals

The SSHD intends to continue the use Crowborough Training Camp to accommodate 540 asylum seekers. The site provides basic and functional accommodation via existing ancillary buildings and accommodation blocks. Asylum seekers at the site will not be detained, however the site is self-contained with essential services provided on site to reduce the impact on local services.

The site will continue to operate as short-stay accommodation, with the on-site population consisting primarily of newly arrived, male asylum seekers. Residents will usually be accommodated for up to 90 days, before moving to other asylum accommodation suitable for longer stays. Moving off-site will also enable the termination of asylum support once an individual's asylum claim has been decided.

Site Context

Crowborough Training Camp is in East Sussex. The site is surrounded by woodland with agricultural land beyond. The existing main site access will be retained. The site is 2.5km from Crowborough Town Centre.

Description of Development

The proposed development at Crowborough Training Camp comprises the continued use of the existing site as a managed, non-detained asylum accommodation facility for up to 540 residents, together with associated operational infrastructure, until January 2030. The proposal primarily seeks to retain and continue the use of existing accommodation, facilities and support services that are already established on the site, including welfare, healthcare, catering, recreational and security infrastructure. No new development is proposed. No additional construction activities, engineering works, utilities upgrades or groundworks are required, and the existing facilities installed under the current consent, including ablution blocks, security infrastructure, floodlighting, generators and catering facilities, will be retained and operated as part of the ongoing use of the site. The proposal will therefore provide continuity of a functioning

accommodation facility while maintaining established operational management, support services and safeguarding arrangements.

Planning Route

The SSHD has a power to provide asylum support to individuals who would otherwise be destitute, including accommodation and/or subsistence under section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999; temporary support under section 98 while a section 95 application is considered; and support under section 4(2) for certain refused asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute and who meet the statutory criteria.

The SSHD is seeking determination via the Urgent Crown Development procedure to secure timely planning permission to enable the continued use of the site. This is necessary to ensure the asylum accommodation estate can continue to meet operational demand and can flex safely to periods of increased arrivals.

National Context and Urgency: Need for Suitable Asylum Accommodation

The urgency arises from the fluctuating asylum arrivals and the need to replace hotel and dispersed accommodation estate dependence with more appropriate, operationally resilient accommodation that reduces identified community cohesion and public order risks. In this context, Crowborough Training Camp continues to provide a solution delivering up to 540 bedspaces.

From 2004 to 2020 there were between 22,000 and 46,000 people claiming asylum in the UK each year. However, since the second half of 2021 there has been a notable increase, peaking at 109,662 in the year ending September 2025. In the year ending March 2026, the UK received the fifth largest number of asylum seekers in the EU+, after Germany, France, Spain and Italy and the sixteenth largest intake when measured 'per head of population'¹. The number of people claiming has fallen in the latest year but remains high compared to the previous two decades². As of 31 March 2026, 97,519 individuals were in receipt of asylum support, including 20,885 in hotels. While the initial-decision backlog has reduced to 48,758, 36% of people waiting for an initial decision had been waiting for over a year³; demonstrating that the absolute number requiring accommodation remains high.

Additionally, irregular migration remains a live operational challenge with continued fluctuation in small-boat activity, compounding the issue and leading to sustained pressure on the asylum system. In the year ending March 2026, there were 43,806 detected arrivals via illegal routes, of which 90% arrived by small boat, with overall detected arrivals remaining similar to the previous year⁴. Over the same period, around 93,500 people claimed asylum⁵, with small-boat arrivals accounting for around two-fifths of all claims. This demand for accommodation fluctuates seasonally. [REDACTED]

¹ [How many people claim asylum in the UK? - GOV.UK](#)

² [Summary of latest statistics - GOV.UK](#)

³ [Immigration system statistics, year ending March 2026 - GOV.UK](#)

⁴ [How many people come to the UK via illegal entry routes? - GOV.UK](#)

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]⁵, underscoring the requirement for capacity that can be stood up at pace and flexed safely to meet peaks.

The SSHD's main source of asylum accommodation is DA. As of March 2026, there were 68,719 service users accommodated in DA⁶. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]⁷. Although the SSHD is seeking to increase the size of the DA estate, particularly the availability of HMO and single-occupancy accommodation, delivery is dependent on access to suitable properties within a constrained and competitive private rental market. Availability of such accommodation is affected by wider market conditions, competing demand for housing and the continued participation of private landlords. This can limit both the acquisition of new properties and the retention of existing accommodation, reducing the certainty with which additional capacity can be secured and maintained. DA alone therefore cannot provide all the flexibility and resilience required to respond to fluctuating accommodation demand, reinforcing the need to maintain a balanced estate that includes established, larger-scale accommodation sites.

In his Written Ministerial Statement made on 13 February 2025, the Minister of State for Housing and Planning set out when a development is of national importance⁸. Namely, where the development would:

- involve the interests of national security or of foreign Governments;
- contribute towards the provision of national public services or infrastructure, such as new prisons, defence, or border infrastructure;
- support a response to international, national, or regional civil emergencies; or
- otherwise have significant economic, social, or environmental effects and strong public interest at a regional or national level

The Home Office considers that the continued use of the development meets multiple requirements to be determined as a development of national importance in accordance with the guidelines set out above.

This development sits within the parameters of point 2 given that the provision of asylum accommodation to destitute asylum seekers is a public service arising from the power placed upon the SSHD under the IAA 1999. Additionally, as set out previously, the Home Office is dealing with large numbers of asylum seekers requiring support, including accommodation, to avoid destitution.

In response to point 3, where numbers significantly exceed available capacity, for example, during seasonal surges in asylum numbers, the resulting risk of widespread destitution and pressure on essential public services may engage serious impacts on human welfare and amount to a civil emergency.

⁵ Internal management information, Home Office monthly asylum accommodation inflow statistics, June 2026.

⁶ [Immigration system statistics data tables - GOV.UK](#)

⁷ Internal management information, Home Office asylum accommodation statistics, June 2026

⁸ Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament

Finally, in so far as point 4 is engaged, the SSHD has sought to meet the shortfall in accommodation through hotels. However, this is largely out of necessity rather than choice. Hotels are not the most suitable accommodation for most cohorts of asylum seekers and their planning status as asylum accommodation has been a repeated source of dispute, leading to widespread legal challenges by Local Authorities on planning and wider public law grounds. Additionally, the prolonged use of hotels has placed a strain on local communities, becoming a flashpoint for community tensions, leading to an increase in protests and violence. It is also accepted that hotels represent a 'pull' factor for asylum seekers to come to the UK even after passing through other safe countries: intelligence suggests that the prospect of a paid-for hotel bed is used to lure asylum seekers into small boats⁹.

The continued use of Crowborough Training Camp provides a more controlled and operationally resilient alternative that helps mitigate cohesion and public order risks. Unlike hotels located within, or immediately adjacent to, town centres and residential neighbourhoods, Crowborough Training Camp is an established former military estate with defined boundaries and controlled access, including primary access from A26 Uckfield Road, enabling robust security management and controlled movement in and out of the site.

The Government has committed to ending hotel use for asylum seekers by the end of this Parliament. This demand is national in scale and relates to the SSHD's powers to provide accommodation and support to eligible asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute. The continued availability of this existing operational site goes beyond issues of purely local importance and engages a strong national public interest in maintaining an operationally resilient asylum accommodation system, reducing reliance on hotels, and ensuring provision can flex safely in response to fluctuating arrivals. The continued use of Crowborough Training Camp will maintain established short-stay capacity as part of a balanced and operationally resilient asylum accommodation estate, complementing the provision of dispersed accommodation suitable for longer stays.

Alternatives Considered and Need for Urgent Determination: Why Urgent Crown (not non-urgent Crown or Class Q) is necessary for Crowborough Training Camp

The SSHD is seeking planning permission as soon as possible in 2026 to secure a clear planning basis for the continued use of Crowborough Training Camp as non-detained asylum accommodation beyond the expiry of the current Class Q permission in January 2027. Crowborough Training Camp is already operational and provides managed accommodation for up to 540 residents. The urgency therefore arises from the need to avoid any gap in planning certainty – noting that operations would need to cease inflow to the site and begin decanting several weeks before the expiry of Class Q – preserve existing operational capacity and ensure the site can continue to support the SSHD's wider objective of reducing reliance on hotels and maintaining a resilient asylum

⁹ Restoring Order and Control Statement, November 2025: [Restoring Order and Control: A statement on the government's asylum and returns policy \(accessible\) - GOV.UK](#)

accommodation estate. The current planning position is time-limited, with continued use required after 22 January 2027.

Alternative routes have been considered, but are not considered suitable for the following reasons:

- The non-urgent Crown Development route is understood to involve a 12-week determination period, or 16 weeks where the application is EIA development. If an application were submitted at the beginning September 2026, a 12-week determination period would take the decision point to the end of November 2026, while a 16-week EIA determination period would take it into December 2026. That timing would leave no/limited scope to plan and implement any operational decant arrangements before the current Class Q position expires on 22 January 2027.
- Urgent Crown is expressly designed to accelerate determination for nationally important developments where urgency is evidenced. The site is being progressed to ensure the SSHD can enable current capacity to be sustained and reduce reliance on less suitable contingency accommodation.
- A 'Special Development Order' (SDO) necessitates a separate bespoke ministerial/legislative route) and would constitute an exercise of executive power rather than falling under conventional planning determination routes.

For these reasons, Urgent Crown Development appears the most viable route for Crowborough Training Camp. It is designed to combine speed with a robust planning judgement, enabling the SSHD to secure continuity of use before the current Class Q permission expires, while ensuring that environmental, transport, community and operational safeguards can be properly considered.

Conclusion

For the reasons set out above, the proposals at Crowborough Training Camp are nationally important and required as a matter of urgency. The SSHD therefore seeks expedited determination under the Urgent Crown Development procedure to authorise the continued use until January 2030.