

29th January 2024

Dear Resident,

Re: Braethorpe, Canterbury Road, Ashford, TN24 8QF

We are writing to share KCC's plans for Braethorpe.

We would like to apologise for not being able to do so before now but on-going legal and funding discussions between KCC and Central Government means there is limited information to be shared at this point. Nonetheless, we wish to share with you now, what we can, and we will keep you updated as much as we are able.

In July, the High Court ruled Kent County Council (KCC) must take "every possible step" to increase its capacity to accommodate and look after all unaccompanied asylum-seeking (UAS) children arriving in the county. The legal process is ongoing, as are the funding discussions with Central Government.

KCC must comply with the Court ruling. As a result, KCC is required to identify accommodation which can be utilised to support UAS children at pace.

Braethorpe is selected as one of the properties to support the service for the following reasons:

- Internal spaces are already configured in a layout to provide homely and appropriate accommodation for children, as is required by Ofsted regulations
- It is located in an area where children can temporarily reside to develop early skills in acclimatising to community norms and socialising
- The layout is appropriate for the proposed use with the location similar to KCC's existing Reception Centres which for many years successfully provided temporary accommodation for UAS children before they move to other Local Authorities under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS).

We recently commenced some early enabling works at Braethorpe to help ensure we are able to open the accommodation prior to UAS children arriving in the spring/summer period. As a result, you will start to see increased activity at the site.

Reception Centre Management

Braethorpe will have KCC staff and security on site 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Braethorpe will be registered with Ofsted, operate to its regulatory standards and be subject to regular inspections as a children's home. The intention is for it to be a temporary home for UAS children aged under 16, providing up to 10 beds.

Braethorpe will be managed in the same way as KCC's two existing reception centres, one of which is based in a similar residential area to Braethorpe, close to local schools and community services. These centres are operating well and have been for many years,

providing temporary homes for UAS children while they await transfer to other local authorities under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). The required timescale for a UAS child to transfer from KCC care to another local authority under the NTS is 10 working days.

UAS children accommodated at Braethorpe will be Children in Care to KCC, as required under legislation. This means each child will have an allocated social worker regularly visiting them and leading a plan for their care. Each child will have an allocated Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to ensure this plan is satisfactorily completed. Therefore, social workers will be at Braethorpe alongside dedicated management staff and security.

KCC dedicated managers and staff at Braethorpe will be responsible for meeting the children's basic care needs, providing a structured program of weekly education and activities and setting rewards and sanctions for behaviour. As the children will only be at the centre for a short period of time their education will be delivered on-site. This includes English language lessons and guidance on English law and society, thereby supporting the children to develop early skills to socialise whilst having the best and earliest opportunity to contribute towards their community, wherever that may be in the UK. This helps UAS children successfully integrate, whilst temporarily at Braethorpe and when they move to their more permanent home in other local authority areas.

Braethorpe has an outdoor recreation area the children will use and KCC staff will accompany them on organised activities off site. There will be times when the children can independently leave the centre for short periods of time, for example, to go to a local shop or park. It will only be allowed with the agreement of staff about where they will be and when they will return. Children will be asked to return before early evening. If a child does not return and cannot be located KCC staff will report them missing to Kent Police. This will instigate a multi-agency response to locate them.

Generally, children are extremely grateful for the accommodation and support they receive from KCC and are eager to learn about, integrate and contribute to UK society. The UAS children are continuing to provide strong contributions to their local community which are valued.

Construction

Building works are expected to be taking place on site until July 2024. The works will involve the refurbishment of the building for this use. KCC will be applying through the planning process for permission to change the use of the building.

Therefore, in the next few weeks you will see a planning application being taken forward on this basis. Please be assured KCC are planning to retain the existing building. As part of the planning application there will also be minor changes to the site including additional fencing and a new link structure to connect the existing buildings.

We continue to work closely with our contractors to ensure we minimise noise and disruption to the local residents. For example, deliveries will be taking place outside of school drop off and pick up periods to prevent unnecessary congestion.

Questions

We will keep you updated and will write to you again when we have more information to share with you.

In the meantime, if you do have questions, please send these to reception.enquiries@kent.gov.uk. Your questions will be individually reviewed. Given we anticipate there will be many and similar questions, we will organise these into a unified response.

KCC is also working with your local councillors to identify a forum through which they and other local leaders can represent your questions regarding Braethorpe.

KCC is committed to working with the local community and partners as these plans develop.

Kind regards,

UASC Reception Centre Enquiries Team