

REPORT FROM THE CLERK

WETHERSFIELD AIRBASE ASYLUM RECEPTION CENTRE

BDC lost their appeal for their injunction hearing which was heard on 12 June 2023.

Three judicial review hearings were heard on 11 and 12 July 2023 at the High Court. Braintree District Council brought a judicial review of the same plans in Wethersfield. West Lindsey District Council brought a judicial review challenging plans to accommodate asylum seekers at RAF Scampton, and local resident Gabe Clarke Holland brought a third judicial review of the plans at Wethersfield.

All three claims were granted permission on two grounds, the Court finding that it was arguable that:

1. The Levelling Up Secretary produced an unlawful Environmental Screening Direction because it failed to consider relevant considerations; and
2. the Home Secretary may have acted unlawfully by relying on emergency powers to push through the plans.

Braintree District Council was also granted permission on a third ground arguing that the decision was unlawful because it was based on an insufficient Equality Impact Assessment which failed to consider the impact on community relations.

A further meeting took place between the Home Office, and parish/district councils (virtual) on 22 June 2023. The Home Office confirmed plans to start moving asylum seekers on the site on 11 July 2023. The site will be run by Clearsprings Ready Homes, and they have experience working with this contractor. We asked if the Home Office would come and speak to residents of Wethersfield face to face to hear their concerns. The HO advised that Chief Inspector Jenner would be organising meetings with residents and that it would be preferred for the police to handle any questions or concerns by residents. The Home Office again confirmed that both Wethersfield and Finchingfield parish councils would be invited to visit the site, week commencing 26 June 2023 however no invitation has been received yet. Concerns were again raised over traffic and large vehicles using the roads which cannot cope with it. At the time of the meeting, 3 large out of gauge loads were stuck in Sible Hedingham causing traffic chaos since 7am because they could not continue their journey to the airbase as the road was too narrow. The Home Office confirmed they were aware of this and that the situation occurred as people had parked on the street outside their homes, and were being asked by the police to move them. They confirmed these residents' cars were not parked illegally and at 3pm the vehicles had to turn back and abort the journey. The Home Office advised they are mitigating where possible the impact to roads, businesses, and the local sewage system in Wethersfield. They are installing chemical toilets on site and underground sewage tanks. They confirmed they are working with providers for phone masts to support 1700 additional users. Primary would be used for longer than 12 months and that no compensation would be provided to home owners whose insurance policies has increased to the asylum centre plans. The sewage survey is 95% completed however the Home Office will not share the results, and Anglia Water are surveying the water works at patches bridge and will inform the Home Office the available capacity. If there is no capacity, they will not be able to use the site.

On 12 July 2023, 46 asylum seekers were moved onto the base. 2 left to live with relatives and 2 have disappeared. As far as we are aware, no further AS have been moved on site since. It would appear there is a problem with sewage, and 3 huge septic tanks have been moved on base which will be buried underground. There are reports of a lot of digging at the base, and it appears the rest of the blocks are still not ready for habitation. 18 portacabins reported on site now.

The Home Office are holding a drop-in session on 31 July 2023 at 3.30pm Wethersfield Village Hall for women and vulnerable residents to ask questions. The session will last 1.5hrs.

THE FIELDS ASSOCIATION

The equality impact assessment was refused by the Home Office under several FOI's. The report has since been received and in the public domain by TFA from the lawyers representing Gabe Clarke Holland.

All AS banners were removed the day before the first AS arrived.

WETHERSFIELD PROTEST

The peaceful protest group organised a demonstration at the main gate of the site on Saturday 8 July. Around 200 people attended in addition to ITV and BBC news.

WASC MEMBERS

Welcome to new WASC members Cllr C West (Wethersfield PC), Cllr B Foulkes (Castle Hedingham PC), Cllr T Strudwick (Gosfield PC) and Cllr J Warner (Finchingfield PC).

Cllr A Hooks will no longer be representing the Salings PC as she now holds a District Councillor position sitting on the planning committee.