



Dear Mr Huw Merriman MP,

This letter is sent to you on behalf of the local Labour Party and Labour Party candidates who are standing in wards within the Bexhill and Battle constituency for the local elections.

The recent news regarding the use of the Northeye site to house asylum seekers concerns us greatly. We fear for the quality of life that those being housed in this site might face, as well as the effects on their health and wellbeing. We also share local concerns around the suitability of local infrastructure to accommodate what the published briefings suggest could be up to 1,200 people. We take issue with the rushed nature of this proposal, including the failure to properly consult local authority partners or the local community. We seek an urgent meeting with you to discuss our concerns which are set out below.

We are concerned for the wellbeing of those who will potentially be housed on site. When it comes to health and wellbeing safeguards, the Government briefing document appears to be contradicting. Those housed on the site will be free to come and go as they please, yet they will be encouraged to remain on site and use on site services. Those housed on site will be expected to return to the site each night and yet the document states this is not a curfew. We are concerned that this security monitored, fenced off site will in effect feel imprisoning for those housed there as they are discouraged from venturing off site during the day and asked to remain on site at night. The former use of the site as a prison does not help assuage these concerns. The emphasis appears to be that the conditions on site will be adequate, yet the purpose of the scheme appears to be to reduce costs in comparison to hotel use. We are highly concerned that the health and wellbeing of those housed on site will be below an acceptable standard, especially if cost cutting is a primary motivation for this.

The Bexhill community has demonstrated that it warmly welcomes those fleeing violence, war and persecution. Most recently, local people have welcomed Syrians and Ukrainians and offered the hand of friendship and provided a safe haven from violence. However, this warm and welcoming spirit is likely to be broken by the strain on local infrastructure if your proposal goes ahead. There are serious, legitimate concerns to raise about having up to an extra 1,200 people in the area, especially as they will all be housed in this one space on the edge of a community where public services are under enormous pressure. How is medical provision going to be delivered onsite when there is already a local shortage of doctors? How will mental health issues surrounding the trauma of the asylum process be dealt with when locally, mental health support is virtually non-existent? How is transport in and out of site going to be delivered when there is limited local public transport infrastructure? How is the relationship between those on site and nearby residents going to be managed when there has already been hostility towards the proposals online? From petitions warning of the threat of 'escape' despite this not being an imprisonment and videos of aggressive clashes outside the site between protestors, what provision will be in place to prevent hostility and what effect will that have on the local police resources? This is a concern that needs addressing.

Finally, we must object to the way in which this has come about. Proposals like this should undergo public consultation and discussion with local authorities. Council officials finding out the day before and councillors finding out on the day of the announcement means neither can be prepared to deal with resident concerns or explain the proposals let alone organise a cohesive response that has any meaningful effect. This feels like a deliberate move and if reports are correct that you, as an MP, also did not find out about this until shortly beforehand then that furthers the concern. We feel this should be halted and a proper, open discussion had between the Government, the Councils, and the local community, before any further action takes place. The concerns of the local communities and their representatives must be taken fully into account. You will have seen our public statement on this where we state fairly and squarely that this is only occurring due to the Government's failure to clear the backlog of asylum applications. This is where efforts should be focused and if you were to support Labour's sensible proposals to sort the backlog, we would back you in this completely.

This proposal cannot be allowed to proceed.

Christine Bayliss

Chair of Bexhill and Battle Labour Party

Sam Coleman

Vice Chair of Bexhill and Battle Labour Party