

<u>Location:</u>	Anderson House Florence Street Hitchin Hertfordshire SG5 1RA
<u>Applicant:</u>	Mr Euan Courtney Morgan
<u>Proposal:</u>	Change of use from care home (use class C2) to supported hostel accommodation (sui generis) and provision of additional car parking, refuse/recycling store and cycle storage. Erection of single storey store (as amended by plan nos. 1300-S2-P04, 1350-S2-P03 (002), 1181-S2-P06 and CCTV layout plans received 13.11.2024)
<u>Ref. No:</u>	24/02173/FP
<u>Officer:</u>	Tom Rea

Date of expiry of statutory period: 09/01/2025

Reason for Referral to Committee: Paragraph 8.4.5 (a) of the Councils constitution
- The site area for this application is greater than 0.5 hectares.

The application has also been called in to Committee by Councillor Ian Albert in the wider public interest.

1.0 **Site History**

- 1.1 1/2088/79: Erection of building comprising 39 elderly persons flats & two warden flats and associated facilities. Deemed permission granted 4th March 1980
- 1.2 1/1314/81: Erection of 47 Category 2 grouped flats with associated parking and facilities as a variation of previously approved scheme. Deemed permission granted 3.11.81
- 1.3 Varied on 1.7.1983 to the provision of 48 flats and associated works.

2.0 **Policies**

2.1 **North Hertfordshire District Local Plan 2011 – 2031**

Spatial Strategy and Strategic Policies:

Policy SP1: Sustainable Development in North Hertfordshire

Policy SP3: Employment

Policy SP5: Countryside and Green Belt

Policy SP6: Sustainable transport

Policy SP8: Housing

Policy SP9: Design and sustainability

Policy SP10: Healthy communities
Policy SP11: Natural resources and sustainability
Policy SP12: Green infrastructure, biodiversity and landscape

Development Management Policies:

Policy CGB1: Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt
Policy T1: Assessment of transport matters
Policy T2: Parking
Policy D1: Sustainable design
Policy D3: Protecting living conditions
Policy D4: Air quality
Policy HS2: Affordable housing
Policy HS3: Housing mix
Policy HS4: Supported, sheltered and older persons housing
Policy HS5: Accessible and adaptable housing
Policy NE2: Landscape
Policy NE4: Biodiversity and geological sites
Policy NE7: Reducing flood risk
Policy NE10: Water conservation and wastewater infrastructure

2.2 Supplementary Planning Documents

Design SPD

Vehicle Parking Provision at New Development SPD (2011)

Sustainability SPD (2024)

2.3 National Planning Policy Framework (2023)

Section 2: Achieving sustainable development

Section 8: Promoting healthy and safe communities

Section 9: Promoting sustainable transport

Section 11: Making effective use of land

Section 12: Achieving well-designed places

Section 14: Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change

3.0 Representations

3.1 Site Notice:

Start date: 21st October 2024

Expiry date: 13th November 2024

Press Notice: 24th October – 16th November 2024

3.2 Neighbouring notifications:

At the time of the drafting of this report the Council had received comments both in support of and objecting to the proposed development. (full detail on web site).
Comments include the following matters:

Comments raising concerns / objections:

- No objection to provision of good quality well managed supported housing
- Concern / object over scale / size of use and impact on local infrastructure and neighbourhood. Not suitable location
- Adverse impact on a residential area
- Too much strain on local resources
- Better to spread the number of vulnerable people across the district

- Concerns at integration and support
- Concern at anti-social behaviour on site and in local parks
- Concern at re-sale value of property
- Query security arrangements especially at night
- Potential disruption to local residents and the neighbourhood
- Request specific conditions relating to obscure glazing, restricted access and CCTV and capacity limited to 65 residents
- Too much homeless accommodation in the area
- Contrary to Policy SP8
- Permission should not be flexible
- Query the implications if another provider became the operator
- Concern at loss of elderly accommodation
- Fencing too low and requires more height
- Request a condition is attached covering on-going engagement with the community

Comments in support :

- Support on the grounds of need in Hitchin
- Applicant is an experienced operator with a good track record
- Anderson House is suited for the type of accommodation proposed
- Crucial that we provide a safe and supportive space for our most vulnerable community members
- Can explain to children why the community must protect the vulnerable
- Acknowledge concerns about size and issues but a well a managed shelter can help rebuild lives
- A positive step to creating a more compassionate and inclusive community
- Support conditions re privacy and restricted hours of use for outside space should permission be granted

3.3 Consultee responses:

- 3.4 NHDC Housing Officer:** The Council's Strategic Housing Manager has provided detailed comments on this application as follows:

Thank you for your memo of 21 October 2024 in respect of the above application for full planning permission for a change of use from a care home to supported housing hostel accommodation.

A report was presented to North Herts District Council Housing Services Committee in December 1979 for approval to seek planning permission for 39 Category 2 elderly persons housing units and two warden's houses on the site.

The scheme was to be built on land which was part of a Clearance Area and additional land purchased under a Compulsory Purchase Order and the application was granted on 4th March 1980. Another application to build 47 flats was granted on 3rd November 1981. The properties were built in 1985.

The Council transferred their housing stock in March 2003 to North Hertfordshire Homes, now known as Settle Housing Group, who continued to use the accommodation as social housing for elderly occupants. As the Council no longer owns any housing of its own, it works in partnership with registered providers (formerly known as housing associations) to help meet the housing needs of the District.

Settle recently advised the flats at Anderson House were provided as flexicare accommodation but have low demand and no longer met required standards for elderly residents in receipt of care. The flats are far smaller than new build flats for this client group, with the dimensions of corridors and rooms no longer compatible for mobility devices, nor the space needed to deliver personal care.

Elderly residents from Anderson House have been decanted over the past few years to homes that met their housing and care needs. We understand that when the building had been completely vacated, it was then occupied by 'live in guardians'. Settle also advised the building required significant investment over coming years and subsequently decided to offer it for sale, agreeing terms with One YMCA.

One YMCA is a Registered Provider and a registered charity; in its planning application, it proposes to convert the existing building from elderly persons accommodation to hostel use for the provision of supported accommodation for single homeless people (and some couples) including rough sleepers. This will include a specialist young service provision for 18–25-year-olds. The aim of the proposed service is to support its residents to lead independent lives, including eventual resettlement into their own accommodation.

The proposals for the hostel include the retention of communal areas including reception area, laundry, kitchen and dining area, staff offices and two lounge areas; one for young adults (18 -25 year olds) and one for adults above 25 years of age.

Counselling spaces will be added to provide support to residents to promote health and wellbeing and training opportunities/activities that will support residents and prepare them for independent living.

The accommodation will comprise a mix of individual one-bedroom flats and shared two-bedroom flats by converting the living room in some flats. Kitchens will be retained in the one-bedroom units, being closed off in the shared double occupancy flats.

The services provided by One YMCA include not only emergency accommodation, but crucially the provision of a "pathway" out of homelessness including support and independent living skills to prevent homelessness recurring. The service will be staffed 24/7 by a number of Specialist Supported Housing Managers/Workers and Complex Needs Specialists in order to provide the right level of support for each resident.

The Council were invited by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to bid for funding provided by its Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP) as it was identified that we have a high need for more provision for vulnerable young people (aged 18-25) who are at risk of or are experiencing homelessness or rough sleeping. This bid – submitted in partnership with One YMCA, Helping Herts Homeless and Herts County Council - was successful and part of the proposed hostel provision will deliver 24 units of accommodation and support for this client group.

The Council's bid to the Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme identified a cohort of vulnerable young people, over 75% of whom had multiple support needs. A third (33%) have experienced some form of abuse, just under a third (29%) have a learning disability, a quarter (25%) have a history of offending and nearly a quarter (21%) are care leavers. Almost half of this 18-25 cohort have previously approached the Council for homelessness assistance and 29% have been evicted from arranged accommodation or have been refused accommodation placements due to accommodation not being suitable for support needs and/ or inappropriate behaviour often because of unmet support needs.

The scheme will provide medium-high support in self-contained accommodation in a psychologically informed environment that offers a safe space for young people facing multiple disadvantages and with a range of complex needs. Wraparound tailored support by onsite staff will be required to support residents along the pathway, including help with accessing and engaging with external specialist support.

Progression along the pathway is important and the scheme will act as a feeder site to other stepdown/move-on units so residents are able to move towards independent living.

The other 62 units will help meet the wider accommodation and support needs of single homeless people, including some couples. The current District provision for this client group is extremely limited. One YMCA currently provides single homeless accommodation services at two sites in the district. The first, at the Sanctuary, Hitchin, accommodates only 4/5 people and the building is in very poor condition. The second, at 20 High Street, Baldock has 18 rooms, however this only has temporary planning permission, until December 2025. Keystage Housing operates a 21-room scheme at the former Lord Lister hotel in Hitchin, however the Council's access to these units is due to end in 2031.

The provision of accommodation-based support services for single homeless people has been long term challenge for the Council, as highlighted in successive Housing Strategies. The current Sanctuary site in Hitchin received planning consent over 10 years ago, however this scheme remained undelivered. Since then, options have been limited by a scarcity of local sites for development. Another planning application for a site in Protea Way, Letchworth received planning permission for a 40-bed hostel in

February 2021, however this permission has now lapsed and there is no sign of any appetite to deliver a scheme here.

Existing single young person's provision in the district consists of one scheme of accommodation-based support for 15 residents (aged 18-25 years), comprising of six flats with shared bathrooms and kitchens. The scheme is commissioned by Herts County Council and caters for young people across the county, not just North Herts. A waiting list operates for the scheme, with currently six young people from North Herts on it. Due to the shared facilities and communal nature of the scheme, it is not suitable for young people with complex needs, or those with a serious offending history.

Paragraph 63 of the National Planning Policy Framework says "Within this context of establishing need, the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community should be assessed and reflected in planning policies. These groups should include (but are not limited to) those who require affordable housing; families with children; older people (including those who require retirement housing, housing-with-care and care homes); students; people with disabilities; service families; travellers; people who rent their homes and people wishing to commission or build their own homes".

The Council has a statutory duty to secure accommodation for unintentionally homeless households who are in priority need and are legally required to work with people to prevent and relieve homelessness. As the Council no longer owns any housing stock, it is reliant on registered providers to help it meet local housing need.

The Council has a duty to review homelessness in the district and to formulate a homelessness strategy based on the results of that review. The Council's strategy for preventing and managing homelessness is incorporated within the Council's Housing Strategy for 2024-2029 [NHC Housing Strategy 2024-2029 0.pdf](#).

The previous government's strategy setting out how the government and its partners will end rough sleeping for good was published in September 2022.

The provision of this accommodation would assist in meeting the government's aim and specifically help the Council to meet one of its key priorities to increase provision of good quality accommodation and support for homeless people facing multiple disadvantages, including people sleeping rough. This includes single homeless people, especially young people who face issues securing decent suitable accommodation providing support.

The 2016 Stevenage and North Hertfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) update identified a need for additional accommodation for single homeless people with support needs, people in need due to alcohol misuse and people with mental health problems. The latter two groups being a primary reason for homelessness.

There is a great need in the district for this type of accommodation; the SHMA indicates that the number of vulnerable people is expected to grow over the period of the emerging Local Plan. By 2031 in Stevenage and North Herts there will be approximately 360 (220 North Herts.) single homeless people with support needs, 740 (440 North Herts.) people aged 18-64 in need due to alcohol misuse and a further 470 (290) people aged 18-64 in need due to poor mental health.

In addition, the pandemic revealed a large, previously hidden cohort of single people (and some couples) in the district who are living unstable, often chaotic lives. Many are moving in and out of informal accommodation arrangements including enduring spells of 'sofa surfing' with friends or relatives or periods of rough sleeping and without stable housing, the cycles can be repeated over the course of many years.

The following table outlines the Council's legal duties to homeless households over recent years (the **bold** figures represent the number of single people – and some couples, without children – who approached the Council because they were homeless):

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Q1&Q2 only 2024/25
Households owed a prevention duty	275	229	194	175	207	98
Households owed a relief duty	219	385	281	241	269	139
of which, single households	170	322	217	168	178	94
Households owed a main housing duty	65	90	128	123	131	58
of which,	14	33	53	43	43	25

single households						
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In addition, there is further demand, not reflected in the table above, from households who are not receiving or engaging with support from housing services. For example, each year the Council deals with over 1,000 “advice only” cases in addition to cases where a duty is owed. Many of these cases are people simply seeking advice about their housing situation but others are referrals from other public services (such as job centres, prisons, social services) where it is believed that a household might be homeless or at risk of homelessness. In 2023/24 over 100 single households were referred to the Council for assistance, all of whom were homeless on departure from institutions, of no fixed abode or rough sleeping. Whilst 60% were provided with advice (and did not go on to be owed a duty, including by choice, at that point in time), 40% failed to engage or respond to repeated attempts of contact.

The homeless households that the Council works with are also approaching with increasing support needs, including complex/multiple needs particularly mental and physical ill health and experience of abuse (including domestic abuse). Of the households to whom the Council owed a duty in 2023/24, 63% had one or more support needs – this compares with 51% of households in 2019/20.

Single people in temporary accommodation are amongst some of our most vulnerable clients. Of single people placed into temporary accommodation during 2023/24, two-thirds had two or more support needs. The most common support needs were: mental health problems (56%); physical ill health (42%); drug and/or alcohol dependency (25%); domestic abuse (22%); histories of repeat homelessness and/or rough sleeping (22%); learning disabilities (18%); and offending history (15%).

Almost half had approached from unsettled living arrangements (not including with friends and family) with one-quarter rough sleeping at the time or at some time in the past. 12% were homeless on departure from an institution such as prison or hospital. Since 2021, five single homeless clients whom the Council was working with have sadly died.

The increased demand for homelessness services has resulted in corresponding pressures on the district’s already over-stretched supply of registered provider temporary accommodation. There are waiting lists in place and the Council is reliant on hotel placements to fulfil its legal duties and manage demand levels. Hotel placements are often outside of the district as many local hotels will no longer work with the Council as the needs of our clients exceed the service on offer from commercial hotels; although some outreach support is available, this cannot be effectively delivered in hotel settings.

As demonstrated, there is high housing need in North Hertfordshire for accommodation with comprehensive support for single homeless people and some couples. Due to the

long-term instability in the supply of this valuable resource, we would ask that the following planning obligation/condition is considered to ensure that local people retain priority for the service:

All vacancies - in perpetuity - should be offered to the Council only.

In the highly unlikely event there are vacancies in the scheme and there is no demand from local people, the Council will consider appropriate reciprocal arrangements with other local authorities and/or providers in consultation with One YMCA.

3.5 NHDC Planning Policy officer :

Any comments will be reported when available

3.6 NHDC Environmental Health team:

Air Quality – No comment.

Noise – Do not raise any concerns with regard to noise impact. Recommend a Noise Management Plan condition is considered in order to protect the wider community.

Contamination - Advises no objections subject to precautionary land contamination condition

3.7 NHDC Waste Manager:

Recommends a tracking plan for refuse vehicles

3.8 Herts Crime Prevention officer:

Any comments will be reported when available.

3.9 Anglian Water:

Does not offer any specific comments on the application.

3.10 Hertfordshire Highways:

Advises that the Highway Authority raises no objections. Requests a planning condition securing details of the cycle storage facility.

3.11 NHDC Parking Services

Advises that Florence Street is part of a Controlled Parking Zone. The District Council may issue a residents permit or visitors / business permits at its discretion.

4.0 **Planning Considerations**

4.1 **Site and Surroundings**

- 4.1.1 Andersons House is a two-storey brick-built building with associated grounds and car parking located on the east side of Florence Street, Hitchin. The site has a wide frontage onto Florence Street and is a short distance from the junction with Nightingale Road. The building was constructed in the 1980's as purpose built sheltered housing for elderly persons comprising 47 apartments and two small staff houses and included a range of communal areas for residents such as dining and living areas and laundry room together with ancillary accommodation for support staff. The site amounts to 0.52

hectares and includes an existing car parking area with vehicular access onto Florence Street.

- 4.1.2 The application site is located within a primarily residential area with the majority of properties adjoining or adjacent the site being in residential use with one or two exceptions (notably the veterinary practice along Nightingale Road and car repair /MOT garage in Kings Road)
- 4.1.3 Florence Street is designated a Controlled Parking Zone (Zone F) which restricts on-street car parking to those with a residents permit and visitors for short periods. The CPZ operates Monday to Friday between 8am and 6pm.
- 4.1.4 Until recently Andersons House has been occupied by Live-in Guardians providing temporary accommodation for approximately 65 people. That use has now ceased and the property is vacant.

4.2 **Proposal**

- 4.2.1 The applicant, One YMCA, a registered Housing Association, seeks permission for the conversion of Andersons House from its authorised use as sheltered housing (Class C2) to hostel use to accommodate a maximum of 86 people (*Sui generis*). A *Sui Generis* use is a type of use that does not fit within any of the established use classes contained within the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended).

- 4.2.2 The development will provide supported hostel accommodation for young people (18 – 25) and adults who are homeless. The conversion work will provide the following accommodation:

- Ground Floor: 4 x 1 bed units and 17 x 2 bed units = 38 individuals
- First Floor: 10 x 1 bed units and 15 x 2 bed units = 40 individuals
- Attached houses: 2 x 4 bed houses = 8 individuals

A scheme will therefore comprise a total of **48** temporary residential units of accommodation.

- 4.2.3 There will be limited external changes to the building. The main vehicular access will remain as existing from Florence Street and the car park increased by 3 spaces to 22 in total. An enclosed refuse store will be located within the car park and a flat roofed single storey storage building will be located within the centre of the site enclosed by existing development.
- 4.2.4 At the southern end of the site, facing properties in Nightingale Road, the proposal is to obscure glaze all first floor windows on the nearest elevations of the building to those properties. In this location windows will also have restricted opening mechanisms.
- 4.2.5 The proposals indicate two amenity areas for residents separating young adults from adults and these areas will be secured with fencing. The area along the southern boundary will not be accessible to residents being reserved for emergency access only.
- 4.2.6 The application is accompanied by the following supporting documents:
 - Planning Design and Access statement
 - Flood Risk Assessment
 - One YMCA Statement of Need and Management

4.3 **Key Issues**

4.3.1 The key issues for consideration are as follows:

- Principle of the use
- The need for homeless accommodation
- Design, layout and landscaping (including amenity space)
- Intensity of use and Living conditions
- Management and issues regarding crime and anti-social behaviour
- Highways/ parking / waste management
- Environmental matters (Flooding, contamination, biodiversity etc)
- Planning obligations
- Planning balance

4.3.2 Principle of the use

4.3.3 The application site is located within the built-up area of Hitchin – a key settlement within North Hertfordshire. Policy SP1 of the Local Plan supports the principles of sustainable development within the district and maintaining the role of key settlements as the main focus for housing and employment making use of previously developed land where possible. Policy SP2 identifies the main settlements as areas to provide the majority of the districts' housing, employment retail and other development. The proposed development would be consistent with the aims of these policies in providing a form of housing in an accessible location within the town. Furthermore, the proposed use would continue a residential use of an existing building requiring minimal physical changes and less resources to facilitate the use than a purpose built scheme. The use would also create additional employment through staff required on site and visiting professionals providing a range of services as well as other employment in servicing the use.

4.3.4 Policy HS4 of the Local Plan supports the provision of supported, sheltered and older persons housing in use classes C2 (Residential institutions) and C3 (Dwellinghouses) provided they are in accessible locations, close to other facilities with appropriate landscaping, amenity space and car parking. The policy does not include any reference to protecting against the loss of existing accommodation or requiring its re-provision should such accommodation be lost through a new use or redevelopment. In this case the previous Class C2 sheltered elderly persons accommodation operated by Settle has ceased due to a lack of demand for the units together with the cost of required upgrading, rendering the C2 use economically unviable. The premises has been occupied by guardians on a temporary basis. There would however be no conflict with Policy HS4 should planning permission be granted for another use.

4.3.5 Paragraph 60 of the National Planning Policy Framework reiterates the Government's objective of boosting the supply of housing including the requirement to ensure that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed. Paragraph 74 encourages the provision of housing development in locations such as larger settlements which are supported by the necessary infrastructure and facilities including a choice of transport modes. The proposed development would be consistent with the general thrust of this advice in the NPPF to locate development in accessible locations well served by public transport and other services.

- 4.3.6 Paragraph 124 of the NPPF encourages development on brownfield land to bring back into use underutilised buildings. It says that planning policies and decisions should:

c) give substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes and other identified needs, and support appropriate opportunities to remediate despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated or unstable land;

d) promote and support the development of under-utilised land and buildings, especially if this would help to meet identified needs for housing where land supply is constrained and available sites could be used more effectively (for example converting space above shops, and building on or above service yards, car parks, lock-ups and railway infrastructure)

The proposed development would be in step with the above requirements in bringing back into use a building on a brownfield site that would assist in meeting the housing needs of the district.

- 4.3.7 A number of residents have queried the applicants' statement (see paragraph 3.5 in Planning Statement) requiring 'maximum flexibility to respond to local housing needs' by requesting permission for a sui generis hostel use. The current authorised use of the premises falls within Class C2 (Use for the provision of residential accommodation and care to people in need of care). The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes Order) 1987 defines care as follows:

"care" means personal care for people in need of such care by reason of old age, disablement, past or present dependence on alcohol or drugs or past or present mental disorder, and in class C2 also includes the personal care of children and medical care and treatment;

The applicant could therefore operate the homeless accommodation under the authorised C2 use but this would not include those residents who do not need 'care' in terms of past or present dependence on alcohol or drugs or past or present mental disorder and the care of children. Therefore, to provide 'maximum flexibility' the applicant is seeking a change of use to sui generis, which would enable One YMCA to occupy the property as a hostel, as opposed to occupying it as a care home where only alcohol or drug dependent individuals could live. The applicants have stated that this flexibility will provide a more mixed and balanced community with people at different stages of the Pathway to Independence.

- 4.3.8 Taking into account the above matters, including the sustainable location of the premises and the authorised use of the premises comprising 48 units of accommodation, it is considered that in both planning policy and land use terms the proposed development is considered acceptable in principle.

- 4.3.9 The need for homeless accommodation

- 4.3.10 The applicant has set out the case for the need for the accommodation in the submitted Planning statement and 'Statement of Need and Management' document. The applicant advises that currently within North Herts there are some 475 households requiring accommodation of which 220 are single person applicants. The report explains that demand exceeds supply and that hotel accommodation is not appropriate as it does not provide the support that individuals need to work towards independent living. The report acknowledges that permission has been granted to replace the nearby Sanctuary hostel on Nightingale Road with a new facility to accommodate 23 people but this scheme is under review given the advantages of the Andersons House proposal to provide a significantly larger number of homeless people together with better amenity space and other facilities.
- 4.3.11 The Council's Strategic Housing Manager has explained how a significant need for more provision for vulnerable young people (aged 18 – 25) in the district led to an invitation from Central Government for North Herts to apply for funding through its Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP). This bid was successful and will provide funding to deliver 24 homeless accommodation units and support for this client group.
- 4.3.12 The Housing team also refer to the extremely limited provision in the district for other single homeless people (including couples) beyond the 18 – 25 young adult group with the current facilities either in substandard accommodation, temporary or with limited future access by North Herts as housing provider. The lack of provision together with increasing demand for homelessness services demonstrates a high need in the district for accommodation with comprehensive support for single homeless people and couples. It is clear, on the evidence provided by the Council's Housing Manager, that there are currently considerable demands on the Local Authority in its statutory role as provider of temporary housing accommodation for those in housing need.
- 4.3.13 Both the applicant and the Council's Housing Department have made submissions, supported by data, that demonstrates there is an increasingly urgent local need for this type of accommodation. The lack of this provision locally has been compounded by schemes within North Hertfordshire that have or were granted planning permission not being deliverable with rising costs and consequent economic viability being key factors. The application proposals present an opportunity for at least some of this local housing need to be met within an existing building with on-site parking and amenity space located in a sustainable location.
- 4.3.14 The weight that can be attributed to this housing need is set out in the planning balance below.
- 4.3.15 Design, layout and landscaping
- 4.3.16 Policy SP9 of the Local Plan states that development will be supported where it is well designed and located and responds positively to its local context. As mentioned above there are few external changes to the building. The proposed single storey storage building will replace a covered cycle rack but will not be visible from outside of the site. The alterations to the car park to create 3 additional spaces will remove some landscaping but this will be a minimal loss given the significant landscaping across the site. The proposed refuse storage area will be partly screened by remaining landscaping and sited alongside a high boundary wall.

- 4.3.17 Some additional security fencing is proposed particularly along the southern boundary both to contain the amenity areas and provide some separation from adjacent residents gardens however this fencing would be mainly screened by existing landscaping and other fencing and will not be easily seen from Florence Street.
- 4.3.18 Internally there will be some partitioning of rooms and re-designation of spaces. These alterations are required to provide the required size of units to meet operational needs and accommodation for support staff and to separate the young adults from other prospective residents as part of the management strategy for the hostel.
- 4.3.19 The site has extensive and well landscaped outdoor space and these areas will include separate amenity areas for the young adults and other residents. Amended plans indicate the retention and protection of the existing wildlife pond and the retention of boundary planting. This will ensure that the external appearance of the site is maintained in the interests of visual amenity as well as to achieve some biodiversity net gain in accordance with Policy NE4 of the Local Plan.
- 4.3.20 Intensity of use and living conditions
- 4.3.21 A number of people have suggested that the provision of accommodation for up to 86 people is too many for the site. The density of accommodation proposed however is far less than that approved in July 2024 for the redevelopment scheme at the Sanctuary hostel site at the junction of Grove Road and Nightingale Road (23 residents on 0.025 hectares as opposed to 86 residents on 0.56 hectares in this proposal). The proposed residential density at Andersons House would equate to 85 dwellings per hectare which is similar to many residential schemes comprising flats in the main urban settlements of North Herts. Moreover, there is no actual increase in the number of units as the authorised use of the site is for 48 elderly person units – the same number in units as the proposed use which would comprise 21 one bed units, 25 two bed units and 2 four bed units of accommodation (= 48 accommodation units overall). There is no increase in floorspace (other than the replacement of a cycle store for a storage building) and the site includes comparatively generous outdoor amenity space for this built up location. In addition, the development meets the parking standard for a residential institution as set out in the Council's Parking Standards SPD document.
- 4.3.22 In terms of the frequency of activity in and around the site, volume of visitors and residents, deliveries and vehicular movements, in my view the proposed use would be broadly similar to the authorised use as sheltered accommodation or if the building were to be converted into market and/ or affordable housing under Class C3. The level of parking is only marginally increased but it is likely that car ownership amongst residents will be extremely limited.
- 4.3.23 In terms of noise issues the building already has comprehensive double glazing but more importantly the applicant operates a system of management that monitors and controls any behavioural issues that might lead to noise disturbance (see management section below).

- 4.3.24 The accommodation will provide kitchen and bathrooms for each unit plus one or two bedrooms. Some units will also have living rooms. A communal dining room and two separate living rooms (one for each cohort group) will be provided and both groups will have access to large outdoor amenity areas. A laundry and cleaning room is proposed together with a counselling room.
- 4.3.25 The prevailing land use around Andersons House is residential and there are limited, if any, noise sources that would adversely affect the continued residential use of the building albeit on a temporary basis for the tenants
- 4.3.26 The Council's Environmental Health team have not raised any objections on the grounds of unsuitable living conditions for the proposed residents or environmental disturbance however a noise management condition is recommended.
- 4.3.27 Overall, it is considered that the facilities proposed would provide acceptable temporary living conditions for the proposed residents.
- 4.3.28 In terms of the impact on living conditions of existing residents there will be little physical impact given that the proposal is mostly limited to internal re-fitting works. One of the main concerns raised by existing residents is noise and anti-social behaviour and these are discussed in the following chapter below.
- 4.3.29 The amended plans show that on the southern elevation where there are windows close to the boundary with Nightingale Road properties, all first floor windows will be glazed in obscure glass with restricted opening mechanisms on all windows. A buffer strip along the southern boundary is also proposed reserved only for emergency access. A comprehensive CCTV system will be installed including externally mounted cameras. With these measures in place it is considered that the amenity of existing residents will be protected in accordance with Policy D3 of the Local Plan. .
- 4.3.30 Management of the site and issues regarding crime and anti-social behaviour
- 4.3.31 Policy D1 of the Local Plan states that, *inter alia*, development should include measures which design-out opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour through physical and management measures to minimise the risk of crime. It advises that development should be built to the Police preferred minimum security standard of Secured by Design SBD Part 2. In this regard the Council has consulted Hertfordshire Police Crime Prevention Officer who have provided a detailed response (see above) with various recommendations.
- 4.3.32 Paragraph 135 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should :
- f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.*
- 4.3.33 The application is supported by a 'One YMCA Statement of Need and Management' document. It states that in terms of management Andersons House will be staffed by a number of specialist housing managers/workers and complex needs specialists with two overnight concierge supervisors and housekeeping team. Staff on site will in turn be supported by One YMCA's Head office team responsible for a range of operational

matters including health and safety and maintenance. Operational scrutiny will be overseen by several Committees within the One YMCA structure.

- 4.3.34 In terms of security Andersons House will have two secure points of entry and a staffed reception providing 24 hour/365 days per year concierge service. A comprehensive CCTV system will be installed both within the building and externally (see CCTV layout plans). The applicant company will liaise with local police and work with the local community to reduce crime and improve security for the residents.
- 4.3.35 The management statement also refers to strategies for dealing with housekeeping matters, health and safety and maintenance and its experience in servicing around 800 units of accommodation across Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire.
- 4.3.36 In terms of managing noise and anti-social behaviour, the management document advises that the applicant company has the experience and established procedures in place to manage residents who have experienced trauma to help them with the skills necessary to work toward independence. Residents will be required to sign a tenancy/licence agreement setting out the site rules and responsibilities of each tenant and tenants may ultimately face eviction if in breach of the terms of such agreement. The company operates a monitoring system to manage noise and matters arising from behavioural issues.
- 4.3.37 The applicants have confirmed that the facility will be permanently staffed 24/7 and all year round with at least two members of staff on duty day and night. Specialist support staff and project workers will be on site during the day. A telephone number will be available to any local resident who wishes to raise concern during the day or night. The applicant reiterates that the property provides a significant amount of internal and external amenity space. Individuals staying at the supported hostel will have access to two large lounge areas and outside space in two dedicated garden areas. The applicants state that with the facilities provided, the potential for the spill out of residents into nearby parks and roads is less likely given the extent of amenity space within the property. The on-site facilities will enable residents to remain at the property unlike the recent practice at the Sanctuary hostel in Nightingale Road where, because of the sub-standard of accommodation and general lack of facilities, residents have previously had to vacate the property for certain hours during the day.
- 4.3.38 With regard to the garden areas / outside space, amended plans have been received proposing amendments to the security fencing which would provide a buffer corridor along the boundary with properties backing onto the site in Nightingale Road serving as an emergency access route only. No on-site residents will be permitted access to this area. In terms of noise and behavioural issues within the garden areas the applicant's submitted Management plan indicates One YMCA's process and protocols in order to ensure that the property is well managed. The applicant refers to established examples of their management system in practice at sites of a similar, if not larger scale at its properties in Welwyn Garden City (100 bed spaces), Charter House in Watford (220 bed spaces) and High Wycombe (140 bed spaces).
- 4.3.39 A condition is recommended requiring the development to be carried out in accordance with the submitted 'Statement of Need and Management' in the interests of the amenity of local residents and the amenity of the locality in general and to comply with the requirements of Policy D1 and D3 of the Local Plan.
- 4.3.40 Highways, parking and waste management issues

- 4.3.41 Vehicular access to the site will remain as existing from Florence Street with direct access into the existing car park. Three additional parking spaces are proposed involving some alterations to the layout to facilitate the extra spaces and a refuse and recycling store and covered cycle store. The provision of 22 parking spaces overall would be in accordance with the Council's Supplementary Planning Document regarding parking at new development.
- 4.3.42 Refuse and recycling will be undertaken by a private contractor. The applicant has submitted a Waste Collection Strategy document which includes the provision of a waste collection point within 10 metres pull distance to the highway and a tracking plan to demonstrate that waste can be collected from the site without leading to congestion in Florence Street.
- 4.3.43 Hertfordshire Highways as highway authority raise no objections to the access arrangements.
- 4.3.44 The consultation with local residents has raised a concern that the use could lead to further congestion in Florence Street where there is already high demand for on-street parking. Firstly, with regard to this issue it should be noted that the development provides sufficient parking on site to meet its needs and in this regard it complies with the Council's current parking standards for this type of residential institutional use. Secondly, Florence Street is within the Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) so there are already parking controls in force for the benefit of local residents. Hostel tenants could apply for parking permits however the Council's Parking Services team have absolute discretion over this and the fact that the site has its own car park will be a determining factor. Historically permits have never been issued by North Herts Council to Andersons House residents. Lastly, experience and anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority of residents will be unlikely to own and /or have access to cars. Furthermore, the sustainable location and availability of public transport together with on-site cycle storage is highly likely to deter car ownership amongst residents at the site. The Highway Authority have concluded that the proposal is not likely to have any significant impact on highway safety or operation. Therefore, it is considered that the proposal would comply with Local Plan Policies T1 and T2 relating to transport matters and parking.
- 4.3.45 Environmental matters
- 4.3.46 The site falls within Flood Zone 1 of the Environment Agency's flood map and is not at risk of fluvial flooding. It is in a location susceptible to surface water flooding however the proposal is for change of use with virtually no increase in floorspace or loss of existing soft landscaping. The development proposes a very low risk of surface water flooding and no mitigation is required in this case.
- 4.3.47 The application is exempt from the need to demonstrate a 10% increase in biodiversity net gain under the Environment Act 2021. However, Policy NE1 of the Local Plan does require all developments to deliver measurable net gains for biodiversity. In this regard the applicant has submitted amended plans showing the retention and securing of the existing wildlife pond within the site which is currently not protected and in a neglected condition. This measure together with likely new planting around the site will ensure compliance with Policy NE4.
- 4.3.48 As no significant new intrusive ground works are proposed and given the previous use of the site for residential use there are no concerns with regard to ground contamination. A precautionary condition is proposed in the event that any contamination is found during refurbishment works.

4.3.49 Planning Obligations / Conditions

- 4.3.50 There would not be an increase in the number of accommodation units at the site which would remain at 48 units as per the previous use. The Highway Authority have not requested any sustainable transport contribution because of the nature of the use and the sustainable location and no offsite works are required to make the use acceptable in transport terms. Given the limited impact on local infrastructure overall no formal Section 106 Agreement would be required with this particular development.
- 4.3.51 It is noted from the response of the Housing Manager that a planning condition is sought to ensure that rooms within the facility are subject to nomination via the Council's Housing team, in perpetuity. This request is to ensure that the development meets the identified local housing need. The applicant has raised a concern with a planning condition that restricts occupancy to those residents with a local connection and has offered an alternative nominations agreement / condition which reflects similar partnership working agreed between the applicant and other local authorities. Negotiations are on-going on this issue and it likely that an updated position will be reported to the Committee prior to the application being determined.

4.3.52 Planning balance and conclusion

- 4.3.53 The Framework requires all new development to achieve the three strands of sustainable development. In terms of the economic objective the development will provide employment both directly on site and indirectly through services being provided by third parties such as welfare workers and servicing and maintenance contractors. The benefit to the local economy will also be enhanced by additional spending on local goods and services. In terms of the social objective there will be a clear benefit in the provision of temporary housing helping to meet the needs of the community with the associated benefits to health and wellbeing. In terms of the environmental benefit the development will make effective use of land, utilising an existing building and minimising waste and the use of resources. It will also encourage the use of sustainable transport and there is potential to increase biodiversity through the maintenance and enhancement of the landscaping on site. The development meets all three objectives and is in accordance with the development plan. Section 2 of the Framework applies the presumption in favour of sustainable development and advises that in such circumstances development should be approved without delay.
- 4.3.54 It is acknowledged that the local community has some concerns over the scale and intensity of the development and potential for crime and anti-social behaviour. The applicant has demonstrated that management measures will be imposed that will mitigate the impact of the development in respect of these issues. A number of planning conditions are recommended to control and monitor the use. However, these concerns are important particularly in ensuring community cohesion and the integration of the development with the surroundings and therefore are assessed as having significant weight in the planning balance.
- 4.3.55 The Highway Authority have raised no concerns with regard to the proposed development and there are no identified harms that have been raised in connection with environmental issues such as flooding, contamination or biodiversity.

- 4.3.56 The case of need provided by both the applicant and the Council's Strategic Housing Manager is based on considerable empirical evidence and this, in addition to the support provided by Central Government through SHAP funding, points to a compelling case in favour of the development. Against a background of increasing homelessness and shortage of suitable accommodation this matter is assessed as having substantial weight in favour of the proposal and on balance outweighs the harms that have been identified.
- 4.3.57 The development is supported in principle by many members of the public. There are justifiable concerns over the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour arising from the use however the applicant company has demonstrated how these issues can be addressed through its tenancy/licence arrangements, its well established management regime and support through its company structure involving review scrutiny and review boards in addition to its experience in operating similar facilities across Hertfordshire and other counties. The District Council in its role as the strategic housing authority responsible for homelessness will have some partnership role in the nomination of tenants and an enforceable planning condition is recommended requiring the use to be carried out in accordance with the 'Statement of Need and Management' statement submitted with the application. In addition to the responsibilities of the Council in monitoring and controlling the impact of the use through its housing team and planning enforcement, its environmental health team and parking services department there are other agencies acting under separate legislation, such as the Police, Community Support officers and Hertfordshire County Council, that also have a role in monitoring the use and taking appropriate action, including enforcement, where necessary. As identified above in the planning balance the benefit of the scheme in meeting an increasingly critical housing need provides a convincing case in favour of the development.

In conclusion it is considered that the proposed use is acceptable in planning terms being compliant with local planning policies and the National Planning Policy Framework which promotes sustainable development and healthy, inclusive and safe places for all members of the community.

Alternative Options

See discussion of case merits above

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 In making decisions on applications submitted under the Town and Country Planning legislation, the Council is required to have regard to the provisions of the development plan and to any other material considerations. The decision must be in accordance with the plan unless the material considerations indicate otherwise. Where the decision is to refuse or restrictive conditions are attached, the applicant has a right of appeal against the decision.

6.0 **Recommendation**

6.1 That planning permission be **GRANTED** subject to the following conditions:

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of 3 years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out wholly in accordance with the details specified in the application and supporting approved documents and plans listed above.

Reason: To ensure the development is carried out in accordance with details which form the basis of this grant of permission.

3. The development hereby permitted shall be operated at all time in accordance with the submitted 'One YMCA Statement of Need and Management' unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that the use is managed effectively in the interests of the amenity and safety of both the occupiers of the development and the occupiers of property within the vicinity of the site. To comply with Policy D1 and D3 of the North Herts Local Plan.

4. Prior to the commencement of the use hereby permitted details of a Noise Management Plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that the use is managed effectively in the interests of the amenity and safety of both the occupiers of the development and the occupiers of property within the vicinity of the site. To comply with Policy D1 and D3 of the North Herts Local Plan.

5. Prior to the commencement of the use hereby permitted the car parking facilities shown on the approved plan shall be marked out and made available and shall thereafter be kept available solely for the parking of motor vehicles.

Reason: To ensure the provision of satisfactory car parking facilities clear of the public highway to meet the needs of the development and to comply with Policy T2 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 to 2031.

6. Prior to the installation of any external lighting and prior to the first occupation of the development hereby permitted, details of all external lighting required in association with the development scheme shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Such lighting shall thereafter be installed in accordance with the approved details or particulars and thereafter retained and maintained to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure all external lighting is installed in the interests of maintaining community safety and amenity.
To comply with Policy D1 and D3 of the Local Plan

7. The proposed on-site facilities for waste storage and collection (including waste for recycling) as shown on the approved plans shall be provided prior to the commencement of the use hereby permitted and shall be retained thereafter unless alternative arrangements are agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: To protect the amenities of nearby residents/occupiers and in the interests of visual amenity. To comply with Policy D1 of the Local Plan.

8. Prior to occupation, the proposed development shall incorporate 2 Electric Vehicle (EV) ready domestic charging points.

Reason: To contribute to the objective of providing a sustainable transport network and to provide the necessary infrastructure to help off-set the adverse impact of the operational phase of the development on local air quality and to comply with Policy D4 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 to 2031.

9. All first floor windows nearest to the southern boundary of the site shall be obscured glazed and fitted with restricted opening mechanisms as demonstrated on the submitted plans. Such measures shall be retained and maintained for the lifespan of the proposed use to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interest of maintaining the privacy and amenity of adjacent residents. To comply with Policy D1 of the North Herts Local Plan.

10. All security measures including the operation of CCTV, the provision of palisade fencing and locking mechanisms to access gates shall be installed and fully operational prior to the commencement of the use hereby permitted.

Reason: To accord with the terms of the submitted application and to ensure the facility is managed appropriately in the interests of amenity and security of the premises. To comply with Policies D1 and D3 of the North Herts Local Plan.

11. Prior to the commencement of the use hereby approved full details of the cycle storage facilities shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure the provision of adequate cycle parking that meets the needs of occupiers of the proposed development and in the interests of encouraging the use of sustainable modes of transport in accordance with Policies 1, 5 and 8 of Hertfordshire's Local Transport Plan (adopted 2018)

Proactive Statement:

Planning permission has been granted for this proposal. The Council acted proactively through positive engagement with the applicant during the determination process which led to improvements to the scheme. The Council has therefore acted proactively in line with the requirements of the Framework (paragraph 38) and in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.